

TECHNIQUE, PRACTICE, RESEARCH:
FOUNDATIONS FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT
IN PHYSICAL CULTURE, PERFORMING ARTS, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

by

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Abstract

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Advisor: Maurya Wickstrom

This dissertation develops an epistemology of embodiment, or theory of embodied knowledge, based on a central thesis: *technique is the knowledge that structures practice*. Drawing on critical perspectives from the sociology of knowledge, phenomenology, dance studies, queer theory, and other fields, I argue that technique is a major area of historical and ongoing research in physical culture (e.g., postural yoga and somatic bodywork); performing arts (e.g., dance and actor training); and everyday life (e.g., gender). Technique—from the Greek *techne*—is contrasted with related concepts like habitus, performance, and performativity, which do not necessarily suggest such an epistemological perspective. I argue that a more rigorous epistemology of embodiment may help us to understand research projects in each of these areas, as well as to frame new ones. This argument has immediate relevance to discussions of the relationship between theory and practice in academia, including the debate around “Practice as Research.”

“Everything that can be said about spiritual things can be translated into the language of master techniques.”

- Jerzy Grotowski¹

¹ “Wszystko to co o duchowych rzeczach da się powiedzieć da się przetłumaczyć na język techniki mistrzostwa.”
From an untitled text transcribed by Bruno Chojak from a video recording made during a meeting between Anatoly Vasiliev's company and Grotowski in 1990 in Pontedera, Italy, and provided to me by Kris Salata. My translation.

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Prior to entering graduate school, I was introduced to embodied artistic practices in theatre and dance by a succession of extraordinary teachers and practitioners. My experiences of these teachers and their work, while in many cases not directly cited, are the hidden sources of this project. In the Introduction, I discuss my time in Poland, where I was profoundly influenced by encounters with Włodzimierz Staniewski and the actors of the Gardzienice Theatre Association, Rena Mirecka, and the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, as well as Grzegorz Ziolkowski and Jaroslaw Fret at the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw. Although I never met him, I thank Jerzy Grotowski for affecting so many lives that have deeply affected mine. I also want to mention Pedro Alejandro, Cheryl Cutler, and Hope Weissman, my

undergraduate mentors at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and Gerry Speca, whose high school theatre courses gave me my first taste of physically dynamic, formally experimental, ensemble-based theatre.

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INTRODUCTION:
WHAT CAN A BODY DO?

This dissertation examines physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life alongside each other, in order to develop a theory of embodied knowledge. It argues that technique constitutes knowledge in a rigorous sense, and that such knowledge is sustained by an ongoing relationship between training and research. The purpose of the dissertation is to provide an epistemological framework for analyzing and assessing a range of embodied practices in relation to each other. I believe this could make it easier to recognize and articulate connections between dance, acting, yoga, martial arts, sports, as well as gender and other kinds of identity, which are often separated in critical analysis because of assumptions about their differing ontologies and goals. By comparing such diverse practices with one another, I believe we may discover radically new ways of naming and understanding them. I also believe it is important to historicize such practices, acknowledging that they are not static entities but rather evolving fields of inquiry. I offer here the basis of a theory of embodied knowledge that accounts for both the stability of practices and their continual transformation. At the heart of my investigation is a question posed by Gilles Deleuze, following Baruch Spinoza, namely: *What can a body do?*¹ The epistemological framework developed here addresses this question from a new angle.

In addition to engaging with key issues in recent critical thought, this dissertation draws on theories of embodiment and epistemology to argue for the cultivation of research cultures in three major areas: physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life. I examine a range of examples and case studies from various disciplines, genres, countries, and cultural contexts. Holding the project together is not any particular regional or historical object of study, but rather

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 217.

a central argument that can be concisely stated: *technique is knowledge*. While it is hardly controversial to suggest that technique in some way involves knowledge, the implications of such an assertion have never been thoroughly explored. Indeed, the word “technique” has a number of meanings and connotations, some of which contradict each other, and part of my goal is to propose a new way of understanding this concept. A rigorously epistemological perspective on technique has much to offer theatre, dance, and performance studies, as well as cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, and other fields. Epistemology, in this context, refers to an analysis of knowledge as both social and material product. I argue that knowledge is neither purely abstract and separate from social interactions and power struggles nor simply a product of these. Rather, knowledge results from the sustained investigation of material possibilities, a process in which the social interacts with the material in complex ways. As such, knowledge structures every aspect of human life.

The basis for my understanding of epistemology is found in the work of Karin Knorr Cetina and other sociologists of scientific knowledge, who demonstrate that knowledge is organized by culture as well as by disciplinary specialization. Cetina’s notion of “epistemic” cultures—those that are organized around a quest for knowledge—grounds a sociology of science that restores embodiment and tacit knowing to precisely those cultures that have historically claimed objectivity and rationality. Her work “reveals the fragmentation of contemporary science” by displaying the “different architectures of empirical approaches, specific constructions of the referent, particular ontologies of instruments, and different social machines” in order to “disunify” the sciences. I extend Cetina’s argument to include embodied practices, arguing that these similarly constitute epistemic cultures and communities. Like Cetina’s work, my approach “deepens the split with traditional notions of knowledge,” not by

denying the reality or value of knowledge but by showing how it develops through research projects that are selected and supported according to power dynamics that are eminently social, even as they investigate and engage with the reality of a material world that exceeds the social. When I argue for an epistemological perspective on embodiment, practice, or technique, I am referring to the model of socially and materially grounded knowledge and research put forth by Cetina and other sociologists of knowledge.²

In this respect, my notion of “embodied technique” both resembles and differs from several other terms that are currently circulating in the humanities and social sciences, such as *performance*, *performativity*, and *habitus*. I address each of these in Chapter 1, where I argue that technique carries a unique and valuable epistemological significance. Simply put, technique connotes knowledge. Unlike *habitus*, technique emphasizes conscious as well as unconscious repetition and provides a model for how these relate to each other. Unlike *performativity*, technique acknowledges the materiality of embodiment and avoids taking discourse and language as metaphors for nondiscursive practice. Unlike *performance*, technique highlights relative reliability in the face of life’s complexity, rather than emphasizing the exceptional, liminal, or uniquely ephemeral event. In this sense, my project extends the work of performance scholars like Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor, who have studied the relative stability of embodied knowledge across time and space. In a recent lecture, Roach described the passage of a danced movement from New York to Nairobi via London as the communication of a “form” through the “medium of muscle and bone.” He asked: “What precisely traveled over that time

² Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999), 2-5.

and space?”³ This dissertation offers a new answer to questions of form and medium, of what travels and what links together diverse embodied practices across time and space.

Actors and acting are at the heart of this project, and the training of actors for theatrical performance is its root. My search for a different way of understanding theatre began ten years ago, if not earlier, when I started to direct improvised, ritualistic, contemporary-themed productions in New York City. Although I had been acting in theatrical productions since an early age, as well as directing and designing for theatre since college, something was missing for me in the commonly accepted approach to theatre-making. I found myself continually frustrated by the idea that theatre represents and comments upon reality, rather than constituting its own real events. But what could such a “real” theatrical event be, and how could it have meaning beyond a small circle of witnesses? In 2003, just before moving to Poland for two years, I wrote in my journal about a small production I was directing:

I told my actors to think of this as mask work using invisible masks. I wanted them to be possessed by their characters, drowned in their roles. This is what I meant by not faking anything. I did not want them to split their mind, reserving a part of them to censor their actions and take care of the audience. I decided that if the actor's experience was powerful then the audience's experience would take care of itself. I decided not to design the experience of the audience, but to design the experience of the actor and see what followed. I wanted the actors to experience something powerful, not because they were playing a role that was

³ Joseph Roach, “A New Poetics,” lecture at the Mellon School of Theater and Performance Research at Harvard University (2011), 36:00. Available at <[thschool.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k76089](https://school.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k76089)>, accessed 12/21/12. This is also addressed by the essays collected in *Migrations of Gesture*, eds. Carrie Noland and Sally Anne Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

significant to them in society, but because they were actually performing actions onstage that were transformational to them. My inspiration was possession rituals. There is no showing in a possession ritual, nor being shown. There is only doing and witnessing.

Today, I am struck by how precisely the language of doing and witnessing evokes the later work of Jerzy Grotowski. Without knowing this, I bought a one-way ticket to Poland and showed up in the rural village of Gardzienice, ready to begin what would become a one-year apprenticeship with the Gardzienice Theatre Association and its director Włodzimierz Staniewski.

I stayed in Poland for two years, first as an ensemble performer with Gardzienice, touring with the company to Berlin and Budapest, and then as a Fulbright Fellow at what is now the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław. During the second year, in addition to leading my own work sessions with local students and actors, I participated in several workshops lasting between three days and one month. I worked with many artists who had been influenced by Grotowski and by Staniewski, including members of Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret and Peter Brook's company. The work sessions that had the greatest impact on me were those led by Rena Mirecka, a founding member of Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium in 1959, and by members of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, including Richards himself, Mario Biagini, Ang Gey Pin, and Pei Hwee Tan. My encounters with Gardzienice, Mirecka, and the Workcenter—each influenced by Grotowski in a different way—radically transformed my understanding of theatre. My deepest suspicions about the potential of acting to be more than representation were confirmed. At the same time, I realized how little I understood about what I was looking for. My belief that the craft of acting overlapped with martial arts, yoga, and ritual

was substantiated, but I had neither the language to explain these intersections nor the technique to realize them in practice. I had only questions, and a very deep need.

I returned to New York City, where I have continually led and participated in embodied practice related to theatre since 2005, primarily under the name Urban Research Theater. Some of this practice has been aimed towards the creation of public theatrical performances, but other aspects of it were intentionally directed away from the public and towards the performer or doer as a site of meaningful practice with or without external witnessing. In 2007, I began doctoral studies at the Graduate Center, and my understanding of theatrical history and theory began slowly to deepen and to inform my studio practice. In the studio, I learned that anything was possible if I could manage to articulate my desire in technical terms: to translate from a deep and inarticulate impulse or need into a task that could be directly attempted. Meanwhile, in graduate school, this dissertation gradually developed out of a deep dissatisfaction with the language used to describe acting and performance, theatre and culture, embodiment and identity. In one scholarly tradition, I found a romanticization of performance as uniquely ephemeral and impossible to capture in words—almost magical. In another, I found an analysis of everyday cultural performance and performativity that seemed to evacuate agency at every step, replacing freedom with habit and choice with the unconscious reproduction of social norms and ideology.

It was here that I began to see how acting—along with other embodied practices—might provide a key to reconciling these divergent perspectives. The crucial point emerged for me when “technique” and the “technical” crossed over from my studio practice into my scholarly writing. At that point I began to think about acting and other practices in terms of the technique that structures them, and I have never stopped doing so. The result is a dissertation in which acting serves as a central example, but which is not ultimately about acting or theatre. My focus

here is not “Theatre Among the Other Arts,” but rather acting among other practices.⁴ By pulling theatre away from its associations with film, literature, and painting, and examining it instead as a site for embodied practice—alongside yoga, martial arts, social dance, ritual, and therapy—I hope to free it somewhat from its dependence on the notion of a general public or public sphere in which its spectacles are presented. This does not mean that theatre becomes apolitical, for politics is not synonymous with a public sphere in which spectacles unfold. Once, in a graduate course on global political theatre and performance, I suggested that we might consider the global politics of embodied practice as distinct from those of representation and spectacle. I asked: What if some of the most effective political theatre unfolds, like yoga classes, out of the public eye? A fellow student objected: “But no one would see it.” *No one would see it*. As if seeing were the only way to be transformed by embodied technique. As if the enactment of technique in one’s own body could not be as transformative as seeing it practiced by someone else—or perhaps even more so. As if politics were only a matter of representation. As if theatre’s claims to social intervention could be realized only through the spectatorship of rather than active involvement in theatrical practices.

While writing this dissertation, I have been teaching introductory acting classes to students at two campuses of the City University of New York: Baruch College and the College of Staten Island. It makes no sense to think of these classes as preparation for professional acting careers, any more than English composition classes are designed to train professional writers, or mathematics classes intended only for those who will become professional mathematicians. Instead, I have used the idea that “technique is knowledge” to reframe introductory acting class as part of a general education in a basic area of embodied technique that can serve students no

⁴ The former was the title of the 2011 session of the Mellon School of Theater and Performance Research at Harvard University. See <theschool.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k76089>, accessed 12/20/12.

matter what kinds of careers they go on to have. Acting classes are sometimes justified in terms of building “confidence” and “creativity” or helping students to become “comfortable” in their bodies. All of this is true, but I want to affirm that these transformations take place through the transmission of knowledge. Students become confident, creative, and comfortable because they learn how to maintain eye contact and stillness; how to read the body language and rhythmic patterns of others; how to activate emotional and physiological energy in their own bodies; or how to develop, practice, and repeat a score. Acting class is not something other than the transmission of knowledge. It is, or it can be, an introduction to embodied technique. What are the politics of such an education? How might such a view help us reframe the study of acting—and other embodied practices—in higher education?

Another story: In 2006, I read a newspaper article about a man who started training in martial arts when he was in his thirties. “He used to hang around a couple dojos where he knew instructors, but it was never serious. Then a friend took him to the concrete basement—a subterranean room on Morris Avenue where eight men were practicing jujitsu. ‘I saw these guys throwing each other and said, “That’s what I want, right there,”’ he recalls. The next day he showed up with a uniform. That was 17 years ago.”⁵ What are the politics of the concrete basement? What knowledge is contained there? D. S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge observe: “Supposedly people go to martial arts studios to fend off attackers in the street, but practitioners know that this is an inadequate explanation of the phenomena.”⁶ How might we better explain why people hunger for particular kinds of embodied technique? I remember one day in Gardzienice, when a group of younger actors and apprentices had been rehearsing for several

⁵ Jarrett Murphy, “The Gentle Combat of Mapes Avenue,” *The Village Voice* (May 9th, 2006).

⁶ D. S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge, “Introduction: Martial Arts, Transnationalism, and Embodied Knowledge,” in *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 6.

days in the lead-up to an important premiere. Finally, three of the older actors came to join us: Tomasz Rodowicz, Elzbieta Rojek, and Dorota Porowska. The force of their deeply embodied singing transformed the atmosphere in an instant, almost taking my breath away. Where did such power come from? I wanted to have that in my own body. This was another kind of concrete basement.

Another story: In his seventies, my father began taking lessons in taiji. He told me that sometimes, when he is waiting in Penn Station—an infamously stress-inducing train station—he will go into a corner and make some of the movements from his taiji class. Not really taiji, he said, just some of the warmups. He is not trying to attract any attention. There is no sense of display in his actions. They are for him. They work to separate him from the bother and bustle of the station, giving him mental clarity, focus, and relaxation. Another thing he does is recite poetry in his mind. This is less visible, less physical, but no less an embodied technique. Both the taiji and the poetry have specific cultural and historical lineages. Having studied English poetry of the seventeenth century, my father knows many poems from that era by heart. The taiji is newer for him. I don't know the lineage of his teachers and, at such a basic level, it hardly matters. There is no sense in asking whether what he is doing is “really” taiji. Nor does the “cultural” value of these forms sufficiently explain how they serve him in this moment, when he is waiting in the train station for his track to be announced. How can we explain what technique does, not as a cultural sign but as the structure of embodied repetition?

A story from Jewish lore, told to me by my sister: A wise person instructed that the words of a song of praise should be “written on the heart.” Someone asked: “Why is it written ‘on’ the heart and not ‘in’ the heart?” The wise person answered: We don't have the power to write it in our hearts. What we can do is to write it on our hearts, and then, after some time, it may sink in.

Maybe, the tenth time we sing it, the song glows for us. But maybe, the eleventh time, that glow is gone. We can't control what is inside the heart, only what we inscribe on the heart. My sister said, when she sings in temple, sometimes it has a golden quality, sometimes not. But when the quality is there, she said, "it has something to do with the fact that I know I'll be there again the next week." Practice. Repetition. In the inscription written "on" the heart I see Stanislavski's caution to the actor, which Grotowski repeated: We cannot control our emotions. What we *do*—that we can control.⁷ But the inscription written on the heart is also Foucault's inscription: the body inscribed by instruments of power, the body that Judith Butler called "a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power."⁸ How does technique change us, through practice? What is the relation between knowledge and power in the practice of embodied technique?

In each of these stories, people are learning what bodies can do. The man learning jujitsu in his thirties; my father learning taiji in his seventies; me learning to sing in Gardzienice; my sister learning Jewish songs at Hillel; my students learning basic acting at the City University of New York. *What can a body do?* I propose a different way of thinking about the Deleuzo-Spinozan question. Recently, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg invoked this question as a starting point for critical affect theory, writing: "Two key aspects are immediately worth emphasizing, or re-emphasizing, here: first, the capacity of a body is never defined by a body alone but is always aided and abetted by, and dovetails with, the field or context of its force-relations; and second, the 'not yet' of 'knowing the body' is still very much with us more than 330 years after Spinoza composed his *Ethics*."⁹ They remind us: "No one will ever finally

⁷ Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 103.

⁸ Judith Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86.11 (1989): 601.

⁹ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

exclaim: ‘So, there it is: now, we know all that a body can do! Let’s call it a day.’” Much as I agree, I do not find the question about what bodies can do to be adequately answered—or even adequately posed—by critical affect theory. There is a lack of concreteness in the concept of affect that fails to recognize the labor of those who have searched in tangible ways for specific answers to the question: *What can a body do?* What are the real possibilities of bodies, together and alone, in motion and in stillness? In theorizing embodied technique, I take this question literally and aim to show how it is continuously being answered in practice.

I also fear that there are many who do think we have answered the question, many who are ready to call it a day when it comes to embodied technique. I fear that when people speak of research, discovery, and knowledge today, they do not think of technique but only of technology. Karin Knorr Cetina observes: “There is a widespread consensus today that contemporary Western societies are in one sense or another ruled by knowledge and expertise.”¹⁰ But this knowledge and expertise is commonly assumed to be knowledge about how to make and use technology. There can be no doubt as to the urgency of technological questions, but what about knowledge of embodiment? What about the use of the human body in sports, dance, martial and performing arts, ritual, and therapy? Have these areas of knowledge been exhausted? Have human beings been exploring embodied technique for so long that we have discovered all there is to know about what bodies can do? This dissertation argues the contrary, namely that embodied technique remains a crucial area for exploration, and that the potential for new discoveries in this field has in no way been exhausted.

In focusing on the body as distinct from technological products, I do not intend to reify the borders of embodiment, or to envision anything like a utopian, non-technological society. On the contrary, I believe that the importance of embodied technique, as distinct from technology,

¹⁰ Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures*, 5.

has grown with the increasingly technologization of the world. The contemporary focus on embodiment—as will be clear from the examples I study—comes out of and responds to advances in technology. Far from being unrelated to technology, the rise of embodied practices like yoga and actor training can be seen as part of a general reaction to the increasing presence of advanced technology in every part of life. Such practices may be seen as calling for a less technological world, but perhaps what they really call for is a more sustainable world in which technology figures differently. Either way, Peter Brook’s “empty space,” and the empty spaces of theatre, dance, and yoga studios in cities across the globe, are not neutral spaces. They are empty because someone has intentionally removed the stuff—books, furniture, computers, lights—that so often fill our rooms today. These are politically, actively emptied spaces in which technology has been removed so as to focus on embodied technique. The wider meanings, politics, and implications of the practices unfolding in these empty rooms have yet to be charted. I hope this dissertation takes a step in that direction.

It may be objected that the boundary between body and technology, or body and world, is too porous to withstand scrutiny. An empty room still has a floor. A naked actor still has to eat. As Elizabeth Grosz observes: “Anything that comes into contact with the surface of the body and remains there long enough will be incorporated into the body image—clothing, jewelry, other bodies, objects... External objects, implements, and instruments with which the subject continuously interacts become, while they are being used, intimate, vital, even libidinally cathected parts of the body image.”¹¹ How then can I hope, even theoretically, to set aside technology—from clothing and jewelry to more complex “objects, implements, and instruments”—in order to focus on embodied technique? The answer is that Grosz’s point,

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 80. And see Donna Haraway, “Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65-108.

important as it is, leaves out the history of objects and their (fundamentally embodied) means of production. When a pacemaker, contact lens, walking cane, or watch enters my body image, I may experience it as part of myself—indeed, it may become part of myself—only insofar as I am able to bracket and set aside the radical difference between the processes through which my organic body and this technological object were produced. No essentialism or primitivism is therefore needed in order to place a special value on embodiment—just a sense of how recent these technologies are in comparison with the ecology of bodies. We do not need to “return” to the body so much as to locate it, sort it apart from its recent technological products, and maintain a critical awareness of the difference between technique and technology. I am very much for an investigation of technology that would account for its continual enmeshment with embodied technique, starting from the bodily labor that produces it. What I will not accept is a fetishization of technology that ignores the role of embodied technique in the production process, or which romanticizes the “cyborg” interaction of products and bodies in technologically advanced societies.¹²

With this in mind, the following chapters set forth a theory of embodiment and embodied practice based on an epistemological understanding of technique and trace the implications of this theory through several case studies. Drawing on a range of published work, as well as my own experiences, I offer a newly theorized concept of embodied technique that I hope may be useful to others. Chapter 1 begins with Marcel Mauss’s work on technique, which I contrast to that of Foucault, and which I argue has much to offer to us in the present day. In this chapter, I engage with contemporary theories of phenomenology, sociology, anthropology, ritual studies,

¹² My thanks to Stefanie Jones for helping me clarify the Marxist underpinnings of my emphasis on embodied technique and my resistance to the fetishization of technology. For more on the relationship between historical materialism and the materiality of bodies, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

and dance studies, among other fields, reexamining concepts like discipline and agency along the way. I do not argue that people freely choose their technique, or that technique in itself is inherently good and noble (as Mauss believed). I do however suggest that we devise technique in order to accomplish particular goals, and that frustration and injustice may stem from our entrapment within old technique as often as from a genuine desire to do harm. As a result, the search for new technique is continually valuable. For this reason, it is crucial to conceptualize technique as knowledge rather than as power—even if knowledge, as Foucault showed, is always intertwined with power.

Chapter 1 concludes with a description, in somewhat abstract terms, of what we might expect “embodied research” or “research in embodied technique” to look like. The following three chapters are dedicated to fleshing out this notion by examining a variety of case studies. Since many theorists of embodied practice do not use the word “technique,” I have searched for closely related concepts and terms. Early on in my research, I began to discover what I now take to be synonyms for or indicators of technique: the “procedures” and “protocols” of Michel Foucault, the “norms” and “ideals” of Judith Butler, and the “methods” of ethnomethodology, to name a few. Finally, the word “way” began to pop out at me from the page. Suddenly I saw how ubiquitous technique is in writing across all these fields, appearing without much acknowledgment through the tiny words “way” and “ways.” These inconspicuous generic nouns are everywhere: the way we think, the way we move, the way we shape our identities, the way we constitute ourselves as subjects; ways of walking, ways of performing gender, ways of doing things, ways of knowing... Once I began to replace “ways” with “technique” in my reading, I began to see technique everywhere. Each way is a path-way, a route through material possibility: technique of thinking, of movement, of identity, of walking, of gender; technique of the self,

technique of daily interaction, performance technique... One has only to scan for the word “way,” and embodied technique is revealed in its ubiquity throughout critical and artistic literature.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on well-established examples of physical culture and performing arts technique respectively. Chapter 2 begins by looking at the genesis of modern postural yoga in the work of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya in Mysore, India, during the first part of the twentieth century. This is a particularly clear example of both the development of new technique and its spread or dissemination on a global scale. The chapter then expands to consider physical culture and physical education as a larger landscape of technique within which modern postural yoga can be situated. Chapter 3 examines the work of Konstantin Stanislavski and Jerzy Grotowski in the field of actor training, and argues for a reconsideration of actor training in relation to research in acting technique. My discussion of acting has implications for other performing arts, insofar as it deals with issues of repetition, composition, the experience of the performer, and the perception of the audience. In both chapters, I have chosen to focus on canonical cases rather than obscure ones, because my primary purpose is to test a new theory of technique and practice. If this theory works, it can be applied to any number of examples, including those that are as yet relatively unknown. But in order to test the theory’s mettle, it seemed wise to choose the hardest of examples. For the same reason, I do not explicitly refer to my own artistic practice—the work of Urban Research Theater—even though it is relevant to Chapter 3 and informs my writing throughout. To make my central thesis compelling to the widest possible range of readers, I have tried to err somewhat towards the conservative in both methodology and style. As a rule of thumb, I have sought to make an argument for technique as knowledge that may convince historians of theatre as well as theorists of performance.

Chapter 4 works somewhat differently, because its subject is the technique of everyday life. Unlike physical culture or performing arts, there are no clear boundaries to everyday life. It is therefore not easy to choose a single case study that would allow for specificity in my analysis of technique. It might be possible to find an individual who could be argued to have made a significant impact on the technique of everyday life. However, I have chosen instead to focus on gender, showing how the practice of gender is structured by embodied technique and how some communities are currently working to develop new and innovative technique in this area. Taking my cue from works of feminist, queer, and transgender theory, I ask what the theory of technique developed thus far could offer towards our understanding of how gender technique is learned, embodied, and transformed. I begin by rethinking the materiality of sexual difference—a famously vexed issues in gender theory—through the lens of technique. Then, working through several examples of both feminine and masculine technique, I argue that understanding gender as technique can enable us to account for both its stability and its susceptibility to change. In the final section, I depart from the specificity of gender, drawing on John Roberts’s history of the “everyday” to envision a patient, thorough, and potentially transformative approach to research in everyday life. Because this chapter engages with technique that is general rather than specialized, it may appear to be more politically engaged. However, I hope that the explicit gender politics of Chapter 4 will also reveal how the practices discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 can be seen as political in previously untheorized ways.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each deal with an area of embodied technique that has been a major preoccupation throughout my life. Each has at different times been a source of empowerment and of anxiety for me. Furthermore, as will no doubt become clear, they are deeply woven together in my life and in the world. Thus gender appears as a concern throughout Chapters 1

and 2, even though I do not focus on it explicitly as embodied technique until Chapter 4. The choice to address gender directly towards the end of the dissertation is no accident. I was a feminist before I was a theatre person, but as I grew up, I felt speechless in the face of feminist and queer politics and theory. I never knew how to account for my visible identity as a straight white male in a way that could articulate the complexity of my own experience as well as the realities of privilege and power. As it turns out, the passage through critical theory, physical culture, and performing arts that is incarnated by the structure of this dissertation was exactly the road along which I needed to walk in order to feel that I could say something meaningful about sex and gender. Thus each chapter, in a sense, is more deeply personal than the last.

The final chapter, which is also the conclusion, begins with a consideration of how the argument for embodied knowledge fits into current debates over the role of academia in contemporary society, and the relationship between academia, the state, and the capitalist market. From this point, I go on to consider the relationship between research in embodied technique outside academia—such as that described in the previous chapters—and within it. As a scholar-practitioner, for whom this dissertation constitutes a possible gateway into the academy, I am invested in the idea that academia should support embodied research. However, I do not wish to make this argument without strong theoretical and historical foundations to back it up. While sympathetic to their goals, I am wary of some articulations of “Practice as Research” that I find lacking in disciplinary and methodological rigor. Having made what I hope is a convincing case for embodied technique as a field of knowledge and ongoing research, I use the conclusion to argue for a more fully historicized and rigorously theorized engagement between theory, history, and practice. Assuming no institutional guidelines or support, I start from the ground up, asking how and to what extent the stated priorities of academia might lead it to devise, articulate, and

realize projects in embodied technique. I conclude with some concrete proposals for the development of a rigorous approach to embodied research in academia.

The methodology employed throughout this dissertation is closest to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of philosophy as "the creation of concepts." According to Brian Massumi, Deleuze's "image for a concept is not a brick but a 'tool box.' He calls his kind of philosophy 'pragmatics' because its goal is the invention of concepts that do not add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying... The question is not: is it true? But: does it work?"¹³ With this in mind, I have tried to develop concepts with which one can *do* something—in particular, as the title suggests, reworkings and retheorizations of technique, practice, and research. Ideally, the reader will come away with a sense of new projects in the offing, or new ways to articulate current projects that might result in a shift of direction or emphasis. I do not wish to control of what is done with these ideas. I hope they may serve anyone who wishes to articulate the complexity and importance of embodied knowledge in today's world. While writing this dissertation, I particularly had in mind the teachers, practitioners, and theorists of physical culture and performing arts—as well as the extent to which each of us daily teaches, practices, and theorizes the technique of everyday life.

¹³ Brian Massumi, "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xv.

CHAPTER ONE:
FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF TECHNIQUE

Technique is a fundamental dimension of embodiment and of our lives as embodied creatures. It structures our actions and practices by offering a range of relatively reliable pathways through any given situation. Many artists and athletes acknowledge that technique plays a necessary if not sufficient role in what they do. Yet there is a long history of arguments against technique, and for every positive reference to technique there is a skeptical or cautionary warning against it. Enough has been written about technique, in a variety of fields, to provide some groundwork for a discussion of its meaning and importance. It may be clear on a superficial level that technique is a kind of knowledge, but this idea has never been thoroughly explored. Nor is there any consensus about what technique is or how it differs from related concepts like method, discipline, or practice. In many cases, the importance of technique is assumed without its being thoroughly investigated.

In this chapter, I review some of the existing literature on technique in fields as diverse as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and theatre, dance, and performance studies.¹ I begin by considering the work of Marcel Mauss and Michel Foucault, which I take to be essential starting points for a discussion of technique. I then proceed to develop what I call an “epistemological” approach to technique: one that draws on the work of Mauss, Foucault, and others, but which specifically emphasizes the implications of conceiving technique as knowledge. From this premise, I draw a fundamental distinction between technique and practice, and situate my

¹ For an overview of this literature in the context of theatre and performance, see Robert P. Crease and John Lutterbie, “Technique,” in *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*, eds. David Krasner and David Z. Saltz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006): 160-79. Crease and Lutterbie point to a divide between the “champions” and the “skeptics” of technique and call for a more comprehensive philosophical treatment of technique. Many of the points raised in their brief essay will be more fully developed here.

argument in the context of recent theories about language and performance. The chapter ends with a discussion of training and research in embodied technique. By the end of the chapter, I hope to have established a small group of key terms—especially technique, practice, knowledge, and research—that will serve as the theoretical foundation for the rest of the dissertation.

The arguments made here could in principle be applied to all kinds of technique, from agriculture to economics to medicine. However, for a variety of reasons—including my own background and interests, my ethical and political stance, and the need to keep the scope of my analysis manageable—I focus here solely on *embodied* technique. Embodiment here does not refer to a distinction between mind and body. As will become clear in this chapter, I understand the mind as fully embodied. Rather, my interest here lies with technique as distinct from technology. I am interested in how the movements, gestures, actions, interactions, repetitions, processes, and activities of human beings are structured in relation to the fact of our embodiment, our existence in and as bodies. Fields like economics and medicine rely on embodied technique, as do all areas of human activity, but they also rely on a massive infrastructure of technology, from books and computers to buildings and airplanes. In this discussion, I limit myself to areas of technique that do not rely on such infrastructure, such as walking, running, swimming, dancing, sleeping, praying, storytelling, and meditation. I do not mean to suggest that such activities are independent of society or indicative of any special freedom—only that it makes sense to study embodied technique as a field in its own right and that doing so may provide insights which could then be applied more generally.²

² No hard and fast line can be drawn between embodied technique and technology, or between human bodies and their tools. The creation of tools is synonymous with the beginning of the human species. Moreover, recent advances in technology—from pacemakers to contact lenses to genomic sequencing—render the border between body and technology more and more permeable. As noted in the Introduction, the intense controversies that attend such developments underscore the importance of studying embodied technique alongside and in relation to technology.

The performing arts, conceived as specialized areas of embodied technique, are the centerpiece and implied starting point of my argument. They are not its only focus, however, since one of my goals is to highlight the complex and dynamic relationship between performing arts and other areas of embodied technique, both specialized and everyday. Rather than beginning from performance, I start more generally, with the anthropological and historical writings of Mauss and Foucault. I later circle back to performance, performance studies, and performing arts, explaining how the study of performance could benefit from the theory of embodied technique developed here. Dance studies, because it has focused more on technique than either theatre studies or performance studies, is an important resource in this chapter. My goal here is to set the stage for subsequent chapters, which use the theoretical model developed here to examine in greater depth particular areas of embodied technique, including but not limited to those of performing arts.

Mauss and Foucault

My basic conception of technique derives from a series of insightful but eclectic writings on technique by French sociologist-anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950). Mauss's 1935 essay on "The Techniques of the Body" has for several decades been established as a key text in anthropology.³ With the 2006 publication of *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, edited by Nathan Schlanger, the full range of Mauss's writings on this subject have become available in

³ Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the body," trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2.1 (1973): 70-88; originally published as "Les techniques du corps," *Journal de psychologie* 32 (1935): 271-93.

English for the first time.⁴ Schlanger's volume traces Mauss's interest in technique from a 1913 essay written in collaboration with his mentor and uncle, Emile Durkheim, to an article from the 1940s in which he declares the importance of the study of technique.⁵ In that final essay, Mauss defines technique as "an ensemble of movements or actions, in general and for the most part manual, which are organized and traditional, and which work together towards the achievement of a goal known to be physical or chemical or organic."⁶

Mauss's definition is a useful starting point, but far too limiting for my purposes. The technique I wish to consider is not especially manual but may involve the whole body, including not just its physiology but its emotional and mental life as well. The terms "organized" and "traditional" require unpacking and do not apply to all that I will call technique. Nor are the "known" (by whom?) goals of technique, as I understand it, limited to the physical, chemical, and organic. Nevertheless, taken together, the twelve texts collected in Schlanger's volume offer a strong foundation for a consideration of technique as a major dimension of human life. In them, Mauss discusses several examples of technique in detail and touches upon numerous others. He asks how technique changes, how it evolves, and—perhaps most importantly for my purposes—how it moves from one society or culture to another. Focusing in some places specifically on techniques of the body, as opposed to those that depend on the use of tools or "instruments," Mauss illustrates the diversity with which human embodiment can be employed and acknowledges that our training in these different uses of the body is determined to a large extent

⁴ Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, ed. Nathan Schlanger (New York: Durkheim Press, 2006). For a perspective on Mauss from a scholar of French literature and dance, see Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures / Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 18-54. Additional sources are cited below.

⁵ Mauss uses the word "*technologie*" to refer to the science or study of technology. This can be confusing for English readers, for whom "technology" has a very different meaning. Schlanger explains the difference in Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation*, 2. I use technology in the standard English sense.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

by differential categories like age and sex. For Mauss, technique is a fundamental part of human society and a defining characteristic of our species.

As Schlanger makes clear, Mauss's interest in the movement of technique between cultures and societies grew out of his reaction to an emerging and virulent nationalism that placed great importance on the organic unity and evolutionary destiny of the nation. According to Schlanger, one of Mauss's goals was "to *defuse* rather than strengthen would-be territorial claims" by confirming "that 'this thing called civilisation' is by its nature an *international* phenomenon, and that nations are not the purified products of some essential or immemorial destiny."⁷ To this end, Mauss argued that techniques—including those of the body, such as walking—are not tied to particular societies but can be shown to move between them continually. This not only indicates the essentially composite identity of every nation but also points towards a radically different view of humankind as united by a shared pool of knowledge rather than divided by the presence or lack of "civilization." For Mauss, techniques were the crowning achievement of humankind. He saw the history of civilization as "the history of the circulation between societies of the various goods and achievements of each," with techniques—from horse riding to agriculture and industry—being chief among these achievements.⁸

Mauss was fascinated by what he called "the phenomenon of borrowing and the spread of technique" from one social or cultural context to another.⁹ Since the time of his writing, the critique of empire and of the vast differences in power between societies has made Mauss's optimism with regard to the circulation of technique appear somewhat naïve. For example, he

⁷ Ibid., 26, italics original. See also Nathan Schlanger, "The study of techniques as an ideological challenge: technology, nation, and humanity in the work of Marcel Mauss," in *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute*, eds. Wendy James and N. J. Allen (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998): 192-212. "Diffusionist studies can show that societies, like techniques and like their user *l'homme total*, are made out of synthesis rather than distillation: that their lack of 'purity' is their source of strength, that hybridisation and creolisation is not their worst nightmare but their salvation" (207).

⁸ Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation*, 44.

⁹ Ibid., 47.

writes of “the importance of technical borrowings and the human benefits that ensue” without taking into account the asymmetry that so often characterizes such “borrowings” or the fact that they are historically intertwined with violent conquest and may in some cases amount to stealing.¹⁰ Mauss’s intention may have been to critique the idea of the organically unified nation, but the same “spread” of technique that undercuts nationalist dreams can also lead to the disintegration of minority cultures through appropriation and assimilation. It is no easy task, in today’s world, to assess the meaning or value of cultural traditions or to describe how techniques do or do not belong to specific individuals and groups. Certainly, it is no longer possible to assume that the “borrowing” of technique is necessarily benign or that the “human benefits” of technical knowledge are shared equally among those who possess it.

Equally valuable in Mauss’s writing, and much better known, is his focus on the techniques of the body: *les techniques du corps*—usually translated as “bodily techniques” or “body techniques.” To be sure, Mauss believed that most techniques are “characterised by the presence of an instrument” and he catalogued them accordingly: techniques of fire, basketry, pottery, weaponry, cooking, hunting, agriculture, building, etc.¹¹ But Mauss also devoted an entire essay to those techniques that take the human body itself as the “first and most natural instrument” or “technical object.”¹² In this essay, Mauss describes how it was that he came to think about the bodily dimension of technique. This did not happen through his official anthropological fieldwork but through an analysis of his own social milieu. For instance, he observed that children in France were being taught to swim differently than they had been during his childhood. Later, during the war, he compared French and English techniques of digging and

¹⁰ Ibid. The insight that “stealing” indigenous knowledge is a significant aspect of colonial conquest comes from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, whose work is cited and discussed below.

¹¹ Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation*, 100.

¹² Ibid., 83.

marching. Finally, Mauss experienced a “kind of revelation” when he saw that a particular way of walking, which he had first encountered in New York, had traveled to Paris via the cinema.¹³ All of this made him realize that human bodies differ not only in physiological makeup but also in technique—how they swim, dig, walk, etc.—and that these techniques are an important but also malleable and transmissible aspect of society.

Walking is a paradigmatic technique of the body, a “way” of doing something that can be seen to travel from one place to another. But in attempting to classify techniques, Mauss opens the field wide to include all stages of life, from birth and infancy through adolescence and adult life. Several lists offered by Mauss suggest the vastness of the category of bodily or embodied technique, which includes everything from how people walk to how they have sex and how they wash their hands.¹⁴ At the same time, they reveal the impossibility of drawing a clear line around embodied technique, since techniques like eating and washing require materials beyond the human body, namely food, soap, and water. All technique is to some extent dependent on materials outside the body—at the very least, the air we breathe and the ground on which we stand, sit, walk, or recline. Mauss’s own enumerations of technique reveal the incompleteness of the various definitions he offers, since these lists include much that is socially significant rather than “physical or chemical or organic.”¹⁵ None of this invalidates Mauss’s fundamental insight, which predates by decades the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and others who have studied the training, education, and discipline of the body. It simply means that the concept of

¹³ Ibid., 80.

¹⁴ Ibid., 83-91. Within the category of “adult life,” Mauss includes the following areas of technique: sleep and rest; activity and movement; walking; running; dancing; jumping; climbing; descent (e.g., down stairs); swimming; forceful movements; holding; techniques for the care of the body (“rubbing, washing, soaping”); care of the mouth; hygiene in the needs of nature; eating; drinking; techniques of reproduction (including sexual positions); and “techniques of the care of the abnormal.”

¹⁵ For example, the difference between “polite and impolite *positions for the hands* at rest.” Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation*, 80, italics original.

technique offered by Mauss must be further developed if it is to serve as the basis for a contemporary theoretical approach.

Before moving on, I want to highlight two additional points from Mauss's discussion of technique. First, Mauss describes the difficulty of unlearning technique once it has been absorbed to the point of unconscious reflex. Writing about the changes in swimming technique that had taken place since his own "apprenticeship in swimming," Mauss notes that he cannot simply adopt the new technique as his own. "[T]he habit of swallowing water and spitting it out again has gone. In my day swimmers thought of themselves as a kind of steamboat. It was stupid, but in fact I still do this: I cannot get rid of my technique."¹⁶ This remark is important because it raises the question of agency, intentionality, and habit. Many scholars—most notably Pierre Bourdieu—have conceived of something like embodied technique in terms of ingrained habits distinct from agency or intentionality. Although habituation does play an important role in the absorption of technique, I believe the situation is far more complicated than these later things suggest, and requires a reexamination of the relationship between agency and consciousness. Such a reexamination will only be possible once I have more fully explained what I mean by an epistemological perspective on technique, for the question of agency and habit is really one that pertains to knowledge in general. Can knowledge be involuntary? If technique is knowledge, what does it mean to "get rid of" it? What exactly is happening when one finds oneself trapped or constrained by prior training? At the time of Mauss's writing, it might have been possible to assume a coherent self that makes use of the body to accomplish rational and transparent goals. Today, a variety of movements from phenomenology through cognitive science have complicated this picture and must therefore complicate our understanding of technique.

¹⁶ Ibid., 79.

A second crucial point made by Mauss is his description of technique as “a compromise between nature and humanity.” Although the terms “nature” and “humanity” have since been thoroughly problematized, so that Mauss’s formulation may now seem out of date, an important insight can be drawn from the word “compromise,” namely that technique involves a detailed and context-dependent negotiation between socially defined or symbolic meaning and the concrete possibilities offered by the material world. This point will be important for my later discussion of language and my critique of theories that attempt to explicate technique through linguistic metaphors. Although I do not wish to understate the importance of social context in the use and meaning of embodied technique, there is in my argument something like a return to what Mauss calls “nature,” namely the relative reliability and constancy of the world with which technique grapples. Although technique always acquires social and symbolic meaning according to its context, Mauss’s writing valuably emphasizes the material side of technique and the way in which materiality provides the foundation for symbolic meaning.¹⁷

Mauss’s idea of a “compromise between nature and humanity” has been further advanced by sociologist Nick Crossley’s work on body techniques in the context of ritual, broadly interpreted.¹⁸ Bringing together the writings of Mauss with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Crossley shows that the category of *les techniques du corps* is not limited to physical movement, as in walking or swimming, but includes techniques for working with every aspect of embodiment, from physiology to emotions. In one example, Crossley recalls Merleau-Ponty’s description of how he helps himself fall asleep by lying in a sleep-like posture. As

¹⁷ This issue is also a crucial part of my discussion of sexual difference in Chapter 4.

¹⁸ Nick Crossley, “Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity,” in *Thinking Through Rituals*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004), 31-51. Crossley has also written more extensively on reflexive body techniques in *Reflexive Embodiment in Contemporary Society* (New York: Open University Press, 2006). Here he applies quantitative analysis to the study of everyday techniques, like eating and hygiene, as they differ according to class and gender. However, Crossley’s work on ritual technique is more relevant here.

Crossley points out, Merleau-Ponty cannot simply put himself to sleep in the same way that he can wave his arm or go for a walk. Sleep is not directly subject to one's conscious will. Instead, Merleau-Ponty must act "by indirect means" upon his embodied self, for example by lying down and closing his eyes.¹⁹ Extending this argument, Crossley describes the use of embodied technique to "invoke" or "fend off" particular emotional states in a variety of contexts.²⁰ For example, protesters at a rally may "use their songs, chants, and gestures to put themselves, affectively, into protest situations, to whip up the mood or atmosphere, individual and collective, necessary to an expression of dissent."²¹ Crossley's work is important for my project because it expands the concept of technique beyond the kinds of direct, instrumental uses of the body discussed by Mauss. To summon sleep, to arouse anger, or to stimulate joy are not actions that can be taken directly, but they are certainly within the realm of embodied technique. In such cases, the "compromise" with nature or materiality takes place within the person or group that uses technique to manipulate or transform itself.²²

With Crossley's notion of body technique as that which people use "to act both upon themselves and others," we are close to what Michel Foucault has called the "technologies of the self."²³ Broadly speaking, Foucault's idea of "technologies of the self" has been far more influential in theatre, dance, and performance studies than has Mauss's concept of "techniques of the body," despite the fact that Mauss's work is in many ways more compatible with a performance perspective than is Foucault's. It was Mauss, after all, who focused specifically on the techniques of the body, while Foucault drew no significant distinction between technique and technology. Yet Foucault's work informs a great deal of contemporary writing on embodiment,

¹⁹ Crossley, "Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 42.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² This point will be revisited in my analysis of Konstantin Stanislavski's approach to acting technique in Chapter 3.

²³ Crossley, "Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 49.

perhaps because its focus on the operations of power has aligned with the contemporary desire to politicize scholarly analysis. To my knowledge, Foucault's "technologies of the self" have never been directly compared with Mauss's "techniques of the body." By examining them side by side, I hope to illuminate both their relatedness and several key differences between them.

The cognate nouns technique and technology (as well as the adjective "technical") derive from the Greek word *techne*, which in Aristotle refers to the practical knowledge of how to do something.²⁴ But in modern usage, and in my argument, the distinction between them is crucial: Technique refers to a kind of knowledge, whereas technology refers to material objects produced through such knowledge. In his earlier writings, Foucault saw techniques and technologies as part of a matrix of interwoven processes and influences through which both society and the individual are produced. Foucault does not offer a definition of technique, but he repeatedly includes it in his lists of the mechanisms through which power operates. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault characterizes discipline as comprising "a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets."²⁵ Later in the same work he writes that discipline may involve "insidious leniencies, unavowable petty cruelties, small acts of cunning, calculated methods, techniques, 'sciences'..."²⁶ He describes the table (as in a diagram or chart) as "both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge."²⁷ These terms—in translation: instrument, technique, procedure, method, system, science—do not appear to be substantially different for Foucault. Rather than mapping the differences between them, he invokes them together to

²⁴ John Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique* (Paris: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Usually translated as "craft," *techne* is most often defined in contrast to *episteme* or knowledge. However, as Dunne points out, Aristotle also distinguishes it from *phronesis* or "practical knowledge" (9-10). For Dunne, *techne* is goal-oriented knowledge that leads to a "secure mastery" over *poiesis*, the process of making or production. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is oriented to *praxis* (practice) and is "nontechnical" without being "nonrational." My understanding of technique is similar to what Dunne calls *phronesis*.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Press, 1995), 215.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

illustrate the ubiquity and multiplicity of discursive production and regimes of power. In Foucault, a word like “discipline” is defined not once but many times, always in slightly different terms.

Nevertheless, technique/technology remained an important idea in Foucault’s work over several decades. It plays a central role in his later writings, when Foucault began to suspect that he had “insisted too much on the technology of domination” and hence became interested in “the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self.”²⁸ Gradually, Foucault turned away from the study of prisons and asylums and towards that of sexuality and of the ethical practices of ancient Greece and Christian asceticism.²⁹ In these sources, he found a radically different notion of how the self is constructed: not through the operation of power upon a docile body but through the “care of the self”: the development of one’s being through repeated actions, the long-term cultivation of habits and behaviors, as in an Aristotelian conception of the ethical life. Foucault called such repeated actions the “technologies of the self.” Although he does not define technique/technology in this context either, it seems clear that, in returning to *techné*, Foucault intends to ensure that his readers will not mistake mere intellectual knowledge for the kind of knowledge involved in the actual care of the self. Foucault’s techniques and technologies, whether of domination or of the self, are always envisioned as *actions to be taken*, rather than facts or information, and in this sense are linked to embodiment.

The “self” in Foucault is never the rational mind but always the embodied self. Whether they were being burned at the stake, imprisoned, sexualized, or cared for, bodies were the sites of the techniques Foucault analyzed. Even the most disembodied technologies, like the chart or

²⁸ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 19.

²⁹ Foucault’s primary examples of “technologies of the self” were the *askeses* of ancient Greece. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage Press, 1988); and Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

table, were designed to observe, catalogue, and control human beings through their presence as bodies. The discipline and punishment of a person takes place through that person's body, as does the care of the self. This has led theorists of dance, theatre, and performance to rely heavily on Foucault in theorizing the power dynamics at work in performing arts. As Sally Ann Ness observes, "the very mention of the term 'discipline' in current dance scholarship ... more or less automatically makes reference to Foucault's genealogical study of incarceration."³⁰ This is particularly the case since, as Ness argues, Foucault's turn away from phenomenology mirrors a larger turn in performance theory away from universal conceptions of the body and towards cultural and sociological specificity. Foucault's work, with its emphasis on power and its apparently political orientation, has been a productive resource for thinking about bodies as inscribed, monitored, and produced by society. His later work has also opened the door to the possibility that embodied practices in dance and performance might instead serve as ethical practices of the self, a tempting idea that seems to offer new hope for the validation of such practices. Yet there are significant limitations in Foucault's writing on technique, which are magnified when theorists invoke his work in oversimplified terms.

One of the legacies of Foucault's work has been an interest in the precise mechanisms of power and liberation, with an acknowledgment that these mechanisms are not constant from one time and place to another. Indeed, the relevance of Foucault's work to my argument lies in his understanding of technique as diverse, complex, and subject to ongoing transformation. Even in his writings on power and domination, Foucault's view of technique is thoroughly historicized and emphasizes how techniques change and transform over time (for example: from the older, explicitly violent techniques of state retribution to the newer techniques of punishing isolation

³⁰ Sally Ann Ness, "Foucault's Turn From Phenomenology: Implications for Dance Studies," in *Dance Research Journal* 43.2 (2011): 19.

and imprisonment). But the centrality of power in Foucault's writing has led some theorists influenced by him to characterize technique as caught between the poles of oppression and liberation, either oscillating between them or being pulled in both directions at once. The trope of oppression versus liberation appears in numerous writings on dance and performance of the past decade, where it evokes Foucault whether or not he is directly cited.³¹ In fact, although contemporary authors sometimes read him that way, Foucault's thinking did not tend towards binary oppositions. His preferred rhetorical strategy was that of an endless proliferation of terms. The idea that specific practices may be classified either as "technologies of domination" or as "technologies of the self" is not very Foucauldian. Actually, Foucault's idea of technique is best characterized as emphasizing its multiplicity.

In one of his last interviews, Foucault enumerates not two but four different "technologies": those of "production," of "sign systems" (signification), of power, and of the self.³² These categories beg many questions. Are the technologies of power the same as those of domination? Don't the technologies of production and signification substantially overlap with those of power and the self? If Foucault had lived to develop these ideas further, additional lists including other kinds of technique might have further complicated this typology. We would then be drawing closer to Mauss's laundry lists of techniques, but with a crucial difference: Each area of technique would now be available for historical as well as socio-anthropological examination and could be assessed not only in terms of its potential benefit to "humanity" writ large but also

³¹ Once example is Judith Hamera's implicitly Foucauldian characterization of ballet technique as "both taskmaster and mastered, both warden and liberator" in *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 4. For another example, see Jennifer Lea, "Liberation or Limitation? Understanding Iyengar Yoga as a Practice of the Self," *Body & Society* 15 (2009): 71-92.

³² Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," 18. The last of these four types "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." The extraordinary open-endedness of this definition indicates the difficulty of building a theoretical argument around the question of what does or does not constitute a technique or technology of the self.

in terms of the harmful, unequal, or simply complex and open-ended ways in which it has been employed. Walking, swimming, and cooking would then still be seen as areas of technique, but they would no longer be presumed innocent. When Mauss's idea of body technique is inflected by Foucault's concern with power, we can begin to grasp how the ways in which people are trained to walk reflect not only the availability of technical knowledge but also the social hierarchies through which that knowledge is distributed.

Both Mauss and Foucault were interested in how technique varies across time and space. Mauss, as a sociologist-anthropologist, emphasized the flow of techniques between societies, while Foucault, a historian-philosopher, looked at how techniques have changed over time. In grappling with the diversity of technique, both synchronically and diachronically, Mauss and Foucault provide the context in which I hope to develop what I call an epistemological perspective on technique. Before doing so, however, I want to mention briefly one other line of thinking about technique: that which sees it as an essentially negative force tied to modernity and industrialization. Although I will have little use for this approach, it is important to address because it informs the way in which some contemporary practitioners react to the word "technique." Indeed, Nathan Schlanger defines Mauss's work partly in opposition to this anti-technical trend, which he suggests may have been a response to the horrors of the First World War. Schlanger writes: "The themes of techniques and machines were favourite subjects of [post-war] apocalyptic discussions: now that their efficiency as agents of death and destruction was made so evident, their inescapable presence throughout all reaches of life could be seen as a tangible objectification of the moral crisis, if not one of its original causes."³³ These philosophers drew no distinction was drawn between technique and technology. Like Mauss, they viewed the

³³ Mauss, *Techniques, Technology, and Civilisation*, 16.

constant advance of technique as a defining characteristic of humankind, but for them this was a dangerous process badly in need of curbing or reversal.

Schlanger cites Henri Bergson to illustrate the negative idea of technique. Writing in 1932, Bergson proclaimed: “[T]he same instrumental ingenuity and inventiveness that has made us humans into what we are, now threatens to run out of control, to wreak havoc and spread emptiness.”³⁴ Two decades and another World War later, Lewis Mumford and Martin Heidegger took similarly dim views of technique and technology. Mumford’s *Art and Technics* (1952) and Heidegger’s “Question Concerning Technology” (1954) warn of an impending technical or technologized world in which the soul or essence of humanity is compromised by its relationship with technicity.³⁵ Although this is not the sense of technique I intend to develop here, it is important to mention, because the ominous view of technique offered by Bergson, Mumford, and Heidegger continues to inform current discussions of technique. In fact, a good deal of contemporary writing on performance reveals an anxiety surrounding technique that echoes the work of these philosophers and their fear of a technical world, even when it does not cite them explicitly. I will address a few specific examples of this below, but it is important to realize that anti-technique sentiment has its own philosophical precedents. Despite this skepticism, I will now attempt to build upon the work of Mauss and Foucault in developing a theory of technique as knowledge, or what I call an epistemological perspective on technique.

An Epistemological Perspective

³⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 17.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1952). These anti-technique arguments are continued by William Barrett in *The Illusion of Technique* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1978).

Epistemology is a key site of contemporary debate, with scholars in a wide variety of fields arguing for and against the importance of different types of knowledge. Knowledge established through logical induction, a mainstay of eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy, has been severely critiqued for its universalist and masculinist assumptions, leading to the development of numerous alternative epistemological paradigms, from Pierre Bourdieu's practical knowledge and Clifford Geertz's local knowledge to the "situated" knowledges of Donna Haraway and the indigenous knowledge of Linda Tuhiwai Smith.³⁶ Each of these epistemological arguments is grounded in a commitment that is fundamentally political insofar as it demands recognition for the knowledge possessed by those who have been excluded from scientific and philosophical communities as a result of gender, race, class, and other divisions. At the same time, a less overtly politicized but no less fundamental epistemological shift has taken place across the social sciences, with an increasing interest in "tacit" knowledge and the recognition that knowledge cannot be defined in terms of propositional statements but must be understood as fundamentally embodied and communal. Even scientific knowledge, still the dominant paradigm, has been contextualized and historicized in works ranging from Thomas Kuhn's study of paradigm shifts to more recent writing in the sociology of scientific knowledge.

As Theodore Schatzki explains,

knowledge (and truth) are no longer automatically self-transparent possessions of minds. Rather, knowledge and truth, including the scientific versions, are

³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 29. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays In Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 575-99. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 1-17.

mediated both by interactions between people and by arrangements in the world. Often, consequently, knowledge is no longer even the property of individuals, but instead a feature of groups, together with their material setups. Scientific and other knowledges also no longer amount to stockpiled representations. Not only do practical understandings, ways of proceeding, and even setups of the material environment represent forms of knowledge—propositional knowledge presupposes and depends on them.³⁷

Schatzki's focus is on the sociology of scientific knowledge, the study of how embodied and communal processes give rise to knowledge in the sciences. But the epistemological shift from "stockpiled representations" and "propositional" knowledge to "practical understandings" and "ways of proceeding" has much to offer the study of embodied technique as I have introduced it here. Although a full discussion of this shift is beyond the scope of this project, similar claims about the embodied and communal nature of knowledge can be found in Mark Johnson's discussion of embodiment and meaning, Francisco J. Varela's "enactive approach to cognition," and the feminist and anti-colonial critiques of science offered by Haraway and Smith, to name only a few of the most influential authors.³⁸

These major transformations in epistemological thought have been strongly echoed in dance, theatre, and performance studies. In the past decade, scholars writing on performance have approached the issue from a number of angles, looking for ways to articulate the

³⁷ Theodore R. Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice theory," in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eiki von Savigny (New York: Routledge, 2001), 12.

³⁸ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Johnson writes that logical principles "emerge from the nature of our embodied experience, shaped by our sensorimotor capacities, our feelings, and our modes of inquiry" (106). Varela argues that "cognitive structures emerge from recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided" (12). These authors are widely cited by dance and performance scholars in discussions of how knowledge is embodied.

importance of performance and performers in terms of knowledge and ways of knowing. Given the continuing dominance of the scientific paradigm, which derives from the ubiquitous evidence of its ability to deliver ever-advancing technology, and the related idea that we now live in a “knowledge society” in which knowledge and expertise play increasingly fundamental roles, it is not surprising that many performance scholars look to epistemology as a new framework for interpreting the value of the practices they care about.³⁹ For example, Diana Taylor writes: “Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated ... behavior.”⁴⁰ She continues: “Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing.”⁴¹ Like Haraway and Smith, Taylor hopes to reclaim lost or marginalized perspectives by expanding the scope of what is considered knowledge. Whereas print culture has tended to discount that which is not written down, Taylor wants to argue for the validity—not just as performance, but *as knowledge*—of embodied practices in dance, theatre, and ritual. Is this claim to knowledge merely a strategic move? What might it reveal or conceal about such practices? In short, what are the implications of understanding embodied technique as knowledge?

Epistemological claims on behalf of embodied knowledge are even more prevalent in dance studies, where scholars studying non-European dance forms have increasingly looked to epistemology to help them articulate why such forms are not merely decorative artifacts or colorful expressions of cultural diversity but rather constitutive elements of society and culture. For example, Yvonne Daniel describes Haitian, Cuban, and Bahian practitioners as possessing

³⁹ As cited in the Introduction, Karin Knorr Cetina writes: “There is widespread consensus today that contemporary Western societies are in one sense or another ruled by knowledge and expertise.” *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

⁴⁰ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

“embodied knowledge—that is, knowledge found within the body, within the dancing and drumming body.”⁴² Sharon Mâhealani Rowe writes along similar lines:

The bodies of hula dancers hold a body of knowledge, a complete philosophy with its own epistemology, its own vision of reality, and an ethic based on the virtues of sharing, responsibility, reciprocity, and humility. Historically, hula dancers were the moving archives of the cultural knowledge of the Hawaiian people, and today they can help us understand an alternative approach to knowledge and learning that reflects a different concept of enlightenment.⁴³

In some of these cases, the challenge to “Eurocentric and male-centered systems of knowledge production” is explicit.⁴⁴ In others, embodied knowledge is associated less with non-European cultures than with embodiment in general or with the phenomenological body. According to Deidre Sklar: “Bringing out the somatic, or felt, dimensions of movement opens the way for an examination of kinetic vitality as an overlooked aspect of embodied knowledge.”⁴⁵

Both the explicitly political epistemologies and those grounded in phenomenology or cognitive science make important contributions to our understanding of knowledge, which always has a complex relationship to politics. Knowledge is profoundly political at the same time

⁴² Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 4-5.

⁴³ Sharon Mâhealani Rowe, “We Dance for Knowledge,” in *Dance Research Journal* 40.1 (2008): 37.

⁴⁴ Hui Niu Wilcox, “Embodied Ways of Knowing, Pedagogies, and Social Justice: Inclusive Science and Beyond,” in *NWSA Journal* 21.2 (2009): 104.

⁴⁵ Deidre Sklar, “Remembering Kinesthesia: An Inquiry into Embodied Cultural Knowledge,” in *Migrations of Gesture*, eds. Carrie Noland and Sally Anne Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 85.

as it reaches to exceed the politics of any given moment.⁴⁶ My concern, however, is that without greater specificity of terms, the difference between these various approaches cannot be bridged. If embodiment is a basic premise for all knowledge, as Johnson, Varela, and Sklar would argue, then what is the particular role or relevance of the performers, dancers, drummers, singers, and ritual practitioners that performance scholars find so fascinating and important? And what should we make of embodied practitioners who live at the heart of print and media culture, or of empire, rather than at its margins? In reclaiming the knowledge of marginalized cultures, we should avoid falling into an Orientalism that would associate such knowledge with embodiment, ignoring both the rational and textual dimensions of those cultures and the embodied dimension of European knowledge. The problem, as I see it, is that the language of embodied knowledge, or “ways of knowing,” has not been sufficiently developed to handle the complexity of these histories. Although I strongly support the move towards an epistemological framework for analyzing embodied practice, such a move must do more than simply claim that particular performers or performance traditions possess embodied knowledge. An epistemology of embodied knowledge should account for the transmission of knowledge across boundaries, including cultural ones; assess different types of knowledge in nuanced, non-binary ways; and bridge the phenomenology-influenced cognitive science of Johnson and Varela with the insights of dance, theatre, and performance studies. Such a framework would allow us to think about the different kinds of knowledge possessed by different societies and cultures without reducing them to hierarchies of the more or less “embodied.”

To begin constructing such a framework, we need to ask pointed questions about the terms employed by these and other scholars. For example, what is the difference between

⁴⁶ This formulation recalls Mauss’s characterization of techniques as “extrasocial” in the context of his ultimately sociological study of how technique moves between societies. As knowledge, technique is both extrasocial and fundamentally important to society.

embodied knowledge, social knowledge, cultural knowledge, and memory? Why should we bother arguing that dancers possess “knowledge,” if this knowledge is synonymous with culture? Is knowledge just the next trending academic term after “culture,” to describe what distinguishes human societies from each other? In one of the essays just cited, Hui Niu Wilcox describes “three interconnected concepts through which embodied knowledges can be foregrounded: Lived experiences, cultural performance, and bodily intelligence.”⁴⁷ In contrast, I would argue that a rigorous theory of embodied knowledge must clearly distinguish it from precisely these kinds of related but different concepts. If experience is taken, in the phenomenological sense, to mean the “felt-sense” of living, then this is precisely what *cannot* be shared. The experience of an individual cannot be transmitted to another individual, nor can the experience of a group be transmitted to another group. Experience is not repeatable but is intrinsically bound to a specific time and place. Likewise, the word “intelligence” refers to a capacity or talent for acquiring knowledge and not to knowledge itself. Like experience, intelligence cannot be learned or transmitted. By making knowledge synonymous with experience, intelligence, and performance, Wilcox sabotages her own goal.⁴⁸ (The problems with “performance” are more complex and will be addressed in the next section.)

If experience, intelligence, and performance are all importantly different from knowledge, then *technique* is the key term I wish to put forth as an important step in

⁴⁷ Wilcox, “Embodied Ways of Knowing,” 106.

⁴⁸ For a similar, but to my mind even less satisfactory, typology of embodied knowledge, see that offered by Phillip Zarrilli and Rebecca Loukes, cited in John Matthews, *Training for Performance: A Meta-Disciplinary Account* (London: Methuen, 2011), 21-22. Three “distinct ‘areas’ of knowledge” are enumerated here. The first conflates experience with knowledge, while the second and third refer to written or discursive knowledge. There is no mention of anything like technique as distinct from individual development and ability.

conceptualizing embodied knowledge. Technique, as seen in the writings of Mauss—and to a lesser extent Foucault—refers to a particular kind of knowledge.⁴⁹ In Schlanger’s words:

Mauss stressed the part of knowledge and of consciousness deployed and acquired by those engaged in technical activities. To weave a fabric, to navigate a canoe, to construct a spear, to set a trap—all are actions which suppose and at the same time generate knowledge, knowledge which is practical rather than discursive in its nature, without being for that any less social.⁵⁰

I have already mentioned that Mauss referred to such knowledge as a “compromise between nature and humanity.”⁵¹ In more contemporary terms, we might speak of a knowledge of *relatively consistent pathways through materiality*. The technique of swimming, for example, is knowledge of what is possible given the relatively consistent material characteristics of human bodies in water. Although such knowledge is transmissible, it cannot be reduced to a set of propositional statements about “the body” or about “water” as a chemical substance.

Furthermore, differences between bodies will require adjustments in technique, which may be

⁴⁹ In this dissertation, I define technique as a kind of knowledge alongside, for example, propositional knowledge. It would also be possible to argue that *all* knowledge is technique. In this sense, even propositional statements can be seen as ways of doing things. A fuller exploration of this pragmatist move is beyond the scope of this project.

⁵⁰ Schlanger in Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52. For Mauss, the relationship between techniques and the physical or material world places them in an “extraordinary extrasocial position.” This could be taken to mean either that techniques transcend individual societies (in that they move between them) or else that they are outside of the social altogether (as in the “realism” championed by Hubert L. Dreyfus—cited below). More than one theorist after Mauss has attempted to draw a clear line between the material and the social uses of technique. One example is Roy Rappaport’s distinction between the “physical” and the “meaningful” aspects of technique in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108-109. Another is Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart’s “Embodiment and communication: Two frames for the analysis of ritual,” *Social Anthropology* 6.2 (1998): 237-51. I understand the desire for such a distinction, but I do not believe it is tenable, firstly because technique simultaneously negotiates the social and the material rather than engaging in one or the other, and secondly because the two sides of this model are not symmetrical: materiality provides the necessary substrate out of which social meaning arises.

slight or substantial, as would swimming in salt-water or another liquid. Nevertheless, because of the relative similarities between bodies, and because the properties of water are relatively constant, knowledge of swimming can be shared from person to person and even, as Mauss shows, from culture to culture. New discoveries about or within the technique of swimming can be made to fulfill a variety of purposes. Swimming for speed will differ from swimming for aesthetic display, for fitness, for work, for relaxation, or for ritual purposes.

The metaphor of “pathways through materiality,” while not the only valid one, is consciously chosen. In my view, a network of branching pathways veining materiality is one way to picture how knowledge in general is structured. Furthermore, as noted in the Introduction, the word “way” frequently stands in for technique in colloquial usage. While technique is a relatively uncommon term, “way” is extremely common. The authors cited above refer to ways of walking, ways of dancing, ways of performing, etc. When these “ways” are understood literally as pathways through materiality—relying always on the relative constancy of human embodiment—then we can begin to grasp how much genuine knowledge is at work in even the simplest actions. Through trial and error, we learn what to expect as we follow these kinds of pathways through the world.⁵² Often enough we are wrong in our expectations, because technique, like other knowledge, is only ever relatively reliable. Changes in the environment or in our own embodiment, or the passage of technique from one context to another, can lead to actions that have unexpected results. Yet we are able to act and to communicate because of the degree to which the materiality does respond in relatively reliable ways to the knowledge that is technique. Embodied technique, then, is knowledge of relatively reliable pathways through the materiality of human embodiment. Despite variation between bodies, this constancy affords a

⁵² The reader is invited to see what happens when the word “technique” is substituted for “way” in any given text. Very often, without changing the overall meaning of a sentence, this simple substitution reveals a significant depth of learning and epistemological content at work.

vast field of possible knowledge: from ballet to soccer, from martial arts to meditation, from tango to prayer to lovemaking. Each of these is based in the materiality of human embodiment, including capacities for rhythm, vocalization, individual and group movement, empathy, imaginative play, and vastly more.

Once we accept the proposition that technique is knowledge, we can begin to apply concepts from the sociology of knowledge to the relatively undeveloped model of technique offered by Mauss. In what follows, I will use terms normally applied to scientific and academic fields of knowledge—such as specialization, interdisciplinarity, and research—to discuss the movement and development fields of embodied technique. By specialization, I mean a continual searching within a narrow area of technique that gives rise to increasingly detailed and precise knowledge of what is possible there. By interdisciplinarity, I mean the exchange of knowledge among existing fields of specialization. Research, a key term in my argument, means the development of new knowledge, which in this context means new technique. Both specialization and interdisciplinarity can therefore constitute research: In specialization, one discovers new technique by searching within narrowly defined areas of previously existing technique. With interdisciplinarity, one bridges or combines previously existing areas of specialized knowledge, searching for their intersection, border, or synthesis. In all cases, the technical knowledge to which I am referring should be distinguished from ability. While it often passes through virtuosic performers and practitioners, it may also be also transmitted by teachers and coaches who cannot necessarily enact, in their own bodies, all of what they know.

In developing this epistemological theory, I will resolutely employ “technique” as a continuous rather than a discrete noun. Grammatically, technique is just like mathematics or history. We can talk about “elements” or “details” of technique, just as we can talk about

individual mathematical symbols or historical facts, but these elements do not function on their own, and their enumeration is not equivalent to knowledge. Knowledge consists in a vast collection of such elements in aggregate, with thousands or hundreds of thousands of relationships among them, ways of combining them, and contexts in which they might be applied. I will therefore studiously avoid referring to “techniques” as stable or coherent entities. As I argue in later chapters, the notion of techniques (or “Techniques” with a capital “T”) as unitary systems has more to do with marketing, and with competition between practitioners, than with a desire to accurately describe how embodied practices are structured. For various reasons, some of which will be discussed below, many teachers and practitioners describe their technique as if it were a coherent thing. Some even going so far as to trademark the name of a particular “Technique.” In the theoretical model developed here, embodied technique is understood as a very large area of ongoing research in which countless overlapping and contested territories or subfields can be mapped. Swimming, yoga, and walking are areas of embodied technique, which in different contexts may be highly specialized or extremely common.

Only a few recent articles draw an explicit link between embodied knowledge and technique. In “Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance” (2002), Jaana Parviainen aims “to epistemologically analyze bodily knowledge and its relation to bodily skills, techniques, and articulated knowledge.”⁵³ This article is uncommon in that it not only makes use of epistemological language in discussing dance but also actively grapples with the concept of knowledge and with some of the issues that arise when applying it to dance. Parviainen is not content to claim for dance an epistemological status but wants to articulate the precise circumstances in which dancers can be said to possess embodied knowledge.

⁵³ Jaana Parviainen, “Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance,” *Dance Research Journal* 34.1 (2002): 23. For a somewhat older attempt at bringing epistemology to bear on embodied practice in the context of ritual, see Theodore W. Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge,” *The Journal of Religion* 62.2 (1982): 111-27.

If we acknowledge that dancers know something and that for the most part their knowing is nonverbal, it leads us to ask, *What* do they know, and even more importantly, *How* do they know? The often stated but rarely analyzed issue of dance studies is the question of knowing in and through the body. Although the concept of “bodily knowledge” has been around for a long time in dance practice and dance research, the intuition of bodily knowledge is not yet articulated adequately.⁵⁴

Drawing on a range of relevant scholars in epistemology, phenomenology, and dance, including Sondra Fraleigh, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Gilbert Ryle, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, Parviainen concludes—rightly, in my view—that the bodily knowledge of dance cannot be equated with skill. (Although Parviainen associates “technique” with skill, I would argue on the contrary that technique is embodied knowledge and must be distinguished precisely from skill and ability.) Where skill and ability refer to an individual person and result from the complex and nontransferable coincidence of many factors in a particular time and place, technique is that which passes between people.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Parviainen cites aging and disability—important phenomena for any study of embodiment—as situations in which dancers may possess bodily knowledge without the ability to enact it themselves. Rather than locating embodied knowledge

⁵⁴ Parviainen, “Bodily Knowledge,” 13-14, italics original.

⁵⁵ As Parviainen points out, Gilbert Ryle’s well-known distinction between “know-how” and “know-that” does not sufficiently account for the difference between knowledge and ability. Know-how “implies abilities ranging from bodily skills to abstract contemplative cases, but it cannot explain ‘know how’ in the absence of skill” (ibid., 11).

exclusively in the bodies of virtuosic performances, Parviainen recognizes the importance of differences between bodies in the multiple ways knowledge is transmitted.⁵⁶

One of the ways Parviainen attempts to explain the complexity of bodily knowledge is by distinguishing it from “mere technique or the production of a skill.”⁵⁷ By this she does not simply mean that bodily knowledge can be possessed by those who do not have the ability to enact it themselves. She also intends to raise bodily knowledge above the level of “mere technique,” which for her is something like a simplified or reduced model of what actually happens in practice. I will refer to this as the trope of “more than.” Frequently encountered in the writing of contemporary teachers of acting and dance, the trope of “more than” is the idea that certain practices (especially artistic or spiritual ones) have the special distinction of being “more than” merely the enactment of technique. This claim is usually associated with the denigration of other practices (especially those of entertainment and virtuosic display) as being merely technical. References to “mere” technique, “mechanical” technique, and “empty” technique are widespread not only in the performing arts but in a variety of discourses surrounding embodied practice. Such references mystify embodied practice, since the “more than” can by definition never be defined or explained—if it could, it would simply be another area of technique. I will return to this point more than once below, as it marks one of the main ways in which technique has been underestimated and misunderstood. The trope of “more than” also echoes what I have previously identified as an anxiety surrounding technique’s alleged tendency toward mechanization, as in Bergson, Mumford, and Heidegger. I understand the concern, expressed by

⁵⁶ I disagree with the approach of Steven P. Wainwright and Bryan S. Turner in “Narratives of Embodiment: Body, Aging, and Career in Royal Ballet Dancers,” in *Cultural Bodies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2004). Wainwright and Turner refer to the practical knowledge of dance possessed by an aging dancer as “cultural capital” (112). This conflates cultural exchange value with knowledge; a dancer may have one without the other. For more on aging and dance, see Elisabeth Schwaiger, *Ageing, Gender, Embodiment and Dance* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

⁵⁷ Parviainen, “Bodily Knowledge,” 19.

Parviainen and many others, that the complexity of embodied practice must not be reduced to an enumerable set of instructions or an algorithmic program. But rather than looking for something “more than” or “beyond” technique, I believe we should broaden and deepen our understanding of technique to include this complexity.

One of the great strengths of Randy Martin’s *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* is that it avoids ranking practices as more or less technical. Instead, Martin develops a more nuanced vocabulary with which to articulate the relationship between different kinds of technique and the ways in which they come together in particular bodies and moments.⁵⁸

Although he does not propose what I am calling an epistemological perspective, and his discussion of power sometimes tends toward the oversimplified, binary reading of Foucault mentioned above, Martin is the only theorist I have encountered who compellingly describes the interaction of multiple techniques within a single body—including both highly specialized and “everyday” technique. Examining a range of examples in which technique is learned, from a hip-hop aerobics session to a university dance class, Martin envisions a “composite body” made up of techniques drawn from a variety of contexts.⁵⁹ This allows him to look at the complex interaction of different kinds of technique that structures any given moment.

Martin describes the “composite” body of a dancer in which many different kinds of technique work simultaneously to structure movement. He writes: “Examining how disparate technical sensibilities are embodied in the same dancer could be of assistance in imagining the larger question of how any body gets multiply composed.” Crucially, we are not talking here only about different kinds of dance technique but about “a multiplicity of techniques, dancerly

⁵⁸ Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

and otherwise.”⁶⁰ Martin calls this phenomenon the “intertextuality” of technique (an awkward but evocative coinage would be “intertechtuality”) and describes the way in which one technique can appear as “residue” in the midst of another. This happens, for example, when jazz or ballet technique appears unexpectedly in the midst of a modern combination. But it also happens when the training one has received as a child—to sit, stand, or speak in a particular way—manifests as residue during professional training in dance, martial arts, or any specialized area of technique. The phenomenon of technical residue explains why, when we train in a new area of embodied technique, we simultaneously confront our own gendered, classed, raced, cultured identities. It is because both these kinds of identities and our professional athletic or performance training are to some degree made up of the same stuff: embodied technique.⁶¹

Although Martin describes technique as “reigning” within the dancer’s body, it may be more fruitful to understand technique as knowledge rather than as power. Of course, as Mauss already pointed out in 1935, technique, once trained and ingrained, may indeed “reign” over us in the sense that we may feel trapped in our prior training, desiring new ways to act but continuing to reproduce the old ways seemingly in spite of ourselves. In such circumstances, however, we should recall that the technique that now oppresses us was originally learned through painstaking effort and labor. It is therefore not so much a question of technique versus its transcendence, but rather of different kinds of technique. As Martin writes, “it is not a matter of being trained or untrained as some generic condition of the body but how one form of training may come to interfere with another.”⁶² Training may be explicit or implicit, highly specialized or extremely common. Rather than searching for something “more than” technique, we should examine the contexts in which technique is transmitted, from parenting and schooling to

⁶⁰ Ibid., 167.

⁶¹ This point will be further developed in Chapter 4.

⁶² Martin, *Critical Moves*, 174.

professional training and from the most explicit mandatory drills to the subtlest corrections and adjustments—all of which contribute to who we are and what we are able to do. Technique in this sense is constituent of our identity and culture, but it is not reducible to them.

I have been grappling here with what I call the epistemology of embodiment, namely the question of how knowledge relates to the materiality of bodies. How does knowledge, both specialized and “everyday,” structure the actions of bodies? Or, reversing the terms, how do bodies draw upon the knowledge they possess? In the remainder of this chapter, I continue to wrestle with these questions by further developing the linked concepts of technique, practice, and research on which the rest of the dissertation rests. First, I draw a distinction between technique and practice that makes possible the analysis of specific examples. Next, I critique recent theories of embodiment that link embodiment with ephemerality or excess, or which analyze embodiment through an analogy with language. Finally, having distinguished my position on technique and practice from current theories of performance and the performative, I highlight the importance of both training and research in embodied technique.

Technique and Practice

The phrase “embodied practice” has already been used to describe things like walking, dancing, or singing. What then is the relationship between technique and practice? Unlike technique, practice has been an explicit focus and key term of scholarship at least since the 1970s. As Theodore R. Schatzki observes in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*: “Thinkers once spoke of ‘structures’ ‘systems,’ ‘meaning,’ ‘life world,’ ‘events,’ and ‘actions’

when naming the primary generic social thing. Today, many theorists would accord ‘practices’ a comparable honor.”⁶³ Many of the essays in *The Practice Turn* explicitly link practice with knowledge, offering a helpful entry point to the epistemological perspective I am developing here. However, the increase use of “practice” as a reference point for theory also brings with it certain problems. In this section, I examine some of the ambiguities attached to the word practice and offer a more rigorous definition of the term in relation to technique. I also explain why I have built my theory on the relationship between technique and practice, rather than practice and performance, despite the prevalence of the latter term in contemporary theory. The theoretical model of technique and practice developed here is the basis for all subsequent parts of this dissertation.

In the model presented here, *technique is knowledge that structures practice*. In other words, when people walk, dance, or sing, their actions are structured by their knowledge of how to do so. Such knowledge may be learned in contexts of formal pedagogy, from elementary school to professional training, or it may be absorbed through unspoken processes of socialization and personal development. Furthermore, practice is structured both consciously and unconsciously by technique. If technique is knowledge that structures practice, then practice is the enactment of technique. In colloquial language, technique is “put into practice.” While these are not controversial assertions, they do require us to develop a more rigorous definition of practice. For as is clear in many of the essays in *The Practice Turn*, the term “practice” is often used ambiguously to refer both to concrete instances of action and to the patterns or structures that link such instances together. Whereas I have just offered two statements that juxtapose

⁶³ Theodore R. Schatzki, “Introduction: Practice theory,” in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1. In his initial summary of practice theory, Schatzki refers in turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hubert Dreyfus, Charles Taylor, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, Jeann-François Lyotard, and Joseph Rouse.

technique and practice, carefully distinguishing between them and characterizing their complementary relationship, very often what Schatzki calls “practice theory” uses the term “practice” to mean both of these things at once.

Borrowing a simple example from Mauss, my argument would distinguish between an instance of swimming and swimming itself. I sometimes go swimming, so we could say that I have a practice of swimming. On the other hand, swimming itself is sometimes called a practice. It may seem logical to say that when I swim, what I am doing is practicing swimming, where swimming is a kind of abstraction that I “put into practice” in a given time and place. But there are two very different meanings of the word “practice” at work here. In the first case, we are talking about a specific example of swimming, such as my swimming practice on a given day or the development of my swimming practice over a certain period of years. Whether we look at a day or a decade of my swimming, these are concrete instances of practice, bounded in time and space, located culturally and geographically, and tied to a specific body. In the second case, we are talking about swimming in general, a transhistorical phenomenon that potentially links me across vast distances of time and space to anyone who has ever swum. Using the term “practice” for both of these concepts prevents us from distinguishing between them and gives rise to a confused phrasing in which “practice” refers both to the doing and to the thing that is done.⁶⁴

The unacknowledged ambiguity of this double-meaning of practice generates significant problems for the authors of *The Practice Turn* as they struggle to engage with the concreteness of activities while at the same time analyzing their meaning as socially constructed patterns. Schatzki refers to “practices” of cooking, child-rearing, politics, farming, negotiation, banking, and recreation.⁶⁵ But are these “practices” in the sense of concrete doings, historical instances

⁶⁴ John Matthews points to this problem in *Training for Performance* (14), but he does not resolve it.

⁶⁵ *The Practice Turn*, 48.

that we can study in detail and specificity? Or do these terms refer instead to the patterns or principles that link such instances together across time and space? As soon as something like “cooking” is understood as “a practice,” it becomes difficult to examine the kind of nuance and detail that only appear in specific instances. On the other hand, if practice refers only to concrete instances, then how do we name that which links one instance to another? As Schatzki puts it: “What more is there ... to a practice than activity?”⁶⁶ In other words, what allows us to say that two different moments of activity are both instances of cooking? What does it mean to declare that two groups, in different times and places, may have been doing “the same thing”? What kind of “thing” is it that they were both doing? Clearly, if two people are cooking the same meal in different places, they are not *literally* cooking the *same* meal. (For that matter, when I cook the same meal on several days, it is not actually the same meal.) Yet there is something important that links them together. If practices are by definition concrete and specific, then how do we talk about what they share?⁶⁷

This difficulty cannot be resolved unless the two concepts are distinguished from each other: on the one hand, concrete examples of action, moments of doing, historical instances of materialized activity; and on the other, the rules, structures, principles, patterns that govern and determine those actions. Some theorists have attempted to draw a distinction along these lines by using “performance” to refer to the concrete instances in which “practices” are enacted. In Edward L. Schieffelin’s account:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ On these grounds, Stephen Turner rejects the very notion of “shared practices.” He writes that talk of practice and practices “gets into trouble over the notion of ‘sharing.’ The idea that there are ‘shared’ practices requires some sort of notion of how they come to be shared.” Instead, Turner proposes, “we can dispense with the notion of sharing altogether” and replace the idea of shared practices with that of learned, individual habits.” I agree with Turner about the importance of learning, but as I argue throughout, “habit” does not carry the epistemological meaning of “technique.” Stephen Turner, “Throwing out the tacit rule book: Learning and practices,” in *The Practice Turn*, 120.

The relation between performance and practice turns on this moment of improvisation: performance embodies the *expressive dimension of the strategic articulation of practice*. ... It is manifest in the expressive aspect of the ‘way’ something is done on a particular occasion: the particular orchestration of the pacing, tension, evocation, emphasis, mode of participation, etc., in the way a practice (at that moment) is ‘practised,’ that is, ‘brought off.’ It gives the particular improvisation of a practice in a particular situation its particular turn of significance and efficacy for oneself and others at the time—in the moment where habitude becomes action.⁶⁸

Schieffelin’s model is structurally analogous to the one I have proposed, but in this case “practice” refers to the structuring patterns rather than the concrete instances. Here, *practices are instantiated (or expressed) in performance, and performance is the concrete enactment of practice*. To a certain extent this way of thinking is logically sound and solves the ambiguity I have pointed out. However, I would argue that the meaning of both “practice” and “performance” have to be distorted in order to fit into this model. Already in the cited paragraph we find the ambiguous assertion that *practices are practiced*. While Schieffelin’s main assertion is that *practices are performed*, he cannot help but also use the verb “practice” to refer to the specific moment of enactment. The word “practice” is once again doing double duty: It is both the concrete enactment (the *practicing*) and the thing that is enacted (the *practice*).

In my view, there are serious problems with the *practice/performance* terminology, all of which can be resolved by choosing the language of *technique/practice* instead. The first problem

⁶⁸ Edward L. Schieffelin, “Problematizing performance,” in *Ritual, Performance, Media*, ed. Felicia Hughes-Freeland (New York: Routledge, 1998), 199, italics original. I was made aware of this passage by its citation in Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 267n19.

derives from the use of “performance” to refer to those concrete events and moments in which “practices” are incarnated. Even in its broadest usage, as a lens rather than a category, performance is not a broad enough concept to stand in for all kinds of embodied enactment. Performance carries strong connotations of spectatorship. Colloquially, a performance begins when someone is watching. This meaning is applicable not only to the performing arts, where spectatorship is explicit and clearly marked, but also in more general usage. As Jon McKenzie has shown, “performance” is now a primary criterion of evaluation across the public and private sectors.⁶⁹ From “high-performance” athletics and the national debate over teacher “performance” in public education to employee and even stock market “performance” in the private sector, the term has become a synonym for visible and measurable results.⁷⁰ This sense of performance may be simpler than that employed within the discipline of performance studies, but many of the connotations carry over in what McKenzie has called the “liminal norm,” namely the unspoken assumption that even a “broad spectrum” approach will be interested in performance as escape from, opposition to, or subversion of “everyday life” and the “normal” state of affairs.⁷¹ This suggests that performance is not simply the enactment of practice but a special case requiring separate consideration.

According to McKenzie, Judith Butler’s most important contribution to performance studies is that she “theorizes both the transgressivity and the normativity of performative genres.”⁷² Indeed, ever since Butler’s writing on gender breathed new life into J. L. Austin’s notion of the performative speech act, the relationship between “performativity” and

⁶⁹ Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁷⁰ For a particularly relevant example, see Nancy Theberge, “‘It’s not about health, it’s about performance’: Sport medicine, health, and the culture of risk in Canadian sport,” in *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*, eds. Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (New York: Routledge, 2007), 176-94.

⁷¹ Jon McKenzie, “Genre Trouble: (The) Butler Did It,” in *The Ends of Performance*, eds. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 218. For a definition of the “broad spectrum” approach to performance studies, see Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.

⁷² McKenzie, “Genre Trouble,” 220-21 (*italics original*).

“performance” has been contested and overdetermined.⁷³ Butler herself distinguishes strongly between them, as we will see below—a difference McKenzie elides by referring to both as “performative genres.” Yet despite Butler’s important work on performativity as everyday, normative process—as in the performativity of gender—it is difficult to see how the term “performance” could ever lose these particular connotations.⁷⁴ As Deborah Kapchan writes: “Performance is public.”⁷⁵ Suggestions of spectatorship and conscious display are not additions to the idea of performance; they are its very core. More recently, Erika Fischer-Lichte has reiterated this point, writing that performance “requires two groups of people, one acting and the other observing, to gather at the same time and place for a given period of shared lifetime.”⁷⁶ Fischer-Lichte defines the relationship between actors and spectators as “the constitutive moment of performance.”⁷⁷ Thus, although there may be some contexts in which we can refer to a mundane action being “performed” with no sense of spectatorship or liminality, it seems misleading to characterize life in general as constituted by the performance of various practices.

This is already sufficient reason to reject the *practice/performance* model in favor of the *technique/practice* model. But there is an even more important reason to do so, one that returns us to the epistemological issue at the heart of my argument. For if we conceive of things like

⁷³ This problem has been adequately describe elsewhere and I will not dwell on it here, except to note that scholars have now begun to use “performativity” as a flashier alternative to “performance,” without retaining any of its Austinian meaning. This ambiguity is symptomatic of the confusion surrounding performance, performativity, and the performative. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describe the problem in *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2. For examples of the misuse of performativity, see Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky, *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*, 5; and Bryan S. Turner, “Bodily Performance: On Aura and Reproducibility,” *Body & Society* 11.4 (2005): 7.

⁷⁴ The performativity of gender, and its relation to embodied technique, is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Deborah Kapchan, “Performance,” in *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, ed. Burt Feintuch (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 130. Kapchan goes on to note that performance is “set apart from practice” through “self-consciousness” and through what Erving Goffman called “framing” (131). Herbert Blau tightens the circle but arrives at the same basic idea when he writes of “a crucial particle of difference” that distinguishes “between just breathing eating sleeping loving and *performing* those functions.” Herbert Blau, “Universals of Performance: Or, Amortizing Play,” in *SubStance* 37/38 (1983): 140. He concludes: “[*W*]hat is universal in performance is the consciousness of performance” (148, italics original).

⁷⁶ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 38.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

walking, swimming, and cooking as “practices,” then we have said little that is new about them. What is a practice in this sense, as the thing that gets *performed*? What are such practices made of? How are they shaped? These questions remain unanswered. If, on the other hand, we refer to walking, swimming, and cooking as *areas of technique*, then we have said a great deal: These are areas of knowledge. They are made up of discoveries about what is possible given the relative constancy of human embodiment (in relation to gravity, water, air, food). Finally, as areas of knowledge, they can be envisioned as networks of branching pathways through the relative constancies or reliabilities of the material world. Using “technique” to refer to that which links one concrete moment to another brings us towards an *epistemological* perspective that sheds significant light on what these patterns actually are. Using the word “practice” for the same purpose does no such thing. For this reason, I reject the idea that “practices” are enacted in moments of “performance” and work instead from a theoretical model in which *technique is the knowledge that structures practice*.

If this model is to function, we must give up using “practice” to refer to abstract or general categories like “walking” or “cooking” and use it only to refer to that which is bounded in time and space and linked to specific individuals or groups. This simple analytical step, not taken by any writer surveyed here, allows us to dispense once and for all with the idea of “practices” as floating, abstract things. The concept of practice demands historical, geographical, and cultural rigor. Even something as simple as walking cannot be reified as an ahistorical phenomenon. Henceforth, it will not be possible to refer to walking, dancing, or swimming as “practices” unless we specify who is enacting them, when, and where. Similarly, cooking, child-rearing, politics, farming, negotiation, banking, and recreation are not “practices” unless we refer to specific examples that can be located in time and space, in bodies and communities. Instead,

each of these will be viewed as an *area of technique* or as the *knowledge content* of specific practices. This brings us back to epistemology. We can now envision landscapes of knowledge in which some areas are better mapped than others and in which new possibilities always remain to be found. It then becomes much easier to identify that which links my practice of swimming or dancing to the practices of people living thousands of miles away or hundreds of years ago. If we are “doing the same thing,” that is because we are making use of the same technique, the same knowledge of what is possible given the similarities we find in our bodies and environments.

Practice, in this sense, is not repeatable. Every moment of practice is unique. As knowledge, on the other hand, technique is precisely not bound to a particular moment, place, or person. Technique is repeatable. Technique is not ahistorical but transhistorical. It travels across time and space, “spreading” from society to society as Mauss observed and linking diverse practices to one another, whether or not the practitioners are aware of this connection. Moreover, the same technique can be discovered independently, wherever analogous pathways are afforded by the material world. By distinguishing between technique and practice in this way, we gain important insight into all kinds of practices, from the mundane to the most highly specialized. For if we define dance or ritual as “practices,” then we have something like an ahistorical phenomenon and we are forced to debate over who gets to decide what does or does not count as an example of each. If, on the other hand, we take dance and ritual to denote areas of technique, then we can track the movement of that technique across history while at the same time retaining a highly specific and localized notion of practice. We can then compare two instances of practice, perhaps very distant from each other in space and time, at the level of technique. Whether or not these practices are both considered “ritual” or “dance” in their local contexts will be less important than the question of whether they are structured by similar technique.

Ephemera and Language

I have argued that technique is transmissible and repeatable. Yet much of recent performance theory has stressed the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the live event. This view is linked to what I have called the trope of “more than,” namely the assertion that certain practices are not reducible to technique. As noted above, this is usually a means of elevating these practices above others which are thought to be “merely” technical. In this section, I take on the question of what is *not* technical. I do not attempt to give any particular name to this non-technical remainder or to valorize certain practices as especially “resistant” to articulation in technical terms. Instead, argue that *no practices are reducible to technique*, even though *all practices are structured by technique*. It is therefore not meaningful to distinguish between practices based on the *extent to which* they are technical. Instead, it is better to ask what *kinds* of technique structure different practices and how different practices may be similar or different at the level of technique. I begin by critiquing the assertion that live performance uniquely exceeds or escapes language and repetition. I then go on to suggest that, far from being a dominating or repressive force, language itself is an area of embodied technique. There is, then, no way to “escape” it, nor any reason to imagine that such an escape would be particularly “free” in an ethical or political sense. Finally, I propose a new way to think about the relationship between language and embodied technique.

A significant amount of recent critical writing on dance, theatre, and performance has argued that embodied practices exceed language.⁷⁸ A related idea, put forward most forcefully by Peggy Phelan, is that performance is uniquely ephemeral or transient and that it therefore escapes capture by representation and reproduction. Phelan writes:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.⁷⁹

It is not difficult to find similar claims across writing on theatre and performance. In an anthology co-edited with Phelan, Lynda Hart introduces their project as “in part motivated by the desire to displace the dominance of text-based work in theater studies, to value the ephemerality of performance.”⁸⁰ In a book from that same year, Alan Read describes theatre as “the transient art *par excellence* ... a unique, unrepeatable moment,” and suggests that video recording “has done little or nothing to alter the essential ephemerality of theatre.”⁸¹ Peter Brook, as early as 1968, wrote: “The one thing that distinguishes the theatre from all the other arts is that it has no

⁷⁸ For example, Carrie Noland writes that gestures reveal an “*extra-semantic* dimension of signs.” Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness, eds., *Migrations of Gesture*, xiv, italics original.

⁷⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

⁸⁰ Linda Hart, “Introduction,” in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, eds. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 4.

⁸¹ Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11.

permanence.”⁸² More recently, Jill Dolan has identified theatre as “ineffable,” its “ontological status” hovering “between appearance and disappearance.”⁸³

Erika Fischer-Lichte carries the trope of ephemerality forward in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, writing: “Performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artifacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present.”⁸⁴ This passage suggests a stark dichotomization between stable artifact and elusive performance that hides exactly the aspect of embodiment I want to explore, namely transmissible knowledge and repetition. For Fischer-Lichte, objects are transferable while bodies are “elusive.”⁸⁵ But what about the transfer of knowledge from one body to another? What about the repetition of vocal and physical patterns from one performance to another? In her discussion of corporeality and presence, Fischer-Lichte acknowledges the central importance of “processes of embodiment” or “embodiment processes,” which she sometimes refers to as “specific techniques and practices of embodiment.”⁸⁶ However, when analyzing the transformative power of performance, she prefers to take an audience-centered view in which the feedback loop between actor and spectator is the source of transformative energy. From the perspective of the spectator, it could appear that “the specific materiality of the performance itself simply vanishes” after the show.⁸⁷ But in most if not all cases, this is an illusion. From the perspective of the performer, the act of performance always involves some degree of repetition, stability, transferability at the level of technique.

In contrast to Fischer-Lichte, Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* critiques Phelan’s emphasis on ephemerality: “Debates about the ‘ephemerality’ of performance are,” she

⁸² Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1968), 129.

⁸³ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 8.

⁸⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 75.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

writes, “profoundly political. Whose memories, traditions, and claims to history disappear if performance practices lack the staying power to transmit vital knowledge?”⁸⁸ This question provides an important context for my argument. Like Taylor, I reject attempts to locate the value of such practices in their ephemerality or their alleged resistance to language and discourse. My argument for technique is intended to name exactly that which is relatively stable and transmissible in embodied practices. If the ontology of performance is based on disappearance, then what do we make of the repeatability that defines so much dance, theatre, and ritual? An actor may perform the same role hundreds of times. A dancer may practice the same movement thousands of times in the course of a lifetime. Locating the value of nonverbal practices in their “disappearance” and in that which is nonrepeatable risks vastly understating the knowledge content of these practices. Much of the value in performing arts is found precisely in their repeatability. Embodied practices, including those of performing arts, do not exemplify the ephemeral. On the contrary, their predictability is a major factor in their meaning.⁸⁹

From this perspective, it is strange to read sociologist Bryan S. Turner’s characterization of dance as separated from choreography by a “gap” between the choreographic score and the live performance event. Turner describes dance as “resistant to mechanical reproducibility” and emphasizes that, as performance, “it cannot be easily and exactly recreated over and over again.” He concludes: “There is a gap between the text or score and the object or performance, and it is

⁸⁸ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 5. For an explicit reference to Phelan, see 142.

⁸⁹ Given her emphasis on “embodied ways of knowing,” it is worth noting that the word technique does not figure much in Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Taylor proposes several terms by which to develop an epistemological argument, including repertoire, scenario, tradition, memory, style, and even “meme.” Each of these, in a different way, replaces or complicates “performance” by working against the connotation of a special, transient event and instead shifting emphasis to the flows of “embodied knowledge” that undergird all kinds of embodied practices across time and space. However, none of Taylor’s terms carries the epistemological weight of technique. With their theatrical references and connotations of explicit framing, “repertoire” and “scenario” suffer from some of the same problems as “performance.” And although the links Taylor draws to memory and tradition are vitally important to the study of technique, using those words to refer to the knowledge content of performance prevents us from following that knowledge beyond the locality of a particular individual or group.

in that gap that the work of art takes place, constituting a performance that can never be repeated.” Furthermore, “it is precisely the gap between the choreographic text and the object or performance that constitutes the authenticity of the dance.”⁹⁰ Like Phelan and Fischer-Lichte, Turner strongly emphasizes the unrepeatability of performance, exaggerating the uniqueness of the individual performance event and underestimating the extent to which repetition is a vital part of dance. Turner also envisions repeatability in dance as entirely dependent on its relationship with a written text or score. In fact, however, most of the repeatability of dance comes through the transmission of embodied technique and not through written (or even multimedia) texts. Choreography itself, as an area of embodied technique, extends far beyond the various dance notation systems that have been developed. Moreover, the supposed “gap” between a choreographic score and a live performance is filled with an extraordinary quantity of embodied technique, not just that gained through explicit dance training but also the gestural and postural technique learned through socialization, which may then be linked to cultural, national, and other identities. When all of this is taken into account in what Randy Martin calls the composite body, the “gap” Turner points to seems far less significant.

It is true that no analysis of technique will ever exhaust the infinite detail that exists in even the smallest chunk of embodied action. But neither can one point to a particular aspect of any given practice and say that it exists “beyond” or in “excess” of technique. Even if it were possible to isolate something like the “remainder” of a practice—the practice minus its technique—that remainder would not necessarily have any special value. To single out the nonrepeatable, nontechnical “remainder” of embodied practice as the essence of its “authenticity,” as Turner does, recalls nothing so much as the anti-technical arguments of Heidegger, Bergson, and Mumford mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Such an attempt

⁹⁰ Bryan S. Turner, “Bodily Performance: On Aura and Reproducibility,” *Body & Society* 11.4 (2005): 6; 7.

conflates technique with discourse, discourse with power, and power with oppression. There is nothing particularly “free” about an absence of technique, even if such an absence could be proven. Such reductive views of technique damage our ability to appreciate embodied practices, including those of the performing arts, in which technique plays a vital role.

One of the reasons for the temptation to focus on ephemerality, or on the “gap” between score and performance, may be a desire to point to the detail and subtlety of certain practices. This concern is evident in Edward R. Schieffelin’s account of performance, cited above, when he describes “the expressive aspect of the ‘way’ something is done on a particular occasion: the particular orchestration of the pacing, tension, evocation, emphasis, mode of participation, etc.” But there is no reason to exclude technique from this level of detail or subtlety. Indeed, advanced performance technique is precisely concerned with pacing, tension, evocation, emphasis, and other aspects of the “way” something is done. Dance is not just choreography, and acting is not just lines and blocking, precisely because of the complex layers of technique that structure the actions of dancers and actors. Even in everyday life, the rhythm, posture, and alignment of a particular “way” of walking—as well as where one looks, what one thinks about, how one navigates turns and stops, etc.—are not distinct from the technique of walking but constitute precisely that technique. Technique is at work not only in the most basic things—“put one foot in front of the other”—but also in the subtlest details of action and interaction.

I reject the idea that performance is uniquely ephemeral in its embodiment—as if the rest of life were not equally embodied and ephemeral. But I also reject attempts to explicate the meaning of performance by analogy with language. Judith Hamera’s description of ballet technique as “a discursive matrix, a vocabulary and a grammar” no doubt comes from a desire to point to the complexity, nuance, and detail at work in dancing bodies. I also wish to do this, but

in my view much is lost when we use linguistic metaphors to describe the meaningfulness of embodied practices. Far from being an overarching system that determines embodied technique, language itself is an area of embodied technique. We should avoid reducing technique to language—as has sometimes happened in the wake of Foucault’s work on discursive production—just as we avoid romanticizing embodiment as in “excess” of language.⁹¹ Discourse is not a primary milieu from which embodiment then escapes. Rather, embodiment is the basis from which language arises as an area of technique. This assertion is very much in line with the developments in cognitive science mentioned above, wherein propositional logic and reasoning are seen as outgrowths of embodied processes of perception and movement.⁹² Embodiment, then, is not an excess, remainder, or escape from signification. It is the source and ground of all signification, which could not exist without it. If this is true, then we should not look to language to explain the workings of technique. Rather, we should begin from embodied technique, in all its complexity, and then ask how language emerges from our bodies and how it differs from other kinds of technique, such as walking and dancing.

Spoken language is undeniably a product of bodies. Whatever sounds go into a given language must be material possibilities, physical pathways through human embodiment. The idea that language itself determines the development of those bodies exaggerates the independence of language from bodies. Language is just part of the embodied technique that shapes us. As Judith Hamera writes, “technique, like language, reaches out to meet us as we are birthed into dance”—or into life itself.⁹³ Even Judith Butler acknowledges that signification is the result of an

⁹¹ For an example of this, see Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 2. “At the same time, gestures clearly belong to the domain of movement; they produce kinesthetic sensations that remain in excess of what the gestures themselves might signify or accomplish within that culture. Just what is this excess, and what kind of work does it do?”

⁹² See works by Mark Johnson and Francisco J. Varela, cited above. For more on the application of cognitive and neurosciences to dance and embodied practice, see Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic Press, 2009).

⁹³ Judith Hamera, “An Answerability of Memory: ‘Saving’ Khmer Classical Dance,” *TDR* 46.4 (2002): 82.

embodied process, although she fails to give a satisfying account of how the symbolic relations between signs relate to the materiality that undergirds them in the creation of meaning.⁹⁴ Signification is an emergent property of embodied technique. It is one of the kinds of things humans are able to do by virtue of our embodiment. Language is learned and transmitted as technique, just like the styles of walking or cooking described by Mauss. Language, however, possesses a special characteristic that distinguishes it from other areas of technique and allows it to function symbolically in ways that other technique cannot. This important characteristic is the relative physical ease with which language is produced. Indeed, it is only because the production of language usually requires so little effort that we can so often ignore its bodily and material production in order to focus instead on what we think of as its discursive content.

In a sense, “language” can refer to any area of embodied technique in which the ratio between range of articulation and required effort is very high. This is most obviously the case with the vocal apparatus, where the orchestration of lips, tongue, and vocal chords allows for a huge variation in detail with a relatively tiny expenditure of effort. The example of sign language shows that the hands and arms can also function in this way. Both speech and gesture take place in peninsulas of the body: relatively small regions in which minimal effort can produce an astonishingly wide range of articulation. It is the high range of “inexpensive” articulation in these peninsulas that produces what are called “signs”: embodied actions that acquire virtually all their meaning through their semiotic relations with other signs rather than through the bodily

⁹⁴ “On the one hand, the process of signification is always material; signs work *by appearing* (visibly, aurally), and appearing through material means, although what appears only signifies by virtue of those non-phenomenal relations, i.e. relations of differentiation, that tacitly structure and propel signification itself. And yet what allows for a signifier to signify will never be its materiality alone; that materiality will be at once an instrumentality and deployment of a set of larger linguistic relations.” Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 68, italics original.

effort required to produce them.⁹⁵ In principle, however, there is no limit to what can be “lingual” or language-like (literally, tongue-like) in the sense that its symbolic meaning takes precedence over the meaning attached to its embodied production.⁹⁶

Dance, then, appears linguistic precisely to the extent that we can ignore the physical effort it entails. Only by ignoring this effort—not just the effort involved in a single performance but the long-term effort of training and rehearsal—can we “read” dance as a text composed of signs. In doing so, we ignore the entire substrate of materiality and embodiment out of which signification arises. This is true not only for dance but for any embodied practice. Daily communication is predicated on the nearly-effortless quality of words and is interrupted when words require substantial effort to produce. We should therefore be careful not to refer to practices that involve meaningful physical effort as “language,” no matter how semiotically clear they may be.⁹⁷ When we “read” such practices in terms of signification alone, we ignore much of their perceived and experienced meaning, which is found not in the relationship between signs but in the quantity and quality of embodied effort that goes into their enactment. Signification, in this sense, is a surface phenomenon, a top-most layer of embodied technique.

Training and Research in Embodied Technique

⁹⁵ I have borrowed the notion of speech as energetically “inexpensive” in comparison with the rest of embodied technique from Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112.

⁹⁶ “lingual,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press). <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/108688>> (accessed 5/25/13).

⁹⁷ This allows us to distinguish, for example, between the gestural language of American Sign Language and the semiotics of a dance performance. A ballet gesture or Indian *mudra* may have very clear symbolic meaning, but its embodied effort is also meaningful and it therefore cannot be reduced to the status of language.

In this final section of Chapter 1, my goal is to illustrate some of the benefits of the theoretical framework developed thus far. Having explained why contemporary theories of performance and embodiment are insufficient for analyzing embodied practice, I now wish to show what might be gained by adopting the epistemological concept of technique as I have defined it. First and foremost, if technique is knowledge, then we can begin to think about its workings in terms of a dual process of training and research. By “training,” I mean the movement of technique from one person or community to another. This may include both explicit and implicit pedagogies, active and passive learning, mandatory and optional engagements. It may involve visual and aural mimesis as well as verbal comments, instructions, and physical adjustments. Much of what is trained in any given moment remains unnamed, and we never know all the uses to which the technique we learn may be put. On the other hand, by “research,” I mean the development of new technique through a process of investigation and exploration. The criterion of “newness” here is a relative one, depending on the context of a specific individual or community. What is new to me may not be new to you. Hence, there are different senses of “research” and different levels of rigor with which the term may be applied. I will consider a few of these here, and will return to this point throughout the dissertation.⁹⁸ In considering the relationship of training and research in embodied technique, I also hope to shed new light on certain old and vexed questions about consciousness, agency, and intention.

In *The Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu describes *habitus* as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history.”⁹⁹ Entirely distinct from personal

⁹⁸ The specifically academic sense of “research” is discussed in the Conclusion.

⁹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 56. For a related philosophical inquiry on memory and habit, see Edward S. Casey, “Body Memory,” in *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Paul Connerton, “Bodily Practices,” in *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For “habitus” in Mauss, see Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation*, 80.

agency, mastery of *habitus* “is only possible for someone who is completely mastered by it, who possesses it, but so much so that he is totally possessed by it, in other words depossessed.”¹⁰⁰

Such mastery is then only illusory, since no real agency is involved. But Bourdieu is able to divorce *habitus* from agency only because he sharply distinguishes between two different kinds of training: on the one hand, “a practical mimesis (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification,” and on the other, “an imitation that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model.”¹⁰¹

Bourdieu asserts that these two processes—unconscious mimesis and conscious imitation—have “nothing in common” with each other. Indeed, the former case is “opposed to both memory and knowledge” because it takes place “below the level of consciousness.” In conclusion, Bourdieu asserts: “What is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.” With this statement, Bourdieu draws a clear line between knowledge, which is consciously possessed, and the *habitus*, which is unconsciously absorbed and just as unconsciously reactivated.

Judith Butler makes a strikingly similar point in a well-known passage in which she distinguishes between performance and performativity:

[P]erformance as bounded “act” is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s “will” or “choice”; further, what is “performed” works to conceal, if

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake.¹⁰²

Here again, a sharp line is drawn between the conscious “act” of performance and the normative “reiteration” that takes place independent of one’s “will” or “choice.” Butler’s notion of the conscious performer echoes Bourdieu’s image of one who “has” or even “brandishes” knowledge, while *performativity* implies no such possession or willful action—it is merely the reenactment of that which has been unconsciously absorbed. But the distinction between what one “has” and what one “is” fails to account for the fact that *knowledge* functions in both of these ways at different moments in the process of its acquisition. In the initial moment of learning, one “has” one’s knowledge. Later on, one comes to “be” it. This process is fundamental to both cultural and artistic training. Furthermore, there is no reason to suppose that the latter moment is necessarily less “free” than the former. The performer in theatre or dance, far from being a model for fully conscious action, is most often one who has trained intensively precisely in order to render their technique unconscious. For such performers, the moment in which one ceases to *have* technique and comes to *be* it is a moment of success.

Neither Bourdieu nor Butler envisions this possibility—that one might actively strive to render one’s training unconscious—because they are both working from “everyday” examples of training in class and gender. For them, class and gender are the unconsciously absorbed technique of which, in Mauss’s words, they “cannot get rid.” Both Bourdieu’s *habitus* and Butler’s *performativity* emphasize unconscious knowing at the expense of conscious knowing. This is a valid reaction against a long history of European philosophy that privileged the knowing subject as master and possessor of “his” knowledge. But embodied technique, whether

¹⁰² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 234.

of class or gender, dance or ritual, is both conscious and unconscious at different moments. Through repetition, technique sediments into unconsciousness until it is enacted automatically, without being held in what Nigel Thrift calls the “thin band of consciousness,” that “very poor thing indeed, a window of time—fifteen seconds at most—in which just a few things (normally no more than six or seven) can be addressed, which is opaque to introspection and which is easily distracted.”¹⁰³ One of the advantages of an *epistemological* theory of embodiment is that it acknowledges both conscious and unconscious moments of knowing, without necessarily associating either one with freedom or repression. This is a fascinating way to resolve the apparent opposition of structuralist and rationalist accounts of society—or, as Carrie Noland writes, to “find a way beyond the impasse of constructivist theory,” which she understands as “the inability, after Foucault, to produce a convincing account of agency.”¹⁰⁴ By conceiving of knowledge as a process of sedimentation, we can explain how hidden but deeply influential structures may develop out of a process that continually involves and even depends upon conscious agency. Furthermore, once absorbed into unconsciousness, such knowledge can be returned back into consciousness through intentional recollection and rediscovery.

Thrift’s image of consciousness as a “thin band” atop myriad sedimented layers of unconsciousness, affect, and embodiment conveys the smallness of what we can hold in our conscious attention as compared with the vast store of unconscious knowledge that also shapes our actions. Importantly, technique remains knowledge at every level of this sedimentation process. Even when I no longer have to think consciously about what I am doing, I still know how to do it. Knowledge does not cease to be knowledge when it recedes from conscious awareness. It simply becomes unconscious knowledge, absorbed into the many layers of

¹⁰³ Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 236; 6.

¹⁰⁴ Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 7.

“embodied assumptions” that inform our actions alongside conscious thought. Nor should we associate such unconscious knowledge with a lack of agency or intention. As Ruth Leys observes: “[S]killed pianists are not consciously aware of the innumerable movements their fingers must make during a performance, but this does not make those movements unintentional or negate the fact that the pianists intended to play the music.”¹⁰⁵ If agency were the same as conscious awareness, then it would be as narrow as the “thin band” of what we can hold in our attention at any given moment. Instead, we should understand agency as comprising much more than what is in our conscious minds, including those rich depths of embodied technique that we have absorbed to the point of what John Matthews calls “automaticity”—a hallmark of advanced training in any field.¹⁰⁶

Skilled performers and athletes offer such an important counter-example in the context of social theories like those of Bourdieu and Butler. When we look at a skilled performer or athlete, we see someone who has spent years training in an area of technique precisely so that they no longer have to think about it. In a sense, this person is just like a child who has learned to enact class or gender identity without thinking. Placing the two examples side by side gives us a useful, complex model for how agency works. Clearly, in the case of the trained professional, the layering of technique through sedimentation cannot simply be identified with a lack of agency. Instead, we see how the sedimentation of knowledge is at work in all kinds of training, from the socialization of children to the disciplining of adults, and from the specialized training of artists and athletes to the re-training and cross-training they may later undergo. Too often, these

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (2011): 455.

¹⁰⁶ Matthews gives an example from skiing: “[A]s the novice becomes more proficient they are likely to stop thinking about individual parts of the turn. Instead the components of the turn will be grouped together into larger parts so that the turn in entirety becomes much more ‘efficient.’ Moreover ... if a skilled skier ‘think(s) too much’ as they practise performing a turn, they may find a consequent ‘deterioration in performance.’” *Training for Performance*, 187.

different approaches to discipline and training are separated from one another. Connections are not easily drawn between the training children receive in their class or gender identities and explicit training regimes. Nor has the desire to undergo disciplined training outside a professional context been adequately addressed by recent social theories in the vein of Bourdieu and Butler. The structure of this dissertation is designed to bring together the different understandings of agency and discipline that inform scholarly discussions of physical culture and performing arts on the one hand, and everyday life on the other.

One recent and brilliant exception to these analytical divides is Saba Mahmood's consideration of agency and embodiment in *The Politics of Piety*, which examines the daily religious practices of women in the Muslim piety movement in Egypt.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps because Mahmood focuses neither on Euro-American culture nor on the specialized practices of athletes and artists, she is able to draw a connection that is rarely evoked in contemporary theory, namely that between disciplined training and the embodied technique of everyday life. The Islamic context of Mahmood's work, and the turn to piety expressed by these Muslim women, allow Mahmood to engage with notions of submission, training, and embodied practice in ways that few other theorists have. Citing exactly the passages from Bourdieu and Butler that I have just quoted above, Mahmood critiques the assumption that agency can be simply opposed to *habitus* or to *performativity* and calls for a more nuanced examination of how the embodied technique of religious ethics is learned both in childhood and in adulthood.¹⁰⁸ Against prevailing critical assumptions that agency is "the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles," Mahmood seeks to understand how

¹⁰⁷ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 138 (Bourdieu); 162 (Butler).

agency can also work through precisely those channels of embodied technique that are most traditional and disciplinary—in both senses of that word.¹⁰⁹

Like Leys, Mahmood invokes the example of a skilled pianist who “submits herself to the often painful regime of disciplinary practice, as well as to the hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, in order to acquire the ability—the requisite agency—to play the instrument with mastery.” Here, disciplined training in technique is not opposed to agency but entwined with it, so that the performer’s

agency is predicated upon her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as ‘docility.’ Although we have come to associate docility with the abandonment of agency, the term literally implies the malleability required of someone in order for her to be instructed in a particular skill or knowledge—a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement.¹¹⁰

The significance of this point for my argument lies in how Mahmood applies the notions of discipline and training to the details of everyday religious life. Writing that the women she worked with practice “the cultivation of those bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits, and desires that serve to ground Islamic principles within the practices of everyday living,” Mahmood describes the mosque as a site for “training in the requisite strategies and skills to enable such a manner of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 8. Mahmood uses the word “disciplinary” in Foucault’s sense, having to do with the actions of power upon the body—as in the citation directly below. I want to add a second, epistemological meaning: disciplinary as in a defined territory of investigation and research, in contrast to the inter-disciplinary.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

conduct.”¹¹¹ We are talking here about a disciplined training that applies to children as well as adults and to a whole community rather than a set of specially skilled or talented individuals.

Mahmood is particularly interested in ethical training—that is, in the learning of embodied technique as a means towards an ethical life. Reaching back through Foucault, Bourdieu, and Pierre Hadot to Aristotle, Mahmood’s discussion of Islamic ethics is grounded throughout in the language of *habitus* and technique.¹¹² Her emphasis is on the processes of learning and on how technique, in addition to functioning as outward display, cultural performance, or social tradition, actively shapes the subject from within.¹¹³ Thus, for example, the desire to pray is not merely the cause of prayer but also its result. By praying, we cultivate both the ability to pray and the pious self who prays. Ultimately, this means that agency itself is structured by and through embodied technique. Mahmood stops short of proposing an alternative theory of agency, nor would I attempt to do so here.¹¹⁴ I would suggest, however, that instead of conceiving embodied technique as an empty shell to be filled by agency, we think of it as a knowledge of the precise forms that may be taken by agency in practice. Agency, in this sense, is all around us, working in myriad ways not only through our conscious thoughts and choices but in all the countless layers of embodied technique that structure us as subjects and as bodies. Agency is “capillary” (to use Foucault’s word).¹¹⁵ Thus, we might regard both Mauss’s swimming technique and his desire to change it as manifestations of agency: A conflict between two approaches to swimming at the level of society is realized in practice as a conflict between two aspects of Mauss’s embodied self, his deeply sedimented knowledge of how to swim and his “new” knowledge that there is a better way. If we accept that even the most embedded and

¹¹¹ Ibid., 45.

¹¹² Ibid., 122; 136-9.

¹¹³ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁴ See *ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

apparently unshakeable technique has only become so through repetition and training, then we must also recognize that it can be changed, through training in new technique.

But where does new technique come from? Mauss tells us that a new technique of swimming has been found, but he does not explain who found it or how. I conclude this chapter with an argument that logically extends the one developed so far: *If technique is knowledge, then there is such a thing as research in technique*. I define such research as that which discovers or produces new knowledge in the form of new technique.¹¹⁶ The important criterion of newness in this context has a range of meanings depending on the context in which it is applied. To speak of “new” knowledge implies a relationship with previously established knowledge. In a relatively weak sense, knowledge can be new relative to an individual person. Thus, I engage in research when I train in an area of embodied technique that I did not know before. A stronger sense of research is invoked when the criterion of newness pertains to a community of knowledge, as in the intercultural training experiences that many artists undertake. Finally, the strongest sense of research would require the discovery of knowledge that has never been known by anyone before. Although such a strong criterion of newness might be hard to prove, it is actually not difficult to think of examples of technique, like that of ballet or *kathakali*, that almost certainly did not exist prior to its discovery in the contexts in which we have encountered it. Given the size of the field of embodied technique, it is highly unlikely that such specialized investigations would have

¹¹⁶ If “knowledge” is a contentiously politicized term, “research” is even worse. Linda Tuhiwai Smith opens *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by noting that, in many indigenous circles, research is a “one of the dirtiest words” (1). Yet despite its heavy history, and the fact that colonial deployments of knowledge are still ongoing, Smith concludes that research is both important and valuable: “As indigenous peoples we have our own research needs and priorities” (199). Her conclusion, I would argue, is more than power struggle in which the marginalized hope to take power by seizing the weapons of oppression. It is also grounded in the assessment of research as something more than violence and of knowledge as something more than power. Precisely because knowledge comes from a “compromise between humanity and nature” (Mauss) or between society and materiality, it can never be reduced to simply a matter of power.

taken place more than once, even if some elements of this technique could indeed have been discovered independently elsewhere.

Several essays in *The Practice Turn* offer insights that may help us theorize the kind of research that produces new technique. In one essay, Charles Spinosa offers a concrete example of such research—in the weaker sense—when he describes the process of “elaboration” by which what he calls “practices” tend to increase in detail and complexity through repetition. Spinosa writes: “[W]henever we learn a new practice, even a very simple one such as jogging, we find ourselves constantly sensitive to new things to which we had paid scant attention before.”¹¹⁷ These new sensitivities, he suggests, allow us to discover new possibilities within previously existing technique. For example, while jogging, we might “experiment to find out if we notice the pain in our legs so much if we jog while trying to solve an intellectual problem.” Or, equally, we might notice that we had begun regularly “making the second half of our run with the sea breeze in our faces so that the perspiration would not get in our eyes.” Importantly, neither of these developments is possible if we do not first enter into and embody the basic technique of jogging. As long as we are resting, not in pain, and not perspiring, we do not encounter the situations in which those elaborations of technique may be discovered. It is only while jogging, at the edge of existing technique, that we can discover new technique. Of course, it is probably unlikely that Spinosa will discover something new, in the stronger sense, while jogging. But if we looked at world-class sprinters and marathon runners, we could legitimately ask whether research is taking place in the strongest and most rigorous sense of that word.

In another essay, Karin Knorr Cetina describes research in terms that precisely evoke the kind of exploration and investigation I intend. Cetina describes the “epistemic objects” with

¹¹⁷ Charles Spinosa, “Derridian dispersion and Heideggerian articulation: General tendencies in the practices that govern intelligibility,” in Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn*, 200.

which scientific researchers engage as essentially incomplete, and observes that this incompleteness is actually what challenges scientists and provokes them to research.¹¹⁸ She enumerates three modes of relation that people may have with objects: 1) “absorbed coping,” when an object “disappears” because it behaves exactly as we expect it to; 2) “deliberate coping,” when an object is consciously manipulated; and 3) “theoretical reflection,” which is summoned only when an object behaves in unexpected ways, demanding our full attention.¹¹⁹ These different modes of relation are exactly parallel to those outlined in the previous section, where I described how technique is absorbed, sedimented, and made automatic. However, in the context of research, the process moves in the opposite direction. At first the technique appears simple and transparent, a way of getting something done rather than an area of exploration in its own right. When problems arise, coping becomes deliberate and technique becomes an object of consciousness. Finally, if deliberate coping is insufficient, we may have recourse to theoretical reflection. Thus, research is the mirror image of training. In it, knowledge moves from automaticity to consciousness, from what we simply “are” to what we self-consciously “have.”

Cetina describes epistemic objects as “characteristically open, question-generating and complex. They are processes and projections rather than definitive things. Observation and inquiry reveals them by increasing rather than reducing their complexity.”¹²⁰ Like the scientist, the dancer or jogger finds that technique seems to expand and open up in proportion to the amount of attention one pays to it. What at first appears as a single, unitary technique is revealed to be an *area* of technique in which potentially limitless detail can be found. Cetina writes:

¹¹⁸ Karin Knorr Cetina, “Objectual practice,” in *The Practice Turn*, 175-88.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180. Cetina derives these three modes of relation from Heidegger’s analysis of Being.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

The everyday viewpoint, it would seem, looks at objects from the outside as one would look at tools or goods that are ready to hand or to be traded further. These objects have the character of closed boxes. In contrast, objects of knowledge appear to have the capacity to unfold indefinitely. They are more like open drawers filled with folders extending indefinitely into the depth of a dark closet.¹²¹

The image of indefinite extension matches my extended metaphor of a branch or line of technique. The “closed object” is the mastered technique, the *habitus*, accessed and enacted unquestioningly. To open it up may be a conscious choice or the result of some problem or unexpected result. The result of this opening is what Cetina calls an epistemic object, in which “the *lack in completeness of being* is crucial.”¹²² Such epistemic openness will be familiar to anyone who has trained in an area of specialized embodied technique such as a sport or performance genre—or, for that matter, to anyone who has ever engaged in learning of any kind. It can be a thrilling experience, for as Cetina writes, “it is the unfolding ontology of these objects which accommodates so well the structure of wanting, and binds experts to knowledge things in creative and constructive practice.” I propose that we recognize how technique, which is so often imagined as a “closed box” of mechanistic competence, can be transformed into an open, epistemic object through a process of investigation that deserves to be called research.

A substantial part of the potential for joy and excitement that Cetina mentions comes from the fact that the researcher engages with something that is not entirely socially determined. In research, one discovers or unfolds what Cetina calls the “internal articulation” of epistemic objects, which is “not just their differe(a)n^ce to other objects, as in a Saussurean linguistic

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 182, italics original.

universe.”¹²³ There can be no meaningful research without what Laurent Thévenot calls the “realism” of practice, its profound engagement with the materiality of the world as distinct from any negotiation with society and symbolic meaning.¹²⁴ Several other authors in *The Practice Turn* echo this point, each in their own terms.¹²⁵ Of these, Dreyfus goes farthest in suggesting that some practices can “intelligibly be said to get at the functional components of the universe as they are in themselves.” Whether or not we wish to accept this “robust realism,” it is the encounter with something not merely social that makes research compelling both for researchers and for those who benefit from their discoveries. Thévenot describes the small adjustments people make in their practices as “tinkering” or “tuning”—terms that evoke the care with which such adjustments are made, the attention to material detail of the artisan researcher.¹²⁶ Carrie Noland’s phrase for this is “experiential groping,” which connotes less care but certainly highlights the not-knowing that is essential to research.¹²⁷ Whether or not the discovery of new technique is accomplished relative to the prior knowledge of all humanity or just that of an individual, it is a crucial aspect of all kinds of embodied practice.

Realism in this context is not the same as objectivity. It does not imply any belief about truth in propositional terms. It is not based on logic or reasoning but on the relative constancy or reliability of the material world. Such realism, therefore, does not require us to imagine anything like an “ideal” human body to practice our newly discovered technique. For this reason I have

¹²³ Ibid., 183-4.

¹²⁴ Thévenot refers to the “the relation between human agency and material environment” as the “realism” of any given practice, critiquing the “antirealism” that may result from analyzing “the relation between the agent and his environment in terms of symbolic work, meaning, understanding, interpretation, etc.” Thévenot, “Pragmatic Regimes Governing the Engagement With the World,” in *The Practice Turn*, 64; 58; 65. I return to this point in Chapter 4, where I use it to ground my discussion of sexual difference as material but complex.

¹²⁵ See especially the essays by David Bloor, 105; Andrew Pickering, 166; and Hubert Dreyfus, 157.

¹²⁶ Thévenot, “Pragmatic Regimes,” 65. Thévenot borrows “tinkering” from Karin Knorr Cetina and “tuning” from Andrew Pickering.

¹²⁷ This is Noland’s translation of André Leroi-Gourhan’s “*l’expérience par tâtonnement*” (Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 102). I agree with much of what Noland writes about the relationship between agency and embodiment—but not her desire to replace Mauss’s term “technique” with “gesture,” which only takes us back towards writing and signs and away from the epistemology of embodiment.

avoided references to “the human body” as if it were a stable entity. Human embodiment, when viewed from the perspective of technique, is no more or less constant than the capacity of technique to work across difference. If swimming, dancing, and walking are all well-known areas of technique, this is because the aspects of human embodiment they rely upon are well distributed. We must not on that account leap to the idea of a universal or normal body. These are simply areas of technique, developed in relation to material constancies but always subject to change, transformation, and further research. Crucially, then, the object of research in embodied technique is not “the body” or even “embodiment” as an abstraction, but technique itself. It assumes no particular body but must always work through particular bodies in order to discover possibilities that may then travel far beyond them. New technique, I have argued, cannot be identified with new experiences, new aesthetics, or new ideas. It is neither more nor less than concrete knowledge about the possibilities that are available given the relative reliability of the material world, including our own human embodiment. How does embodied technique, in this sense, impact society and culture writ large? How does it cross between public and private, the specialized and the everyday, the ethical and the political? In the following chapters, I offer a series of examples drawn from the domains of physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life. Each example has been chosen to answer these questions from a different angle by showing how embodied technique is developed through research; how it travels, through training, across geography, history, and culture; and how it changes the world as it moves.

CHAPTER TWO:
YOGA, HEALTH, AND PHYSICAL CULTURE

This chapter introduces an epistemological perspective to the study of physical culture, taking as a central case study the global phenomenon of what Elizabeth De Michelis has named “modern postural yoga.”¹ No recent example better illustrates what Mauss calls “the phenomenon of borrowing and the spread of techniques” than the meteoric rise of postural yoga during the twentieth century.² I examine postural yoga from a number of angles, using the theoretical tools developed in the previous chapter to illustrate the value of an epistemological approach. I also attempt to situate yoga in a broader context, as a field of knowledge that links diverse practices across geography, history, nation, and culture. Like judo and aikido, or the somatic bodywork of F. M. Alexander and Mabel Todd—also referenced below—postural yoga is an invention of modern times. Yet few contemporary areas of embodied technique can lay claim to the extraordinary commercial success that attends yoga. Today, postural yoga is increasingly found in studios, gyms, and classrooms throughout the world. As Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne point out, “Yoga today is a thoroughly globalized phenomenon.”³ In placing yoga within this larger context, I argue for embodied research as an alternative model through which to understand developments in physical culture. This is contrasted with the dominant ideology of healthism and culminates in a reconsideration of physical education as a formalized entry point to training in physical culture.

¹ Elizabeth De Michelis, *History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2005). De Michelis capitalizes the phrase “Modern Postural Yoga.” Following Mark Singleton, I leave it uncapitalized to emphasize the diversity and ongoing transformation of the field.

² Marcel Mauss, *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation* (New York: Durkheim Press, 2006), 93. Mauss was inspired by yoga in theorizing *les techniques du corps*, although his understanding of it was far narrower than that of the more recent scholarship considered here. See Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 35-36.

³ Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, eds., *Yoga in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.

For the most part, I leave the question of yoga's spiritual dimension aside in order to focus on postural yoga as physical culture. I believe it is possible to study yoga as embodied technique, provided that one's definition of technique is sufficiently wide and deep. The relationship between embodied technique and spirituality is a fascinating question, but to say much about it here would take me beyond the scope of this dissertation. Briefly, I reject the idea that any particular technique is inherently spiritual. I also reject the idea that spirituality is entirely independent of technique. In my understanding, spirituality has to do with the multifaceted *rightness* of technique in a given moment. Sometimes the application of certain technique in a particular instance seems to be right on all levels at once: the personal, the political, the communal, the symbolic, the embodied, and more. The right movement or the right words, in a such moments, cut through boundaries of body, person, society, environment, and world. Or we could say that all these layers come into alignment for a split second around the deep rightness of a particular action in a particular moment. The profundity of this alignment between technique and context can for me be called spiritual. However, I will not attempt to argue this point here. As I explore the embodied technique of yoga, I assume that it can be spiritual but not that it is inherently so. I also bear in mind that gymnastics, reading, and washing dishes—to give an especially mundane example—can be spiritual activities.

The first section of this chapter discusses yoga in relation to the dominant discourses and ideologies of capitalism and healthism. I situate the growth and spread of postural yoga in this context and argue for an alternative approach that I call epistemological. Against the notion of yoga as health product, I argue for a conception of yoga as a continually evolving and never completely knowable “epistemic object,” in the sense developed at the end of the previous chapter. In the second section, I trace the development of modern yoga from Tirumalai

Krishnamacharya through his best-known students—especially B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois—into the present day. In this context, I offer a brief account of my experiences at two yoga studios in New York City, using the differences between them to illustrate the diversity and ongoing transformation of yoga in the United States. Building on this discussion, the third section of the chapter situates yoga in the broader context of physical culture, by which I mean not only sports and martial arts but also somatic bodywork and dance. I attempt a provisional mapping of this field through the juxtaposition of athletic and somatic tendencies in embodied technique, and I argue that yoga technique offers a particular balance between these two emphases that may account for some of its current popularity, as well as for the shift in demographics that has attended its globalization. In the final section of the chapter, I apply an epistemological perspective on physical culture to physical education, which I understand as a mandatory curriculum of embodied technique offered through schools.

Throughout the chapter, several examples are provided of research in embodied technique. Most paradigmatic of these is the work of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, which has been enormously influential in the development of modern postural yoga. Additional research can be seen in the careers of Krishnamacharya’s students, such as Iyengar and Jois, as they shaped and adapted yoga for new audiences. Crucially, such research also continues today, in the classes and workshops of countless yoga teachers globally. Calling these examples of “research” in yoga technique does not imply that they are all equally valuable or rigorous or that they share the same goals. On the contrary, I want to suggest that embodied practices can be meaningfully assessed in terms of their contributions to shared knowledge in the form of technique, whether or not this aspect of practice is made explicit. In this regard, two examples of contemporary research in yoga are particularly illustrative: first, Bikram Yoga, which I offer as an extreme case

of the commodification and athleticization of embodied technique; and second, the teaching and practice of Matthew Sanford, a paraplegic yoga teacher whose approach tends toward the opposite poles. Taken together, these examples of research in yoga span many decades and thousands of miles, as well as vastly different cultural contexts and levels of commercialism. From this discussion, I hope that a vision emerges of yoga as a dynamic field of embodied technique, with links to some of the most important issues of our time.

Yoga and Healthism

At the start of the twenty-first century, the embodied technique of yoga is inextricably bound up with the biopolitics of health and healthism.⁴ Healthism is a name that has recently been attached to the landscape of unmarked assumptions about the meaning and value of health for both individuals and society. In contrast to the complex philosophical concept of health, healthism as discourse or ideology puts forth relatively stable (and often highly gendered) images of health that combines body type, athletic fitness, and other kinds of “success” such as happiness or wealth.⁵ In some contexts more influential than religion, politics, or economics, the drive to achieve or maintain physical health has today become a major factor in globalized

⁴ For the origin of the terms biopower and biopolitics, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Press, 1990), 142-43. For an overview of current usage of these terms, see Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, “Biopower Today,” *BioSocieties* 1 (2006).

⁵ For a philosophical discussion of health after Kant and Nietzsche, see Georges Canguilhem, “Health: Crude Concept and Philosophical Question,” *Public Culture* 20.3 (2008): 467-77. For healthism as ideology, see Emma Rich, Rachel Holroyd, and John Evans, “‘Hungry to be noticed’: Young women, anorexia and schooling,” in John Evans, Brian Davis, and Jan Wright, eds., *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 178-81; and Richard Tinning, *Pedagogy and Human Movement: Theory, Practice, Research* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 177-80. For the limits of health as a cross-cultural concept, see Thomas Csordas, “Health and the Holy in the Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*,” in *Cultural Bodies*, eds. Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2004).

culture and society, from national health policies and the World Health Organization to the numerous popular diet and exercise regimes that inform so much of popular culture in the early twenty-first century. Whereas earlier generations variously understood health in relation to ethics, morality, or hygiene, the image of health put forward by healthism today has much more to do with athleticism and with the visible shape of bodies. There are many problems with this reductive notion of health, not least of which is that it conflates the serious geopolitical problem of food security and access to medical care with the image-focused quest to possess a certain kind of body. Yet healthism today continues to provide the primary context for contemporary yoga practice, even as health itself “has become a major, multi-million pound industry, a topic of routine everyday conversation, a matter of political concern.”⁶

As Mark Singleton has shown, the link between yoga and health dates back at least as far as the late nineteenth century, and exemplifies the interaction of Indian religious practice with European physical culture. As Singleton writes, the “somatic and philosophical framework” of yoga in India was gradually “replaced by a modern discourse of health and fitness” during this period.⁷ In studying the recent global expansion of postural yoga, it is essential to understand it in this context, alongside the rise of healthism and the history of our assumptions about what it means to become or remain healthy and “fit.” From the late nineteenth century physical culture movement to the fitness boom of the 1980s and the “health” magazines of today, healthism can be seen as one of the key discourses that define Euro-American culture. Indeed, healthism in the early twenty-first century is not merely one framework among others through which to discuss embodied technique, but has become a totalizing and universalizing discourse that displaces other ways of articulating and evaluating such technique. Increasingly, the diverse goals that can

⁶ Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, ix.

⁷ Singleton, *Yoga Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

motivate embodied practice—which include pleasure, social interaction, spiritual discipline, entertainment, and many others—have been eclipsed by a particular idea of health as a universal goal. Correspondingly, embodied practitioners working in many different areas of technique are increasingly pressured to describe what they do in terms of health benefits.⁸

The influence of healthism upon embodied technique goes beyond language and framing to influence how technique from all over the world is transformed and assimilated to fit within the relatively uniform environment of the gym or dance studio. As yoga, tango, capoeira, or taijiquan are repackaged as health and fitness modalities, they are also transformed at the level of technique. Certain aspects of embodied technique are extracted for use while others are forgotten or ignored. The choice of which technique to maintain and which to leave out is informed by the biopolitics of healthism, leading to a distorted and narrow view of global physical culture. At its most extreme, healthism reduces all forms of embodied technique to different flavors of “exercise,” all directed towards the same idea of health. It then becomes possible to ask, in all sincerity: “Will yoga make me thin and happy?”⁹ While such a reductive question says little about yoga and virtually nothing about health, it tells us a great deal about today’s biopolitical landscape and about the pressures encountered by anyone who would hope to learn or teach yoga within it. In actual fact, the links between specialized embodied technique and health are extremely tenuous. As Nancy Theberge points out in an essay on sports medicine, there is a profound gap between athletic ability and health, despite the fact that athletes are often held up

⁸ For a discussion of Pilates and its “crossover into mainstream fitness,” see Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 25-32. For hip-hop’s incarnation as aerobic exercise in a fitness club, see Randy Martin, *Critical Moves*, 139-146.

⁹ Jennifer Munyer, “How Yoga Won the West,” in Liz Stillwaggon Swan, ed., *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3.

as paradigms of health for the rest of us to emulate.¹⁰ Theberge emphasizes the tremendous costs exacted on the health of athletes “in the pursuit of performance” and points out that, by everyday standards, Olympic athletes are not particularly healthy people. According to one expert in sports medicine: “They get sick more often, they get injured more often, they get depressed more often... So, it’s not about health. It’s about performance.”¹¹ Nevertheless, countless advertisements and other popular media outlets continue to equate athleticism with health.

In this cultural context, what does it mean to claim that yoga promotes health? Whose health, and what kind of health, is promoted by exactly which kinds of yoga technique? As William Broad has recently pointed out, many injuries are caused by yoga, either through the incompetence of poorly trained teachers or through the excessive striving for an image of health that can be physically dangerous. Comparing yoga practitioners to circus performers, acrobats, and athletes, Broad writes: “It is no surprise that a field that prides itself on the routine performance of twists, contortions, and dramatic bends of the human body can do a lot of damage.”¹² What makes yoga’s injuries so unsettling, according to Broad, is “the discipline’s image as a path to exceptional health.” In other words, the classification of yoga as part of the “health and fitness” movement hides its intense athleticism and associated risks. The same could no doubt be said of many sports, martial arts, and other highly athletic technique. In the current environment of healthism, the physical dangers associated with athleticism are often ignored in

¹⁰ Nancy Theberge, “‘It’s not about health, it’s about performance’: Sport medicine, health, and the culture of risk in Canadian sport,” in Hargreaves and Vertinsky, eds., *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 180. This comment also illustrates my previous point about the difficulty of using “performance” as a concept to discuss embodied technique. Here performance refers to a very specific range of athletic goals.

¹² William Broad, *The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 103. For a summary of Broad’s warnings, see “How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body,” *The New York Times* (January 5, 2012).

favor of the need to get or stay “in shape” through vigorous exercise. Such exercise is routinely evaluated in terms of weight loss, which is frequently equated with health itself.¹³

One of the goals of this chapter is to break yoga free of the healthist assumptions that have framed it since the early twentieth century. Too often, teachers and practitioners of yoga have marketed and described it as a stable product that can be “consumed” by the practitioner and which reliably leads to a particular result. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne have done much to clarify the global diversity of yoga and to highlight the ways in which its commercial success has been bound up with cultural trends, from Orientalism to healthism. As they write in a recently anthology on yoga in the modern world: “A profusion of yoga classes and workshops can be found in virtually every city in the Western world and (increasingly) throughout the Middle East, Asia, South and Central America and Australasia. . . . This increase of interest in yoga has gone hand in hand with the emergence of a multi-billion dollar yoga industry.”¹⁴ Yoga has become a brand: not only has it been used to sell other products, such as clothing and even cars, but legal battles have increasingly been fought over the authorship and authenticity of its technique. In this context, Singleton and Byrne ask what exactly is meant by “yoga” and underscore the slipperiness of the technique as it travels from one context to another. They work to defuse the “anxiety of authenticity” that stunts many discussions of yoga by reducing them to an argument over which practices are most authentic, and they argue against the assumption of what Liz Stillwaggon Swan calls a “single, unchanging truth” that lies “behind the multiplicity of forms” in yoga.¹⁵ Yoga is not one thing. How might we then go about distinguishing between

¹³ The notion that fatness or “obesity” is the opposite of health is problematic both scientifically and politically. A fuller discussion of this important issue is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a range of critical perspectives on how fatness is constructed as the opposite of health, see Esther Rothblum, Sondra Solovay, and Marilyn Wann, eds. *The Fat Studies Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Singleton and Byrne, *Yoga in the Modern World*, 2. And see Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 3-5.

¹⁵ Swan, *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone*, 14.

clever synthesis, genuine innovation, and mere rebranding when it comes to the embodied technique of yoga?

I propose to extend the work of Singleton and Byrne by viewing yoga not as a stable product or as a geographically and historically bound practice but as an area of knowledge. In other words, I see yoga technique as a prime example of what Karin Knorr Cetina has called an “epistemic object.” In her analysis of scientific research and its complex objects of study—such as proteins or subatomic particles—Cetina warns against the treatment of such objects as stable entities. With epistemic objects, Cetina cautions, “a stable name is not an expression and indicator of stable thinghood. Rather, naming, in the present conception, is a way to punctuate the flux, to bracket and ignore differences, to declare them as pointing to an identity-for-a-particular-purpose.”¹⁶ Yoga is an epistemic object in this sense. When we give the same name to different practices, calling them all “yoga,” we actively bracket and ignore their differences in order to “punctuate the flux” of the field. Cetina also points out that the “process of naming” may stand in contradiction to the “unfolding” and dispersal of knowledge. That is, the naming of epistemic objects can work against a potentially productive recognition of their complexity. This certainly applies to the proliferation of yoga schools and styles today. What may be gained if teachers and practitioners of yoga were to resist the commodification of yoga under healthism and instead take an epistemological view of their own practices?

Such a shift is immediately applicable at the level of brands or styles of yoga. By adopting epistemological strategies of naming rather than consumerist ones, we can affirm that yoga is better understood as transmissible knowledge than as stable product. Treating yoga as knowledge also gives us more nuanced ways to talk about lineage, tradition, and pedagogy. But

¹⁶ Karin Knorr Cetina, “Objectual practice,” in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (New York: Routledge, 2001), 184.

such an epistemological turn is just as important at every level of yoga technique, right down to the *āsana* or poses themselves, which should also be understood as epistemic objects rather than stable ones. What, after all, is an asana?¹⁷ What is it made of? What kind of thing is it? Citing the work of Edward Casey, Benjamin Richard Smith writes:

Each *āsana* exists as a ‘schema for bodily action.’ Neither simply an image of the *āsana* as performed by others, nor an abstract set of rules for how an *āsana* should be performed, such schemas exist somewhere between the ‘condensed specificity’ of image and the ‘generality’ of a rule... These schemas present themselves as a cluster of memories, perceptions and thoughts drawn primarily from previous practice.¹⁸

Smith is right that an asana is neither an image nor a set of rules. Yet even this philosophically sophisticated description fails to account for the development of yoga poses and their potential impact on individuals and societies. If “schemas” are just memories, perceptions, and thoughts, then how and why do they effect the practitioner? What is the nature of their impact and how do they “spread” or “borrowed” across vast distances of time and space?

Casey’s notion of a bodily schema may be usefully expanded through the recognition that such schemas are not pure inventions. Rather, they are discoveries about what bodies can do. To enact an asana is not only to imitate an image, follow a rule, or recall a memory—it is also an operation of knowledge. One knows *what to do* and *in what order* to do it, while at every moment one may also encounter the unknown, either because technique does not work as

¹⁷ Henceforth, I use the traditional plural with anglicized spelling, but retain other usages in citations.

¹⁸ Benjamin Richard Smith, “Body, Mind and Spirit? Towards an Analysis of the Practice of Yoga,” in *Body & Society* 13.2 (2007): 35.

expected, or else because it does and then one discovers inside it another area ripe for exploration. Furthermore, yoga, like other knowledge, can be used in diverse contexts and can serve a wide range of aims and intentions. Arguments on behalf of particular specializations within yoga should acknowledge their status as continually evolving epistemic objects. It makes no sense to argue for yoga in general, but only in particular contexts where it can be shown to offer valuable or useful knowledge that would otherwise be absent. In the remainder of this chapter, I will not argue for yoga but rather use it as a starting point to map the larger field of physical culture. It may then become possible to argue that certain kinds of embodied technique are especially worthy of support, not universally but in specific times and places.

Studies in Modern Postural Yoga

If yoga is a field of knowledge, then no figure deserves more credit for innovative research in that field than Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989). A renowned teacher and practitioner of yoga—and in my terms also a researcher—Krishnamacharya’s influence on contemporary practice is both wide and deep. As one article in *Yoga Journal* puts it: “Whether you practice the dynamic series of Pattabhi Jois, the refined alignments of B. K. S. Iyengar, the classical postures of Indra Devi, or the customized vinyasa of Viniyoga, your practice stems from one source: a five-foot, two-inch Brahmin born more than one hundred years ago in a small South Indian village.”¹⁹ In this section, my goal is less to extol Krishnamacharya’s unique brilliance—he attributed his own teachings to his guru and lineage—than to foreground the

¹⁹ Fernando Pagés Ruiz, “Krishnamacharya’s Legacy,” in *Yoga Journal* (2001). Available online at <www.yogajournal.com/wisdom/465>, accessed 12/10/12.

importance of embodied research in his life's work and to show that such research is still ongoing today. Rather than elevating Krishnamacharya as an individual figure, I want to sketch the contours of research in yoga technique, from nineteenth-century southern India to contemporary New York City. I will emphasize throughout that research in embodied technique, though it often requires physical isolation, never takes place in a cultural vacuum.

Krishnamacharya's research in yoga was part of a dynamic milieu of experimentation and investigation linked to the modernization and eventual political independence of India. Only in that context can we appreciate the epistemological significance of his work.

Mark Singleton observes that premodern or "classical" yoga was never a monolithic entity but was always characterized by "fragmentation, accretion, and innovation."²⁰ There is no single ancient tradition of yoga, and those very old texts and documents that do exist have strikingly little in common with what now goes by that name.²¹ In early twentieth century India, yoga was in the process of transitioning from the domain of esoteric religion to that of physical culture. This was largely due to the influence of Indian nationalism, which saw the development of specifically Indian forms of physical culture as a key step on the road to political independence. Singleton writes:

In the early decades of the 20th century, India—like much of the rest of the world—was gripped by an unprecedented fervor for physical culture, which was closely linked to the struggle for national independence. Building better bodies,

²⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 13. I rely on Singleton here because his research focuses on embodied technique, while that of De Michelis (Singleton's former teacher) is primarily concerned with the influence of Western esoteric philosophy upon the discourse surrounding yoga.

²¹ For an illuminating critique of how the millennia-old *Yoga Sutra* has been used in the modern construction of the notion of "Classical" yoga, see Mark Singleton, "The Classical Reveries of Yoga: Patañjali and Constructive Orientalism," in Singleton and Byrne, *Yoga in the Modern World*, 77-99.

people reasoned, would make for a better nation and improve the chances of success in the event of a violent struggle against the colonizers. A wide variety of exercise systems arose that melded Western techniques with traditional Indian practices from disciplines like wrestling. Oftentimes, the name given to these strength-building regimes was “yoga.”²²

In many cases, the competitive rhetoric surrounding Indian and European physical culture was explicit, with innovators like Kuvalayananda developing his own approach to posture practice at least partly through a direct rivalry with European organizations like the YMCA.²³ In this way, yoga rapidly expanded to include technique from therapeutic gymnastics, calisthenics, and body-building. At the same time, other kinds of technique that had once been included in yoga were left aside as remnants of an earlier age. Gradually, the image of the yogi as isolated Hindu ascetic was replaced by that of the Indian strong-man.

In the early 1930s, the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodiyar IV of the south Indian kingdom of Mysore invited Krishnamacharya to begin teaching yoga in his palace.²⁴ A highly educated Brahmin with multiple degrees in philosophy and religion from several Indian universities, Krishnamacharya had also spent seven years in Tibet under the tutelage of a guru named Rama Mohana Brahmachari.²⁵ The training he received there went by the name of yoga, but even then many Indians would have considered its technique outdated or extreme. As Singleton shows, the term “*hatha yoga*” was in the process of being rehabilitated to the point where today it most

²² Mark Singleton, “Yoga’s Greater Truth,” in *Yoga Journal* (November 2010). Available online at <www.yogajournal.com>, accessed 06/15/12.

²³ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 91-94.

²⁴ This date is from *ibid.*, 177. Other sources give the start date as 1926.

²⁵ For two overlapping accounts of Krishnamacharya’s life, see Kausthub Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi: The Legacy of T. Krishnamacharya* (New York: North Point Press, 2005); and A. G. Mohan, *Krishnamacharya: His Life and Teachings* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2010).

often refers to the practice of asana or postures, perhaps combined with breathing exercises (*pranayama*), chanting, or meditation. For Krishnamacharya, however, hatha yoga involved a much wider range of embodied technique aimed primarily at curing and preventing illness. In his 1934 book on yoga, Krishnamacharya's illustrated discussion of asana is preceded by a discussion of numerous bodily exercises that have been thoroughly excised from today's concept of yoga and might well read as shocking to many contemporary practitioners. For example, Krishnamacharya explains how to gradually cut and pull one's tongue so that, after three years, it will be able to reach out far enough to touch the forehead. Elsewhere, he describes an exercise that involves standing in water and pushing the large intestine out the anus so as to wash it before putting it back inside the body.²⁶ The contrast between this kind of technique—which Krishnamacharya says should be practiced in an *ashram* far away from crowded cities—and the technique and environment of today's urban yoga studio illustrates the radical transformation of yoga over the past hundred years.

Upon his return to India, Krishnamacharya was invited multiple times to take up a highly respected religious position in the Vaisnava Hinduism into which he was born. However, he chose instead to follow the path indicated to him by his guru, namely to teach and popularize yoga.²⁷ By 1931, the Maharaja of Mysore realized that Krishnamacharya's mission was very much in line with his own desire to support and promote Indian physical culture, and he extended the invitation that would prove so important to the development of yoga. As Singleton notes, the Maharaja during the 1920s and 1930s had “actively fostered a climate of eclectic, creative physical culture in Mysore State,” promoting a range of physical culture that was “based

²⁶ Sri T. Krishnamacharya, *Yoga Makaranda* (Madurai: C. M. V. Press, 1934), 47; 39. As of this writing, the full text is available online from <www.scribd.com/doc/55460748/Yoga-Makaranda>, accessed 4/7/13.

²⁷ Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi*, 79.

on a spirit of radical fusion and innovation.”²⁸ By the time Krishnamacharya arrived in Mysore, it was already “a pan-Indian hub of physical culture revivalism.”²⁹ Krishnamacharya was among several practitioners working under the Maharaja to rejuvenate the practice of yoga, but through his students he would exert the most profound influence on its globalization. To a certain degree this may be attributed to the strategy and cunning of his students, but there is no question that Krishnamacharya also made concrete innovations in technique that would be proven surprisingly exportable and widely desirable as the twentieth century progressed.

In order to popularize yoga, Krishnamacharya began to focus more and more on asana, expanding the number of poses and transforming the way in which they were linked to breath and to each another. Working with flexible young boys, and drawing on Indian wrestling and games as well as European sports and gymnastics, Krishnamacharya developed in Mysore much of the technique that structures modern postural yoga. Singleton explains:

Although Krishnamacharya’s teaching career spans almost seven decades of the twentieth century, it is the years spent in Mysore ... that have arguably had the greatest influence on radically physicalized forms of yoga across the globe. During this period, Krishnamacharya elaborated a system whose central component was a rigorous (and oftentimes aerobic) series of *āsanas*, joined by a repetitive linking sequence. The highly fashionable Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga of Pattabhi Jois is a direct development of this phase of Krishnamacharya’s teaching, and the various spin-off forms (like “power yoga,” “vinyasa flow,” and “power

²⁸ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 179.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

vinyasa”) that have burgeoned, particularly in America, since the early 1990s derive often explicit inspiration from these forms.³⁰

N. E. Sjoman may have been the first to point out that the sequencing of postures and the particular use of the breath taught in what is now called Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga was “not an inherited format” but rather was developed during the Mysore period of Krishnamacharya’s work.³¹ For this reason, Sjoman refers to Krishnamacharya’s yoga as a “syncretism” that drew heavily on English gymnastics and Indian wrestling and body-building.³² It is Singleton, however, whose characterization of Krishnamacharya explicitly invokes the notions of research, experimentation, and innovation. He writes: “The forms of physical practice that predominate in popular international yoga today were developed in a climate of intense experimentation and research around a suitable regimen for Indian bodies and minds.”³³ Singleton describes a laboratory-like environment in which the elements of yoga technique (postures, sequences, transitional movements, breathing rhythms and durations, as well as pedagogical technique) underwent continual transformation. This was a period of “tests,” a “pilot” program, intentionally “experimental.”³⁴ It is clear that yoga at this time was not a single entity, far less a codified system, but an active “epistemic object” for which naming can only be provisional. The same exercise could be called gymnastics one day and yoga the next, while much of what Krishnamacharya had learned in Tibet went untaught.

³⁰ Ibid., 176.

³¹ N. E. Sjoman, *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1996), 52.

³² Ibid., 53-55. These pages include a point-by-point comparison between a gymnastics manual of that period, the *Vyayama Dipika*, and exercises from B. K. S. Iyengar’s publications.

³³ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 81.

³⁴ Ibid., 186-88.

As A. G. Mohan’s biography makes clear, Krishnamacharya was aware of what he was doing and referred explicitly to the necessity of *punaranveshana*—which Mohan translates “literally” as “re-search” or “to search once more”—in order to breathe new life into “ancient practices that had declined over time.”³⁵ Yet as Mohan notes, Krishnamacharya “always credited his teachers with everything he himself taught, even if it was his own discovery or improvisation.”³⁶ Such attributions are not merely the result of personal modesty but, as Singleton points out, should “be understood as a standard convention in a living (Sanskritic) tradition where conservation and innovation are tandem imperatives.”³⁷ Krishnamacharya’s son, the yoga teacher T. K. V. Desikachar, recalls: “[M]y father never acknowledged that he discovered anything even when I have seen that it was he who discovered it. He has discovered postures but he would say that it was his teacher who taught him. Rarely had he said that it was his ‘original’ work.”³⁸ I do not consider such assertions by Krishnamacharya disingenuous. Rather, I believe they correctly refer to a very real sense in which change and continuity commingle in the active practice of any technique. Krishnamacharya believed that, in radically changing the embodied technique of yoga, he was nevertheless continuing yogic tradition on another level. A thorough analysis of yoga should embrace this complexity by examining all aspects of its technique and pointing to specific examples of both continuity and innovation.

Krishnamacharya drew into yoga much that would not previously have been considered relevant or even permissible. As Singleton points out, the *surya namaskara* or “sun salutation” was considered by some at the time to be seriously inappropriate for yoga because of its

³⁵ Mohan, *Krishnamacharya*, 115.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90. And see Mohan’s acknowledgment that Krishnamacharya himself composed the *Yoga Rahasya*, a text that is traditionally attributed to the tenth-century sage Nathamuni (120 and 136-37).

³⁷ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 207.

³⁸ T. K. V. Desikachar, cited in Mohan, 137.

association with gymnastics and with sun worship.³⁹ Yet today, this is one of the first things we may think of when we picture the practice of yoga. And Krishnamacharya did more than just absorb and retransmit technique from multiple sources. He also synthesized them in previously unimagined ways. For example, Krishnamacharya seems to have borrowed from the sun salutation the technique of linking one posture to another, and then generalized this to an entire sequence of asana. This gave rise to what is now called *vinyasa*: a continuous flow between poses, matching movement to breath, which had not previously been associated with the practice of asana.⁴⁰ As Mohan writes: “Vinyasa is essential, and probably unique, to Krishnamacharya’s teachings. As far as I know, he was the first yoga master in the last century to introduce this idea.”⁴¹ While contemporary yoga practices differ greatly in their approach to flow, with some retaining a more static approach to each pose, the discovery of vinyasa marks an important turning point in contemporary yoga. If yoga poses had previously been thought of as discrete entities, it now became possible to assemble them in unbroken sequences, as in the “Primary Series” of Ashtanga Yoga.⁴² Additionally, the use of movement and breath to connect one pose to another fundamentally transforms asana practice, bringing it closer to martial arts and dance.⁴³

Krishnamacharya’s approach to yoga continued to evolve after he left Mysore in the early 1950s. Once he was no longer under the influence of the Maharaja, he reverted to a broader and more religiously grounded approach to yoga that no longer placed so much emphasis on physical

³⁹ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 180.

⁴⁰ Krishnamacharya refers to *vinyasa* in his *Yoga Makaranda*, but it seems that he is referring to a set of movements or variations associated with each pose individually, rather than to a sequence of connected poses. See also Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 190.

⁴¹ Mohan, *Krishnamacharya*, 29.

⁴² For a detailed description of the Primary Series, see Gregor Maehle, *Ashtanga Yoga: Practice & Philosophy* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2006), 17-130.

⁴³ In the south Indian martial art *kalaripayattu*, flowing movements serve as transitions between positions that, like yoga *asana*, have names like “lion pose” or “elephant pose.” Further afield, the development of *vinyasa* can be compared with Grotowski’s adaptation of yoga in his “corporeal” exercises. See Phillip Zarrilli, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Maria Kapsali, “‘I don’t attack it, but it’s not for actors’: the use of yoga by Jerzy Grotowski,” in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 1.2 (2010): 185-98.

exercise and asana.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, however, the highly physical approach that Krishnamacharya had developed in Mysore was brought to global prominence by his students—especially B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois—and each of these continued to develop the technique of yoga in particular ways. In one article that exemplifies rigorous analysis of embodied technique, Elizabeth De Michelis juxtaposes photographs from two yoga manuals published by the same organization—one in 1960 and the other in 1983—to show how the technique of physical alignment was developed towards greater precision over the course of those two decades.⁴⁵ In addition to physical alignment within a pose, today’s yoga teachers experiment with visualization and imagery; regulated breathing and meditation; sequence of poses and the poses themselves; chanting and the study of Sanskrit texts; ethical and emotional guidance; sensation and proprioception; as well as pedagogical technique and the economics of yoga. In doing so, they bring knowledge from other areas to bear on the technique of yoga, just as Krishnamacharya did, and they continue the yogic tradition of active research and innovation.

The question of which areas of technique are most actively explored, even within the generally accepted bounds of yoga, is a matter of social context as well as of personal preference. Yoga teachers necessarily tailor their technique to meet the needs of the people who support their practices. Such influences range from the immediate needs of students for various kinds of experience and comprehension to the goals and desires of funders and patrons like the Maharaja. We have already seen how the Maharaja’s interest in physical culture influenced Krishnamacharya’s approach to yoga during his time in Mysore. It stands to reason that contemporary practitioners also guide their teaching and research according to financial and

⁴⁴ This is evident in the accounts of his later teaching given by Mohan and Desikachar; and see Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 176.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth De Michelis, “Some Comments on the Contemporary Practice of Yoga in the UK, with Particular Reference to British *Hatha Yoga* Schools,” in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10.3 (1995): 243-55.

other material circumstances as well as their own interests and those of their students. In this regard, perhaps no example is more extreme than that of Bikram Yoga, a highly codified and commodified form of yoga that, for all its claims to universality, seems to have been precisely engineered for an urban, moneyed, Euro-American clientele.⁴⁶ Among the innovations introduced by Bikram Choudhury are a heated room, which produces more sweat and flexibility, and a fixed 26-pose sequence that is repeated in every 90-minute class. By narrowing and standardizing his teaching, Bikram Choudhury has become one of the most commercially successful yoga pioneers, as well as one of the first to successfully copyright a “brand” of yoga. He has attracted numerous celebrity students and amassed a fortune through the Bikram Yoga franchise. In epistemological terms, Choudhury’s research is highly “applied,” aiming not towards a general expansion of knowledge but towards the instrumentalization of technique in a particular context. The success of Bikram Yoga is due not only to clever marketing but also to the applied research that gave rise to his highly saleable and easily standardized version of the embodied technique of yoga.

To give a deeper sense of how yoga technique can vary from one studio to another, even within a small geographic area, I will now offer a brief account of two different yoga studios in Manhattan’s East Village. From early 2010 until early summer 2011, I attended between thirty and forty yoga sessions at East Yoga, a studio located on East 13th Street in Manhattan. Then, in late summer 2011, I attended between thirty and forty sessions at Ashtanga Yoga Shala NYC, just a few blocks away from East Yoga on East 8th Street.⁴⁷ The two studios are roughly the same size, each having a single large room for yoga practice, and are located just a few blocks

⁴⁶ See <www.bikramyoga.com>, accessed 12/10/12.

⁴⁷ East Yoga <www.eastyoga.com> and Ashtanga Yoga Shala NYC <www.aysnyc.org>, accessed 4/7/13. Citations about the two studios come from their websites unless otherwise indicated. Prior to these experiences, I had encountered yoga only in the context of dance and actor training and had never practiced it regularly.

from one another. As modern yoga studios, both owe their existence to the research of Krishnamacharya and his students. Both were founded around the beginning of the twenty-first century, but they reflect two very different lines of research and practice in modern postural yoga. In comparing them, my goal is not to evaluate their respective merits but rather to illustrate some of the ways in which diverse approaches to embodied technique produce different kinds of spaces and experiences and give different meaning to the term “yoga.” In addition to working differently with poses, sequences, alignment, visualization, breath, and other aspects of embodied technique, these studios offer different economic models. Neither goes as far towards commodification as Bikram Yoga, but both grapple with the tensions entailed in selling yoga to the contemporary urban population of New York City.

East Yoga is a one-room yoga studio that looks out directly onto 13th Street and feels very much part of the fabric of the East Village. Inside, the studio takes a relatively informal approach to yoga and claims only a weak and open-ended relationship to tradition. It offers yoga as an activity that may be useful, meaningful, healthy, and enjoyable, but not necessarily spiritual and certainly not religious. The studio defines its yoga loosely as “vinyasa,” meaning simply that movement and breath are linked. Greater specification in terms of technique is not possible because the studio offers about thirty-five classes per week with a large roster of teachers. The website of East Yoga lists seventeen teachers—fifteen women and two men—mostly photographed in yoga poses. Their stated backgrounds include training in theatre, music, dance, and therapy as well as yoga, and they range significantly in level of experience. Classes are defined by type, with the following categories: Beginners, Intermediate, Open, Express, Restorative Vinyasa, Slow Flow Vinyasa, Meditation, Prenatal, Toddler, and Kids. Each of these classes costs \$18 (or \$10 for students), with multi-class and unlimited passes also available. Most

classes are 75 or 90 minutes, although the “express” class is just one hour. While it is possible, with some effort, to regularly attend the same class taught by the same teacher, this can happen once or twice a week at most, since the teaching schedules are not regular. During my time at East Yoga, I soon discovered which teachers I preferred, but it was not always easy to attend their classes on a regular basis. When I did, I found that the exact sequence of poses could be different every time. This provides maximum flexibility for both teachers and students and fits with founder Kari Harendorf’s description of the studio: “The practice is vigorous and creative with a strong emphasis on alignment to keep you safe and injury free... It is my sincere belief that yoga should be safe and FUN.”

At East Yoga, teachers adapt each session to suit their intuitions and desires as well as the perceived needs of the students. The atmosphere is relaxed, and there is no pressure to attend more often or to “advance” in one’s practice. As Harendorf states, the studio is designed “to cater to the community and my fellow residents” by fitting smoothly into the rhythms of urban life. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages. After several months of semi-regular attendance, I found that I had not developed anything like a repeatable yoga routine that I could practice at home on my own time. The flexibility of East Yoga and its casualness with regard to student-teacher relationships allow one to receive the benefits of a yoga practice without necessarily learning the technique required to practice alone. This does not mean that I did not learn technique at East Yoga—I absolutely did—but it was not structured as a repeatable sequence. Instead, I became acquainted with a large number of poses and began to learn some of the details of alignment that define their rigor. I also learned to search for transitions between unfamiliar poses and to relate my breathing in a flexible but conscious way to any given sequence of poses. The fact that I was not taught a repeatable sequence of poses to practice on

my own seems to fit with a business model in which yoga sessions are consumed, like movies or concerts, rather than being conceived of as sites of training and knowledge transfer. After several months of attendance, I remained dependent on the studio to enact the yoga technique that was slowly sedimenting in my body. Economics also played a role. Since each class was purchased separately, I could always save money by not going, and this discouraged regularity.

Searching for a more focused approach, I visited Ashtanga Yoga Shala (AYS), located on 8th Street at basement level. Although much of the core technique of posture, movement, and breath was the same or similar to that of East Yoga, I found radical differences in pedagogy, discursive framing, economics, and many other aspects. As founder Guy Donahaye writes:

Ashtanga Yoga Shala NYC is a traditional school unlike most modern yoga studios. Based on the teachings of Sri K Pattabhi Jois (Guruji), our aim is to develop a yoga practice for each student according to his or her individual needs and capacities. Asana practice follows a system of three sequences of postures devised by Jois - primary (yoga chikitsa), intermediate (nadi shodhona) and advanced (sthira bhaga).

Classes in the traditional Mysore style are based on the way Pattabhi Jois taught in his home town of Mysore (India). Students come to class daily and gradually build up a practice over time. The relationship of teacher to student is more like that of a personal trainer, with each student receiving individual assistance and guidance in a group setting.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ From the website, accessed 06/15/12.

On the AYS website, Donahaye articulates a strong attachment to lineage: “Ashtanga Yoga is a systematic method devised by Sri K Pattabhi Jois with reference to the teachings of his teacher Sri Krishnamacharya, Krishnamacharya’s teacher, Ramana Mohan Brahmachari and the teachings of an ancient sage known as Rishi Vamana which were given in an ancient text known as the Yoga Korunta.”⁴⁹ Very different from East Yoga, such an exact statement of lineage is possible only because all classes at AYS are taught by Donahaye himself.⁵⁰ According to the website, Donahaye studied with Jois from 1991 until the latter’s death in 2009 and is “one of only 40 students worldwide” to receive a teaching certification directly from Jois. The AYS website includes sections on yoga philosophy, interviews, practice guidelines, diet, and lifestyle, none of which are found on the East Yoga site. The business model and class schedule are also different: Students pay \$150 or \$200 per month to become members of AYS and are expected to attend class as often as possible. Individual classes can be purchased, but this option is only intended for out-of-town visitors. There are just two sessions per day Monday through Thursday (7:00 and 8:30am) and one each on Friday and Sunday, for a total of ten classes per week. In several ways, then, Donahaye encourages a regular and constant practice: All classes are in the morning, all classes are taught by the same person, and the flat monthly fee makes it cost-effective to practice more often.

In addition to these differences in pedagogical and economic infrastructure, the embodied technique of the classes was much more regular at AYS than at East Yoga. “Mysore style” refers to pedagogical technique in which students practice simultaneously but separately in a shared space, receiving individual feedback rather than being guided through a group sequence by the

⁴⁹ A large painting of Pattabhi Jois is displayed in the practice room. For a photograph of this painting and additional commentary on Jois and Ashtanga Yoga, see Benjamin Richard Smith, “‘With Heat Even Iron Will Bend’: Discipline and Authority in Ashtanga Yoga,” in Singleton and Byrne, *Yoga in the Modern World*.

⁵⁰ During my time at AYS, Donahaye went out of town for several days and was replaced by a single guest teacher who taught the same sequence at the same times of day but emphasized different aspects of technique.

teacher. Thus, students work at their own pace rather than in unison. This has a number of advantages, including that students are immediately able to practice at home whatever they have done in class. However, the Ashtanga sequence is only adapted in relatively minor ways to suit the needs of individual practitioners and teachers. One can progress more quickly or more slowly through the process of learning the sequence, and can use props to aid alignment, but the poses and their order remain constant. One kind of flexibility is exchanged for another. In addition, Donahaye (following Jois) places greater attention on how the breath is matched to the movement—for example, counting exactly the number of breaths in each pose—and on the direction of the gaze at each point in the sequence. I had the impression at AYS of entering into a structure that was both sturdy and precise. The Ashtanga Yoga sequence, with all its technical details, is clearly the product of sustained research over many years. At the same time, I remained curious about the extent to which Donahaye had contributed to the technique as I encountered it, either through the “residue” of other training in his body or through his own intentional research and discovery.⁵¹ Not surprisingly, given his traditional orientation, Donahaye does not claim to be adapting or discovering yoga but merely passing it along.

Benjamin Richard Smith’s critique of Ashtanga Yoga focuses on its athleticism and competitiveness. Smith describes the practice at the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (AYRI) in Mysore as characterized by intense discipline and a “fiercely imposed authority” that sometimes borders on cruelty.⁵² According to Smith, these qualities are frequently internalized by students as an aggressive drive to perfect their technique, or that of others, in potentially harmful or dangerous ways. Furthermore, “the sequences of the various *āsana* series are widely regarded amongst Ashtangis as unalterable, despite the fact—obvious to the few students who have visited

⁵¹ Here I am invoking Randy Martin’s notion of “residue” technique, cited in Chapter 1.

⁵² Smith, “With Heat Even Iron Will Bend,” 153-54.

AYRI across a longer period of time, but not widely recognized amongst the majority of practitioners—that Pattabhi Jois has himself changed the sequence and content of the various series since the 1970s.”⁵³ While Donahaye’s teaching persona is warm and unassuming, some aspects of Smith’s description are applicable to AYS. I did experience a kind of pressure to “advance” my practice there, and this notion of advancement did not refer only to the cultivation of a regular, long-term practice but also to the accomplishment of increasingly difficult physical postures. Furthermore, while most practitioners at East Yoga were slender, body type at AYS was even more uniform (although it is important to note that there were some older people and some who were not able to do “advanced” poses despite regular attendance). Neither studio took a strong or explicit stance on the availability of yoga to people of all body types, but the atmosphere of formality at AYS made it feel slightly less accessible in this regard.

I experienced East Yoga, with its informality and lack of religious trappings, as a less competitive environment. Its casual, consumer-oriented atmosphere and flexible scheduling meant that, in accordance with its business model, classes could be taken for personal benefit without reference to any larger scheme. Regular attendance was entirely an individual matter, since no teacher was keeping track. By the same token, however, I left East Yoga without having mastered any definable chunk of sequential technique. At Ashtanga Yoga Shala, on the other hand, the focus on progressing through a predefined sequence, and the presence of familiar faces in the room every morning, provoked in me a sense of competition rather than community. Moreover, since the teacher was always the same, I ultimately felt that I had to choose between a more serious level of commitment and not attending at all, since anything in between would be perceived as incomplete. This ultimately led me to stop attending class at AYS. By the time I did so, however, I had established a simple yoga practice of about thirty minutes, which I continue to

⁵³ Ibid., 154-55.

practice today—although not as regularly as Donahaye would suggest. In the wider context, the differences between these two studios illustrate many current issues and problems in yoga technique. It would be premature to call either studio a site for high-level research in yoga, since I cannot prove that any of their technique is genuinely new or that it has “spread” and been “borrowed” for use in other contexts. However, it is no exaggeration to suggest that studios like East Yoga and AYS—and there are hundreds in New York City alone—are collectively engaged in a research project in the embodied technique of yoga, continually discovering new possibilities and making them available through diverse models of membership and engagement.

Between Athletics and Somatics

Having outlined in broad strokes the history of yoga in the twentieth century and its status in the present day, I now wish to locate it within the broader context of what I am calling physical culture. Although the term physical culture is historically attached to a particular time period, I will use this phrase to refer to a much larger area of embodied technique than that imagined by its nineteenth-century originators. By physical culture I mean all kinds of specialized embodied technique that works primarily through movement, whether spectacular or subtle, rough or gentle, functional or aesthetic. While acknowledging that physical culture very often also involves psychological, emotional, imaginary, and other technique, this movement-based definition is useful insofar as it distinguishes physical culture from both performing arts and everyday life, even if there is much overlap between these domains. As such, physical culture includes at the very least gymnastics, sports, martial arts, bodywork, and the movement-

based aspects of circus and dance. However, this is still far too large a territory for me to coherently map within the scope of this chapter. Instead, I will once again take yoga as a starting point and attempt to place it within this larger field. In doing so, I hope to evoke a sense of the breadth and variety of contemporary physical culture.

I propose to analyze yoga, and physical culture more generally, in terms of two broad and transhistorical poles that I call the athletic and the somatic. Both concepts have specific histories, but they are not only historical. Rather, athletics and somatics are also present-day tendencies that define future possibilities. I have already alluded to the physical culture movement in Europe and India and its ties with nationalism in India. The Indian revitalization of yoga during the first part of the twentieth century was based on the hope that it might represent a strong indigenous counterpart to the sports and gymnastics of England. This led to the gradual athleticization of yoga, as emphasis was increasingly placed on physically difficult movement and—just as importantly—on the kinds of bodies such movement was believed to produce. Yoga became more physical and less religious, oriented towards strength and flexibility rather than towards the annihilation of the self or the stoppage of vital functions. At the same time, it also became more spectacular, from the public demonstrations of Krishnamacharya’s students to the heroic, muscular photographs of Iyengar and others.⁵⁴ In Europe and North America, gymnastics itself was gradually replaced by sports. The physical culture movement developed into athletics and from there into “health and fitness.” As the nationalism that had motivated early physical culture was superseded by globalization, the lines between athletics and health were increasingly blurred, giving rise to today’s highly athletic idea of health.

The movement known as “somatics” developed alongside and in explicit contrast to that

⁵⁴ Mark Singleton describes the public demonstrations given by Krishnamacharya’s students as “performance pieces in a modern Indian court as well as spectacular enticements to draw the people (back?) to yoga” (Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 193). The advent of photography played a major role in the spectacle of the yoga body (163-74).

of physical culture, exercise, and fitness, although the term itself is a recent one. Coined by Thomas Hanna and championed by Don Hanlon Johnson, the term somatics refers to “the field which studies the *soma*: namely the body as perceived from within by first-person perception.”⁵⁵ As such, somatics is inherently unspectacular and derives from a very different perspective on embodiment than that of athletics and sports. As a field of knowledge, somatics has no precise boundary, but is usually defined by reference to those individuals whose contributions are now considered essential to its development. Among its pioneers, Don Hanlon Johnson counts Elsa Gindler, Charlotte Selver, Carola Speads, Marion Rosen, Ilse Middendorf, F. M. Alexander, Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Judith Aston, Irmgard Bartenieff, Mary Whitehouse, Gerda Alexander, and Emilie Conrad Da’Oud.⁵⁶ Their differences notwithstanding, Johnson sees these practitioners as linked by a shared “desire to regain an intimate connection with bodily processes: breath, movement impulses, balance, and sensibility.”⁵⁷ In this sense, somatics and athletics can be seen as two poles in Euro-American physical culture, no less prevalent today than they were one hundred years ago.

As Michael Huxley has recently shown, two of the earliest practitioners in this movement, F. M. Alexander (1869-1955) and Mabel Elsworth Todd (1874-1956), explicitly defined their practices in opposition to the athletic physical culture of their time, distancing themselves from the idea of “exercise” as a merely physical endeavor and looking for ways to engage mind and body together.⁵⁸ In my usage, somatics refers to any movement-based practice that prioritizes the perception and sensation of the mover over externally visible and measurable

⁵⁵ Thomas Hanna, “What is Somatics?,” in Don Hanlon Johnson, ed., *Bone, Breath, & Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 341.

⁵⁶ Don Hanlon Johnson, *Bone, Breath, & Gesture*, xi. This list is not intended to be comprehensive.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁵⁸ Michael Huxley, “F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, practices and the psychophysical,” in *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 3.1-2 (2011): 34-35. I will return to the notion of the “psychophysical” when discussing Konstantin Stanislavski and Phillip B. Zarrilli in the next chapter.

achievements. This puts somatics in an ambiguous position with respect to the ideology of healthism, which continues to privilege spectacle and measurability in the assessment of health. Deeply concerned with uniformity and standardization, healthism has forged an alliance with athletics at least in part because athletic achievement is so much easier to see, measure, and represent through visual media. As a result, the physical culture of somatics is hard-pressed to articulate its value within healthist society. While somatics has increasingly been accepted as part of alternative medicine, especially for pain relief, and has played a major role in the development of postmodern dance and dance/movement therapy, somatic approaches do not fit well into the health and fitness paradigm that continues to dominate contemporary physical culture.⁵⁹ Thus, while many now accept the value of somatics in healing from injury, few would place it alongside sports and exercise as a basic part of routine health maintenance.

I believe that the popularity of yoga may in part be due to its particular location between the poles of athletics and somatics. In arguing this point, I do not wish to underestimate the extent to which Orientalist fantasy, or even cultural interest of a more nuanced sort, has contributed to the popularity of yoga. Certainly the initial appearances of yoga in Europe and North America were defined by discourses of Orientalism that were in many ways similar to those attending the rise of Chinese and Japanese martial arts.⁶⁰ Yet as Benjamin Richard Smith acknowledges, “Western practitioners of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga do not appear to be simply mimicking practices drawn from ‘another culture’. Rather, they seem to be successfully engaging

⁵⁹ For an introductory overview of intersections between somatics and dance, see Martha Eddy, “A brief history of somatic practices and dance: historical development of the field of somatic education and its relationship to dance,” in *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1.1 (2009): 5-27.

⁶⁰ The importance of Orientalist fantasy in the transmission of embodied technique has been even more pronounced in martial arts than in yoga, in part due to the phenomenon of spectacular martial arts films. The emerging field of martial arts studies has examined this at length: See C. S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge, eds., *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011); Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth, eds., *Martial Arts in the Modern World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003).

in a set of supposedly exogenous bodily techniques and modes of somatic attention.”⁶¹ In other words, although Orientalist fantasy and misperceptions about yoga’s ancient pedigree may play a role in its popularity, these alone cannot explain the intense interest and commitment of the many non-Indian practitioners for whom yoga has become a regular activity or even a central part of life. Such practitioners are committed not to the idea or to the name of yoga but to the exploration of a specific area of embodied technique. Their engagement with yoga cannot be understood only through the lens of cultural analysis but requires a closer examination of yoga as embodied technique, relative to other kinds of physical culture, in order to explain its particular appeal in today’s globalized, urban milieu.

Yoga strikes a unique and particular balance between athletics and somatics. Different practices of yoga locate themselves differently with regard to this balance, some gravitating towards athletics and others towards somatics. But many of the characteristics of yoga technique described thus far can be understood as compromises—or, to put it more strongly, research outcomes—at the border between athletics and somatics. This applies to the asana themselves, to the role of competition in yoga pedagogy, to the spatial arrangement of the yoga class, and to the relationship between breath and movement. Unlike a sport or martial art, there is no direct confrontation between opposing individuals or teams in yoga. Indeed, competition may be explicitly discouraged, especially when the spiritual dimension of yoga is emphasized.⁶² Yet as I have described in my own experience at two New York City studios, the display of physical ability is inescapable in the practice of asana. In moving through a sequence of postures, one’s individual levels of strength, balance, and flexibility are put on view. This visible display of postures cannot help but encourage competition even as the individual focus of the practice and

⁶¹ Benjamin Richard Smith, “Body, Mind and Spirit?,” 40.

⁶² On yoga, competition, and spirituality, see Stuart Ray Sarbacker, “The Numinous and the Cessative in Modern Yoga,” in *Yoga in the Modern World*, eds. Singleton and Byrne.

the absence of explicit winners and loses discourages an adversarial framework. Furthermore, as noted above, two studios that share a historical and geographic moment may be importantly distinguished by how they place themselves on a continuum from most to least competitive.

Compared with body-building, gymnastics, or sports, yoga places more attention on sensation and tends to avoid an explicit emphasis on athletic ability. But in comparison with the somatic technique developed by Alexander, Todd, Feldenkrais, or Bainbridge-Cohen, yoga is extravagant in its celebration of physical virtuosity. Yoga studios rarely have mirrors like aerobics or ballet studios. On the other hand, the plethora of photographic and video material on yoga serves to emphasize the externally visible shape of each asana, in its apparently ideal form, rather than the sensory impact of the technique upon its practitioner. This makes yoga relatively easy to assimilate within the health and fitness paradigm, as Nicole Dunas illustrates through the painful story of yoga studio that was visited by a team of advertising consultants who unthinkingly selected the youngest, thinnest, and most conventionally beautiful students to illustrate the studio's new brochure.⁶³ Following this trend, the athleticization of yoga is taken to its farthest extreme in recent attempts to make it an Olympic sport.⁶⁴ Yet there is also significant resistance towards such developments. While proponents of yoga-as-sport argue that yoga's embodied technique is visible, measurable, and competitive, many others argue that the most important aspects of yoga are lost when it is athleticized in this way.

The technique of vinyasa, mentioned above, is another example of yoga's location at the intersection of athletics and somatics. In current yoga discourse, vinyasa most often refers to the counting of breaths in a pose and the matching of half-breaths to the transitions between poses.

In the sun salutation, as I learned it from Donahaye at Ashtanga Yoga Shala, each transitional

⁶³ Nicole Dunas, "The Feeling of Beauty: A Yoga Project," in Swan, *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone*. And see Debra Merskin, "Picturing Yoga: Yoga Journal and the Perfect Form," in the same volume.

⁶⁴ Sara Beck, "Uniting Body and Mind, With a Bit of a Stretch," *New York Times* (March 1, 2012).

movement is accompanied by a single in-breath or an out-breath. The poses themselves are located at the suspension points between these half-breaths (except for “downward facing dog,” during which one takes five full breaths). In diagrams, this pattern of breaths is often explicitly noted. Although I cannot attempt a thorough discussion of the many possible relationships between breath and movement, I do want to suggest that this “vinyasa” approach uniquely synthesizes the athletic and the somatic.⁶⁵ Breath capacity is essential in sports, but breathing rarely receives the kind of sustained attention described above. Generally speaking, breath supports movement in athletics without relying on any distinct technique for working on the breath in isolation. In somatics, on the other hand, attention is often consciously placed on the breath itself—in particular, on the sensation of breathing and the placement of the breath—rather than merely counting breaths or ensuring their regularity with respect to a movement sequence. Thus, the vinyasa technique of matching the duration of a movement with the length of a breath invites an engagement that is simultaneously athletic and somatic. The dynamic movement between poses and the regulated timing of the breaths limit the extent to which the practitioner can relax into the sensation of breathing. On the other hand, students who tend towards the athletic are frequently admonished to “Remember to breathe,” a shift of focus that restores the importance of the somatic even during the most athletically difficult poses and movements.

To understand the cultural significance of yoga’s special balance of athletics and somatics, we must recognize the extent to which these poles are historically gendered. Indeed, the modern phenomenon of postural yoga has always been positioned not only between athletics and somatics but also between the very different ideals that Euro-American physical culture put

⁶⁵ For a survey of approaches to breath in healing, physical culture, and performing arts, see Jane Boston and Rena Cook, eds. *Breath in Action: The Art of Breath in Vocal and Holistic Practice* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009). Don Hanlon Johnson envisions an unwritten “volume on embodied breath that would include Ilse Middendorf, Elsa Gindler, hatha yoga, Taoism, and Russian hesychasm” in *Bone, Breath, & Gesture*, xiii.

forward for men and for women. In the early twentieth century, masculine and feminine physical culture were two distinct spheres to which yoga at different times tried to assimilate. Joseph Alter has shown how yoga came to occupy an ambiguous position in early twentieth-century Indian physical culture precisely because, according to the cultural standards of the time, it could not be made sufficiently masculine.⁶⁶ The revitalization of yoga in India measured itself against a hyper-masculine image of “muscular Christianity” brought over from England, as it attempted to refute imperialist assumptions about the weakness of the Indian man and (by extension) the Indian nation.⁶⁷ According to Alter, this put yoga in an impossible position: Despite its absorption of technique from body-building and wrestling, yoga retained a “holistic” approach to embodiment that could not be fully squared with the demands of the nationalist movement.⁶⁸ Even in its radically transformed and adapted state, yoga could not measure up to the European ideal of masculinity. “If not necessarily regarded as effete, *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* were simply not linked to muscles, masculinity and fitness at a time when that link was of critical national importance.”⁶⁹ Alter shows how the politics of gender and nation have worked together to exclude yoga from Indian physical education.

Given the strict boundaries regulating what could be considered properly masculine physical culture in the twentieth century, yoga was not destined to achieve global success through a complete assimilation with sports. As embodied technique, yoga was too stubbornly somatic to serve the needs of masculinist Indian nationalism or to become very popular among Euro-American men. Instead, the global success of yoga arrived from different quarter, as what

⁶⁶ Joseph Alter, “Yoga and Physical Education: Swami Kuvalayananda’s Nationalist Project,” *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 20-36.

⁶⁷ It is important to note that Krishnamacharya was not part of this movement and did not espouse or perform this kind of masculine ideal. In fact, he faced controversy in becoming one of the first Indian men to teach yoga to women (Desikachar, *The Yoga of the Yogi*, 149-50).

⁶⁸ Alter, “Yoga and Physical Education,” 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

had been practiced in India almost exclusively by men became hugely successful among women in Europe and North America. Suzanne Newcombe has chronicled the rise of yoga in Britain and found that women made up seventy to ninety percent of the students and most of yoga teachers in Britain between 1960 and 1980.⁷⁰ This constituted a second round of the internationalization of yoga, during which the postural yoga of Iyengar came to the fore. Stripped of its philosophical and spiritual context, yoga was gradually popularized within the health and fitness paradigm, where it was increasingly marketed to women. As Newcombe shows,

there was an assumed tradition of gendered physical education in Britain.

Women's attendance at physical culture courses for improving health and beauty were an established part of popular middle-class women's culture during the first half of the twentieth century. Before the Second World War, middle-class women were taught gymnastics, Swedish drill, and dance at school; middle-class men played team sports like rugby and cricket. After leaving school, men who were interested in physical culture often followed the tradition of George Sandow's exercises, while women joined Mary Bagot Stack's Women's League of Health and Beauty.⁷¹

Newcombe concludes that middle-class British women "found yoga an important support in many different practical ways including as an aid to health and beauty, a positive approach to ageing, a complementary support to medical treatment for chronic conditions, social contact with

⁷⁰ Suzanne Newcombe, "Stretching for Health and Well-Being: Yoga and Women in Britain, 1960–1980," *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14. Singleton also writes about the links between "harmonial gymnastics" and yoga (*Yoga Body*, 150-52).

other women and a meaningful hobby.”⁷² In biopolitical terms, yoga technique in Britain was gradually associated with an image of health that was gendered as feminine. Despite major changes in physical culture and gender roles, the demographics of yoga have remained relatively stable since the period of Newcombe’s study. Today, the majority of yoga practitioners in the United States are still well-educated white women, although statistics indicate that the relatively small proportion of male yoga practitioners is growing.⁷³

In the early twenty-first century, it is no longer possible to speak of two distinct physical cultures, one for men and another for women, as in the periods described by Alter and Newcombe. In the three decades since 1980, these lines have increasingly blurred. Today, the characteristics of what was once a distinctly masculine idea of health—attributes like strength, muscularity, and competitive drive—are increasingly considered to be appropriate fitness goals for all people, including women. At the same time, social movements as distinct as feminism, queer activism, alternative medicine, and New Age spirituality have argued for the general value what was once considered particularly feminine technique, such as that involving sensation, patience, and gentle touch. Somatic practitioners have been pioneers in this regard. Today, the ideology of healthism continues to privilege athletics over somatics in physical culture. For this reason, the expansion of athletics to include more girls and women has not necessarily led to an equal expansion of somatics to include more boys and men—nor has the latter yet been recognized as politically important. The push for female participation in athletics, as in Title IX legislation, has been groundbreaking in opening sports to girls and women. Yet it is based on an

⁷² Ibid., 59.

⁷³ Studies published in *Yoga Journal* in 2005 and 2008 show that seventy to eighty percent of yoga practitioners are female, and most are college educated. Unfortunately, these statistics do not distinguish between teachers and practitioners. Barbara Purcell and Andrew Shaffer, “Men, Sports, and Yoga” (36) and Debra Merskin, “Picturing Yoga: *Yoga Journal* and the Perfect Form” (109) in Liz Stillwaggon Swan, *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone*.

assumption of the universal value of athletics, which leaves the value of somatics largely unremarked and unpoliticized.

This is the landscape of physical culture in which yoga has come to global prominence. While we can hardly speak of male and female physical cultures in the present age, the institutions that support physical culture are still profoundly informed by their gendered history. Men continue to dominate the world of professional sports, both in numbers and economically, while women remain the majority in studio-based physical culture, from dance to aerobics to yoga.⁷⁴ The crucial epistemological point is this: If yoga has found a sweet spot between athletics and somatics, that is not accidental but is due to thousands of hours of embodied research at the border between the two. Moreover, if modern yoga is a research project taking place at the intersection of athletics and somatics, then this research has been primarily supported by educated white women, as a social class that has a unique investment in its success. Given that the expansion of healthism and its athletic ideals has gone hand in hand with the continuing dominance of highly restrictive feminine “beauty” standards, it is not surprising that many women should be interested in embodied technique that allows them to engage athletically without stepping too far out of what is still considered proper femininity. In the period studied by Newcombe, yoga classes for women tended to emphasize “body awareness, the deep respect of personal somatic experience and an insistence on non-violence.”⁷⁵ Today, the emphasis on body awareness remains, but yoga practice in general has become less gentle and more virtuosic. As the contemporary demographics of yoga suggests, these developments in yoga are to a large

⁷⁴ For more on female athleticism during the period covered by Newcombe, see Becki L. Ross, “Entertaining femininities: the embodied exhibitions of striptease and sport, 1950-1975,” in Hargreaves and Vertinsky, *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*. Many of the essays in this volume treats the intersections of gender and sports in contemporary physical culture.

⁷⁵ Newcombe, “Stretching for Health and Well-Being,” 57.

extent motivated by the needs and desires of a particular social class in negotiation with social pressures like those of healthism.

Research in yoga continues, as ideas about gender, health, and spirituality continue to change. Rather than concluding with the observation that much of yoga continues to measure itself against an ideal of athleticism—even if this is now a markedly feminine athleticism—I want to end this section by describing a very different research project in yoga, one that moves in the opposite direction: towards somatics. I have in mind the autobiography of Matthew Sanford, a paraplegic yoga teacher. The importance of Sanford’s story for my purposes has nothing to do with the stereotypical narrative in which a disabled person triumphs over their disability by achieving access to an area of embodied technique that had previously been inaccessible. Instead, I want to offer Stanford’s embodied research as a counterweight to the athleticization of yoga. In line with my epistemological emphasis, I want to emphasize the question of transmissible knowledge over that of individual ability. However, it should come as no surprise that there is a link between physical injury and somatic research. As Don Hanlon Johnson reminds us, much of the most important work in somatics was done in response to injury, illness, and disability. “Gindler had tuberculosis; F. M. Alexander had chronic laryngitis; Gerda Alexander had rheumatic fever; Moshe Feldenkrais, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Judith Aston had severe accidents leaving crippling bone fractures.”⁷⁶ The research projects these practitioners launched in response to such problems generated knowledge with application that extends far beyond their own bodies or even the healing of similar injuries.

⁷⁶ *Bone, Breath, & Gesture*, xi. For a study of how some injured and disabled men continue to strive towards the achievement of normative masculinity through sports rather than somatics, see Lenore Manderson and Susan Peake, “Men in Motion: Disability & the Performance of Masculinity,” in Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, eds., *Bodies in Commotion: Disability & Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Of course, Sanford does not present his life story in terms of the theoretical framework I have offered here. Nevertheless, towards the end of his memoir, he articulates what I consider a clearly framed research question in embodied technique, namely: “How do you interact with a body that you cannot feel directly but is conscious nonetheless?”⁷⁷ The premise of Sanford’s project is the relatively reliable but uncommon condition in which the spinal nerves have been severed so that the brain cannot send commands or receive sensations from the lower part of the body. The interaction between these two parts of the body—one connected by nerves to the brain and one not—will be the area of embodiment in which research takes place. The methodology will be Iyengar yoga. Sanford recalls working with the teacher who introduced him to yoga, many years after the accident that left him paralyzed:

After meeting me the first time, Jo called two senior teachers in the Iyengar method for advice. Their recommendations of one or two seated poses and some shoulder and arm stretches were of little help. She had already exhausted their ideas in our first session. She was left to her own devices, to her own creativity, to an uncommon openness that would guide our work together. She didn’t have to be the expert. She knew Iyengar yoga—that was clear. I was her student—that was also clear. But we explored the possibilities of yoga and paralysis together. She made me a partner in a great experiment.⁷⁸

Sanford found yoga after years of interaction with healthism and the medical model of healing. Although modern medicine had saved his life and given him a certain limited mobility, it was not

⁷⁷ Matthew Sanford, *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 2006), 185.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 187-8.

able to restore to him an organic relationship with his body. Surgeons had inserted metal into Sanford's body in order to keep him upright, but they could not tell him what to do with the bottom half of his body. At one point he asks them to amputate his legs, but they respond that he needs them as counterweight to keep his upper body upright. As a result, Sanford comes to experience his lower body as dead weight. Finally, through his encounter with yoga, Sanford begins to look for other ways to relate to his body. By the end of the book, it would no longer be correct to say that Sanford's lower body is disconnected or that he cannot move it. He can move it and is connected to it through touch, balance, and sensation, despite the absence of a link through the central nervous system. Sanford writes: "the mind is not strictly confined to a neurophysiological connection with the body. If I listen inwardly to my whole experience (both my mind's and my body's), my mind can feel into my legs."⁷⁹ Sanford's technique for doing so includes new approaches to touch and balance—both valuable ways to interact with his lower body—as well as physical sensations that do not pass through the spinal cord but through some other (chemical or biological) channel.

The embodied technique discovered by Sanford is not necessarily limited to people working from similar physiologies. In addition to its obvious implications for other paraplegic individuals, there is every reason to believe that Sanford's work on embodied technique could be generally applicable and that it constitutes research in the field of somatics. It is impossible for me to say whether the extended proprioceptive sensation discovered by Sanford is the same or different from that taught by other somatic pioneers. It is likely that Sanford has partly rediscovered technique that Feldenkrais or Bainbridge-Cohen already knew and taught. This would still be research, but in the weaker sense. On the other hand, it also seems possible that Sanford has discovered some technique that is genuinely new, constituting research in the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 193.

stronger sense. Either way, as a teacher of Iyengar yoga, Sanford clearly offers knowledge that extends beyond what Iyengar himself could have imagined: knowledge derived from his own sustained investigations of embodiment. Further, Sanford's research seems to move yoga away from its current tendency towards athleticization, and to extend its somatic dimension. It is possible to describe this research in terms of the gendered division of physical culture, as Sanford himself does when he writes that the integration of his mind and body brought with it a "deeper connection with the more vulnerable, feminine aspect" of himself.⁸⁰ However, given all the work that has gone into dismantling gender roles in this and other areas of embodied technique, it seems preferable to understand vulnerability in relation to sensation and somatics rather than to the archetypal feminine. In this sense, Sanford's work represents an alternative research pathway in yoga, away from athleticism and towards somatics.

Reinventing Physical Education

Today's landscape of globalized urban physical culture offers a dizzying array of choices for those who wish to explore the range of embodied movement and sensation. The most brazen of sellers coin new names and claim to offer new, innovative techniques drawing on a wide variety of sources. Briefly citing the websites of three "new" forms gives a clear sense of how physical culture entrepreneurs use healthism to promote their embodied practices as products:

Zumba Fitness® is the only Latin-inspired dance-fitness program that blends red-hot international music, created by Grammy Award-winning producers, and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 202. A more extended consideration of gender and embodied technique is the subject of Chapter 4.

contagious steps to form a "fitness-party" that is downright addictive. Since its inception in 2001, the Zumba program has grown to become the world's largest – and most successful – dance-fitness program with more than 12 million people of all shapes, sizes and ages taking weekly Zumba classes in over 110,000 locations across more than 125 countries.⁸¹

BOKWA ... is an intense cardiovascular workout combined with South African war dance, Capoeira, Kickboxing and Steps. It has been proven to burn a great amount of calories making it easier for weight loss goals. Through the use of fast paced extreme movement, a fun, challenging, and energizing total body workout was created.⁸²

Nia is a sensory-based movement practice that draws from martial arts, dance arts and healing arts. It empowers people of all shapes and sizes by connecting the body, mind, emotions and spirit. Classes are taken barefoot to soul-stirring music in more than 45 countries. ... Step into your own joyful journey with Nia, and positively shape the way you feel, look, think and live. Nia draws from Tai Chi, Tae Kwon Do, Aikido, jazz dance, modern dance, Duncan dance, yoga, Alexander Technique and Teachings of Moshe Feldenkrais.⁸³

As products in a capitalist marketplace, each of these allegedly new kinds of technique is framed by bold claims regarding its capacity to change lives and bodies. While “Nia” is evidently more

⁸¹ Zumba Fitness <www.zumba.com>, accessed 12/10/12.

⁸² Bokwa Fitness <www.bokwafitness.com>, accessed 12/10/12.

⁸³ Nia Now <www.nianow.com/practice>, accessed 12/10/12.

influenced by somatics—citing healing rather than health, welcoming “people of all shapes and sizes,” and listing Alexander and Feldenkrais among its sources—all three accept the basic premises of healthism, offering individuals a packaged and consumable way to alter themselves through movement. From an epistemological perspective, the question is to what extent these products embody knowledge, in the form of transmissible technique, rather than non-transmissible spectacle. How rigorous are these explorations in physical culture? How different are they from each other and from the practices on which they draw? To what extent are these really new areas of technique rather than simply efforts to rebrand and repackage, say, the aerobics of the 1980s? Which areas of embodied technique do they each really explore, and which do they forget or purposefully ignore?

In this final section, I propose to reconsider physical education in light of today’s continually expanding landscape of physical culture. In keeping with the epistemological emphasis I have maintained throughout, I will argue that physical education—as a kind of education—cannot be measured in terms of health, fitness, or ability. Rather than understanding physical education as a means to the acquisition of skills or maintenance of health, we should see it as a critical and embodied introduction to physical culture. This suggests that the mandate of physical education is vastly greater, more challenging, and more important than is commonly assumed. What if we counted physical culture as one of the major areas of knowledge in which schools prepare children for adulthood, alongside literacy and math, the humanities and the sciences? With this remit, physical education would be obligated offer a curriculum that is both broad and deep, introducing students to a wide range of movement-based technique while also helping them understand what it means to explore a more narrowly framed area in greater depth.

To accomplish this, physical education or “PE” must rediscover its connections to other disciplines that work through embodied technique.

In my high school, the division was stark between “health” and physical education, on the one hand, and dance and theatre on the other.⁸⁴ Health and PE classes were taught by the same teachers, the former in classrooms and the latter in a large gym or fieldhouse, where we engaged in competitive sports like tennis or swimming, and in athletic training such as running and calisthenics. Dance and acting took place in a different building, the former in a studio with ballet barres, mirrors, and wooden floor, the latter in a “black box” theatre studio. At the time it seemed to me that these two universes had nothing in common. They involved completely different kinds of physical and social effort. Moreover, they seemed to be intended for different types of people, different economic classes, different genders and sexualities. I felt intimidated by the men involved in sports and never dreamed of playing on a team. In contrast, men were a minority in the dance and theatre world, where I devoted countless hours to afterschool rehearsal for theatrical productions. Health and PE classes were jokes to me, while I took acting—and, to a lesser extent, dance—more seriously than anything else. It did not occur to me then that, in contrast to all the other classes I took, both PE and acting/dance involved the use of my entire body. Both PE and performance classes relied less on reading, writing, and discussion than on embodied engagement. Looking back, it seems obvious that this set them apart from every other subject: math, science, literature, languages, etc. At the time, however, their differences were so great that I scarcely noticed their similarities.

Scholars of physical education and human movement studies have long grappled with issues of gender, race, class, and ability, in some cases calling for a reexamination of physical education that would better take into account the insights of other fields into cultural diversity,

⁸⁴ I attended Cambridge Rindge and Latin, a large public high school in Cambridge, MA, in the 1990s.

physiological difference, social justice, and embodiment. Yet perhaps not surprisingly, change has been slower to arrive than to theorize, a point made by several authors in the edited collection *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health*.⁸⁵ Richard Tinning writes:

[N]otwithstanding what we know as a result of our theorising and research about how certain cultural practices contribute to limited, restricted or oppressive bodily practices, we have seen little significant systemic change in such practices. While acknowledging that some young people have positive and healthful attitudes to their bodies, many young people still graduate from our schools oppressed by the tyranny of the cult of the body.⁸⁶

Healthist ideology and lack of political will are not the only obstacles to transforming physical education, as Chris Shilling points out in his foreword to this volume. While sports pedagogy and human movement studies have only recently begun to seriously engage with cultural critique, sociology of education has been equally guilty of a “neglect of the body” and an underestimation of the importance of embodiment in schooling.⁸⁷ As a result, critical ideas that have been hotly debated in the contexts of English composition or math pedagogy are only now coming to the fore in physical education.

⁸⁵ John Evans, Brian Davies, and Jan Wright, eds., *Body Knowledge and Control* (New York: Routledge, 2004). I have found little scholarly work that deals with physical education in the United States from a critical perspective. The cited works are largely applicable to this country despite their origins in Britain and Australia.

⁸⁶ Richard Tinning, “Conclusion: Ruminations on body knowledge and control and the spaces for hope and happening,” in Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, 219.

⁸⁷ Chris Shilling, “Foreword: Educating bodies: schooling and the constitution of society,” in Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, xv.

The amount of embodied technique transmitted both explicitly and implicitly through the educational system is enormous. According to Shilling, one 1969 report on nursery school children revealed that “children experienced as many as thirty physical constraints on their behaviour in each hour, a figure which translates into thousands of corrections over a single year.”⁸⁸ In most classes, embodied technique goes unmarked. Children learn to sit at desks and contain their movement in order to focus on what is understood as the content of the lesson at hand. In physical education, however, embodied technique is part of this explicit content. Indeed, physical education may be society’s only mandatory and explicit curriculum of embodied technique. What kinds of technique does it involve, and according to what policies are its curricula developed and implemented? How might we go about “deconstructing the ways in which common sense categories, such as the ‘good’ and ‘able’ child, ‘intelligence,’ ‘physical ability,’ ‘skill,’ ‘health,’ ‘fitness,’ and ‘educability’ are generated and endorsed”—not just in theory but in practice?⁸⁹ Because embodied technique constitutes knowledge in its own right, it will not be enough to study “the relation between the personal and the social body” as “a relation of power” marked by “ethnicities, genders, histories, ideologies, religions, institutions, and politics,” as sociologists of physical culture do.⁹⁰ Although such scholarly research is essential, new pedagogies of physical education can only be developed through embodied research.

One of the key insights of recent work on physical education is that the training of bodies extends beyond “classroom relationships between teachers and taught” to include a complex network of social relations, including those “between parent/guardians and child, doctor and

⁸⁸ Ibid., xvi.

⁸⁹ Evans and Davies, “Pedagogy, symbolic control, identity and health,” in Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, 7-8.

⁹⁰ Hargreaves and Vertinsky, *Physical Culture, Power, and the Body*, 2.

patient, counsellor and client, coach and player.”⁹¹ The physical technique one learns in PE class may align with or may contradict that encountered at home, at the doctor’s office, or on the sports field after school. In PE classes, specialized technique and the technique of everyday life overlap in potentially powerful ways. In fact, as I will argue in the following chapters, technique like that of yoga, ballet, or soccer is only “specialized” to the extent that it remains isolated from the rest of life. Insofar as such technique becomes widely taught in elementary and secondary schools, it becomes part of the everyday technique of society. If just about “everyone” in the United States knows how to do jumping jacks and push-ups—even those who cannot perform this technique themselves—this is because these exercises are part of our basic curriculum of physical education. Although “physical culture” usually refers to the specialized practices of those who pursue athletics into adulthood, the embodied technique we all encounter in school is no less important. In fact, as a major contributor to the technique of everyday life, physical education may be more culturally and politically significant than its more visible counterparts in the world of professional sports and athletics. Thus, the rise of athletics may result as much from changes in the common curriculum of physical education as from the spectacular performances of professional athletes, even if the latter provide an important context for the former.

As a PE educator who has been deeply influenced by feminism and critical pedagogy, Richard Tinning attempts to reevaluate the field of human movement studies “by moving outside the comfort zone afforded by the sub-culture of the active mesomorph.”⁹² This led him to argue some decades ago that “issues relating to gender equity, equality of opportunity, catering for diversity, and challenging unjust practices such as motor elitism, should be an integral part of

⁹¹ Evans and Davies, “Endnote,” in Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, 209.

⁹² Tinning, *Pedagogy and Human Movement*, 114. The word “mesomorph” refers to the body type idealized by contemporary healthism. “Mesomorphism as ideology accepts muscularity and slimness as ‘good’ and assumes that such a body shape actually represents control, efficiency, discipline and health” (113). Tinning also links healthism and mesomorphism with compulsory heterosexuality and with standardized gender roles.

PE” and to advocate “for PE to problematize knowledge construction, legitimation and dissemination, and to critically engage its own ideology, power and culture.”⁹³ Tinning’s focus on pedagogy is especially relevant to my discussion here, as is his acknowledgement throughout *Pedagogy and Human Movement* that pedagogy works both formally and informally and that there is a “complex relationship between education and socialization.”⁹⁴ Tinning recognizes that human movement studies, as an academic field, holds no monopoly on the research and teaching of physical culture and health. As noted above, ideas about health and what is healthy are major focuses of public media, advertising, business, government, nonprofits, medicine, and many other institutions. In this context, it seems crucial that physical education teachers and researchers recognize their unique position in this field and situate themselves as experts who can provide alternative knowledge of embodied technique.

In his overview of Australian physical education, Tinning describes the appearance and subsequent marginalization of an approach called “movement education” that bore considerable resemblance to somatics.⁹⁵ Following the work of Rudolf Laban, movement education emphasized “techniques of ‘individualization’ and ‘problem solving,’” asking students to explore and experiment with movement rather than to drill particular forms.⁹⁶ Instructors in this technique did not give physical demonstrations but instead asked students to respond to verbal cues in their own ways. However, during the 1970s, this alternative approach was increasingly marginalized, giving way to “more scientifically focused forms of PE (including fitness training

⁹³ Ibid., 198. Tinning cites his own work going back to dating back to 1985.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12. Tinning draws this key insight from the work of sociologist Basil Bernstein, whose writings also inform Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*. For a comparison between Bernstein’s “code” and Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus,” see Richard Harker and Stephen A. May, “Code and Habitus: Comparing the Accounts of Bernstein and Bourdieu,” in *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 14.2 (1993): 169-78.

⁹⁵ Tinning, *Pedagogy and Human Movement*, 50. Tinning offers the following chronology of approaches to physical education in Australia since 1900: Swedish gymnastics; movement education; health related fitness; fundamental motor skills; sport education; Teaching Games for Understanding; and Game Sense.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 54-56.

and circuit training) on one side, and to sports and sports skills on the other.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, as Tinning explains, “This marginalization had a strong gendered dimension to it since movement education was very much (but not solely) the preserve of women PE teachers and the science and sports focus were largely championed by men.” Here again, the biopolitics of healthism effectively worked to present athletic technique, which was once considered inappropriate for women, as a universal ideal, while excluding somatic technique from the pedagogy of physical education. Tinning mocks the contemporary fascination with hyper-masculine athletics, which has now reached the point where many “personal trainers have turned to the military to borrow pedagogical methods,” leading to newly popular “boot camp” sessions in which “recruits are ‘motivated’ by verbal abuse and physical punishment.”⁹⁸ In this climate, it seems all the more important to reinstate somatic and other alternative technique as part of society’s basic curriculum in physical culture.

For Tinning, the responsibility of sport pedagogy and human movement studies as scholarly fields is to “connect the dots” between “all pedagogical work that is done relating to the various orientations of our field—between physical activity, the body, and health.”⁹⁹ In laying groundwork for such a project, however, Tinning touches only briefly upon dance and somatics as neighboring areas of embodied technique and physical education. He mentions dance, taiji, yoga, bodywork, Feldenkrais, and Alexander Technique, and rightly points out that “few if any of these alternative thinkers appear on the [Human Movement Studies] reading lists in most Western universities.”¹⁰⁰ Yet these names also do not appear in Tinning’s own initial definition of the field of human movement studies, which includes “motor control, exercise

⁹⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 30; 118-19.

physiology, sociology of sport, biomechanics, history of sport, physical activity and health, sport pedagogy, sports coaching, sports management and sport philosophy.”¹⁰¹ Even here, dance and somatics remain on the sidelines, not yet truly integrated into the analysis of physical education.

Perhaps because this integration has not yet been fully imagined, even by Tinning, he finds little in the way of serious alternatives to current physical education methods, despite ample research indicating their lack of success. Tinning laments:

If ... you want to teach a positive attitude to physical activity (a disposition for a lifetime of participation) then what pedagogy research would you draw on? The answer is that there is none. None that is specific that is. What we have is plenty of research to show that many kids are turned off PE and sport because of the experiences they have in PE and sports classes.¹⁰²

In *Pedagogy and Human Movement*, Tinning searches for the “seeds of a new paradigm for thinking about the human body” and hopes that the growth of such seeds may provoke a radical transformation in physical education. I would argue that such seeds already exist in abundance, in the embodied technique of dance, somatics, martial arts, and yoga—not to mention that of ritual, theatre, therapy, and other fields. As experts in embodied technique, it is the responsibility of educators and researchers in physical culture to develop models of physical education that do not assume the universality of the “health and fitness” framework; that reintegrate movement education, dance, somatics, and other “feminine” approaches to movement; and that present the field of embodied technique as diverse and continually in development. Teaching yoga to school

¹⁰¹ Ibid., xi.

¹⁰² Ibid., 205.

children, as Eric Swan suggests, may or may not be a step in this direction, depending on whether “yoga” becomes a doorway to alternative technique or is simply reabsorbed into healthist ideology.¹⁰³ In pushing for alternative approaches to physical education, we should avoid naïvely championing a particular area of embodied technique as if it alone provided the answer. It may be, for example, that contemporary physical education would benefit from a shift towards somatics, but we should be careful not to romanticize this argument. As embodied technique, somatics is not inherently ethical or wise.¹⁰⁴ If promoting somatics in today’s world has ethical or political value, that is only because of the current dominance of healthism and athletics and the urgent need to expand our understanding of embodiment.

Drawing on the prior work of Tinning among others, Pirrko Markula points to the difficulties of bringing critical pedagogy to bear on physical education.¹⁰⁵ Too often, she writes, critical pedagogy deems “bodily practices” as “unworthy of critical reflection” and “unlikely agents of change.”¹⁰⁶ I would add that an emphasis on “critical thinking” as the key to developing alternative politics makes embodied technique seem like a mere byproduct of ideology rather than a site of ongoing research in its own right. I would suggest instead that we place the fields of critical theory and critical pedagogy alongside those of embodied technique, laying them side by side as contiguous but distinct areas of knowledge. It may then be possible to trace connections between all these fields, without dividing them *a priori* into categories like theory and practice or sports and arts. Markula asks: “Will it be possible to develop exercise

¹⁰³ Eric Swan, “My Guidance Counselor Always Said I’d be a Great Yoga Student,” in Swan, *Yoga: Philosophy for Everyone*.

¹⁰⁴ See Don Hanlon Johnson’s introduction to *Bone, Breath, & Gesture* for a discussion of somatics that naïvely dismisses the embodied knowledge at work in competitive sports and athletics. In the next chapter, I address a similar problem in the writing of Phillip Zarrilli.

¹⁰⁵ Pirrko Markula, “Affect[ing] Bodies: Performative Pedagogy of Pilates,” in *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1.3 (2008): 381-408.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 389. See also Tinning’s observation that there has been a gradual reduction in practical training in Human Movement Studies degree programs, replacing embodied training with theoretical work (Tinning, *Pedagogy and Human Movement*, 104).

practices informed by social theory?”¹⁰⁷ I would argue that not only is embodied technique continually developed in response to social theory, but theory of all kinds is informed by embodied technique. As fields of knowledge, there is no limit to the degree of interaction and influence that may occur between the many fields that constitute our epistemic inheritance.

Markula reminds us that simply giving “theoretical talks to the fitness instructors” on topics related to gender, healthism, and embodiment will not necessarily help them transform their pedagogies.¹⁰⁸ Many of those Markula interviewed “were reluctant to promote the ideal body, but lacked guidance of how to change their practices accordingly.”¹⁰⁹ As I have argued, the gap between a sociological critique of healthism and the implementation of new pedagogical, physical, somatic, sensory, and other embodied technique can only be filled by embodied research. Too often, such research is considered secondary to the discourse that surrounds it. It is seen as mere implementation rather than as the discovery of new possibilities in the endlessly complex materiality of human embodiment. I do not imagine that recognizing physical culture as a field of knowledge within the larger field of embodied technique will immediately serve to effect a transformation of technique in high school gyms or in yoga studios across the United States. However, there can be no serious resistance to the discourses of health and healthism until an alternative paradigm is put forward. My theory of embodied technique as knowledge is an attempt to provide epistemological foundations for such an alternative.

¹⁰⁷ Markula, “Affect[ing] Bodies,” 390. See also Michael Gard on the need to come up with “a credible alternative vision for physical education,” in “An elephant in the room and a bridge too far, or physical education and the ‘obesity epidemic,’” in Evans et al., *Body Knowledge and Control*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ Markula, “Affect[ing] Bodies,” 398.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE:
ACTING, PERCEPTION, AND PERFORMING ARTS

Acting is often understood as a component of theatre. This is not surprising, since one of the most common goals in the implementation of acting technique is to portray a character or role within a publicly presented theatre piece. However, there are other angles from which acting can and should be studied. Viewed from an epistemological perspective, acting technique is an area of knowledge that extends beyond theatre and overlaps with many other areas, including those more often classified as dance, ritual, therapy, and physical culture. The rise of “actor training” in Europe and the United States during the twentieth century owes enormous debts to artists and practitioners in these and other fields.¹ Sometimes these debts are acknowledged, but not always in ways that uphold their epistemological significance. In fact, the practices that take place under the name “actor training” do far more than simply train actors. In addition to providing professional and vocational training, they are sites of valuable experience and education in their own right. It is in this sense that actor training, as Alison Hodge has suggested, “is arguably the most important development in modern Western theatre making.”² Yet the expansion of actor training in the twentieth century can also be seen as a long-term, interdisciplinary, transnational research project in embodied technique. Understood in this way, acting technique is a large and diverse field of knowledge that overlaps significantly with theatre and performing arts but which is not restricted to those contexts.

¹ The explosive growth of actor training is by no means limited to Europe and the United States, nor is the influence of artists like Stanislavski and Grotowski, whose work is discussed here. Issues of translation and canonization prevent me from taking a more global perspective on actor training in the present work, but I hope to do so in the future.

² Alison Hodge, *Actor Training* (New York: Routledge, 2010), xviii.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate acting technique and actor training within a broader epistemological context. In the first section, I examine the rise of “actor training” as a concept and explore both its advantages and its limitations. Ultimately, I argue that training is only one part of what has made acting technique such a dynamic field in the past century, and that it is misleading to focus on training at the expense of research in this field. I survey recent works on the subject and attempt to reframe the discussion of acting technique so that it involves both training and research. This framework provides the basis for the following two sections, in which I analyze the work of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) and Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999).³ As in the previous chapter, my goal is to provide well-documented and paradigmatic examples of research in embodied technique, here by reexamining the careers of these two men through an epistemological lens. I assess their work not in terms of its popularity and influence but in terms of the contributions they made to knowledge in the field of acting technique. In the final section, I turn my attention to the present and future of acting, asking what it could mean to cultivate a research culture in acting technique, how this would differ from the current situation in the United States, and what the political implications of such a shift might be.

Stanislavski and Grotowski are obviously not the only examples of sustained, focused, and highly influential research in the performing arts during the twentieth century. A survey of the chapters in Alison Hodge’s *Actor Training* provides the names of many artists whose work could also serve as examples of research in acting technique. In addition to Stanislavski and Grotowski, these include Meyerhold, Copeau, Chekhov, Saint-Denis, Knebel, Brecht, Littlewood, Strasberg, Adler, Meisner, Chaikin, Brook, Lecoq, Pagneux, Gaulier, Barba, Mnouchkine, Staniewski, Bogart, and Boal—to say nothing of those whose work is classified as

³ I follow Jean Benedetti in the spelling of Stanislavski’s name. However, I retain “Stanislavsky” in citations where this spelling is used.

dance, performance art, or drama therapy, and who for that reason rarely appear under the banner of “actor training” even when there is significant overlap at the level of technique.⁴ I have chosen Stanislavski and Grotowski as central examples here because of their unassailable yet still hotly debated positions in theatre and performance studies, and also because my own background and ongoing embodied practice are particularly indebted to their work.

Both Stanislavski and Grotowski made use of the word “technique,” although as we will see they had different relationships to it, due in part to how the connotations of the technical changed—as I showed in Chapter 1—from early to late twentieth-century usage. Furthermore, because their work is canonical, revisiting it provides a stringent test for the epistemological theory of technique I have been developing. If Stanislavski and Grotowski were indeed conducting “research,” as has often been asserted, what were their methods and methodologies? What were the outcomes of this research, in terms of new knowledge, and how should these outcomes be analyzed and assessed? How can the research outcomes of Stanislavski and Grotowski be distinguished from their artistic success, and is drawing such a distinction useful or productive? Both Stanislavski and Grotowski continue to be topics of present-day discussion and even controversy, especially when it comes to the issues of naming and lineage, which I have already considered in the context of modern yoga. In this respect as well as others, I believe the notion of research in embodied technique can shed light on their work and legacies, and help us understand how the technique of acting fits into the larger contexts of performing arts and embodied technique more generally.

⁴ I am thinking of artists and practitioners like Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Rudolf von Laban, Jacob Moreno, Marina Abramovic, and the pioneers of somatic bodywork mentioned in the previous chapter, all of whom developed embodied technique that borders on that of acting, even if their work is rarely seen in this light.

Actor Training and Acting Technique

The past two decades have witnessed a slew of scholarly publications on the topic of acting and performance. Unlike the countless trade paperbacks sold to aspiring actors, these works do not offer how-to guides or extol the virtues of a particular approach or school. Instead, they aim to provide a sense of the depth and breadth of acting, and perhaps also to work against the mainstream assumption that the greatest examples of acting are to be found in Hollywood. The most cited of these volumes is probably Hodge's *Actor Training*, which offers multiple perspectives on key innovators in twentieth-century actor training, beginning with Stanislavski. Phillip Zarrilli's *Acting (Re)Considered* and David Krasner's *Method Acting Reconsidered* are more theoretically oriented, with chapters that focus on specific problems and theories of acting rather than individual practitioners.⁵ They also serve as complementary volumes arguing against and for "Method" acting respectively. Ian Watson's *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures* takes a more eclectic, partly geographical perspective, while Nicole Potter's *Movement for Actors* and Arthur Bartow's *Training of the American Actor* offer summaries of current approaches, from the Decroux-influenced teaching of Kari Margolis to David Mamet and William H. Macy's "Practical Aesthetics."⁶ Mark Evans's *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*, Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud's *The Politics of American Actor Training*, and Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento's *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor's Work* all grapple with issues of cultural politics, including intersections between actor training and gender, race,

⁵ Phillip B. Zarrilli, ed., *Acting (Re)Considered* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

⁶ Ian Watson, ed., *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001); Nicole Potter, ed., *Movement for Actors* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002); Arthur Bartow, ed., *Training of the American Actor* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006). Potter emphasizes movement while Bartow seems to privilege the approaches offered at New York University's Experimental Theatre Wing. For contemporary perspectives on dance training, see Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettel-Fiol, eds., *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

nationality, sexuality, and (dis)ability.⁷ Ross W. Prior's *Teaching Actors: Knowledge Transfer in Actor Training* looks at the institutionalized pedagogy of acting in Britain and Australia, with passing reference to the United States.⁸ Finally, two recent monographs attempt to synthesize some of these conversations with theories of embodiment via a phenomenological approach. Phillip Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* and John Matthews's *Training for Performance: A Meta-Disciplinary Account* offer new theoretical frameworks for the analysis of acting and actor training, drawing on a variety of sources, including some that I have cited in previous chapters.⁹

From these works, little consensus emerges on how to describe, analyze, or assess the work of actors. Even the words used to refer to what actors do remain ambiguous and undertheorized. Did Stanislavsky create a "System," a "pedagogy," or an "approach" to acting? Did those who studied with him, like Richard Boleslavsky or Maria Knebel, continue his "tradition" or merely pass along his "exercises"? What is the relationship between Stanislavski's "System" and Strasberg's "Method" acting, and what is the difference between one "version" or "brand" of Method Acting and another?¹⁰ Are the actors of Odin Teatret united by common "principles" or by common "techniques," and what is the difference?¹¹ What is an "exercise," and do exercises teach a particular "style" of acting or help develop an actor's overall "craft"? In the works cited, a seemingly endless list of apparent synonyms unfolds to describe differences

⁷ Mark Evans, *Movement Training for the Modern Actor* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud, eds. *The Politics of American Actor Training* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor's Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2009). These works and issues are further discussed in the last section of this chapter.

⁸ Ross Prior, *Teaching Actors: Knowledge Transfer in Actor Training* (Chicago: Intellect, 2012).

⁹ Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2009); John Matthews, *Training for Performance: A Meta-Disciplinary Account* (London: Methuen, 2011). Cognitive science is a recurring interest in many recent attempts to theorize acting. See also Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁰ David Krasner, "Strasberg, Adler and Meisner: Method Acting," in *Actor Training*, 159-60.

¹¹ Ian Watson, "Training with Eugenio Barba: Acting Principles, the Pre-Expressive and 'Personal Temperature,'" in *Actor Training*, 249.

and similarities between actors: *way, approach, art, brand, convention, exercise, craft, discipline, form, method, mode, model, pedagogy, principle, procedure, process, procedure, protocol, regime, school, strategy, style, system, tool, type, training, version, work, etc...* Since authors rarely define these terms in relation to each other, it is difficult to know when they are being used interchangeably and when they point to important distinctions.¹² Some of these words, like *protocol* or *regime*, have Foucauldian connotations. Others, like *craft* or *style*, recall earlier periods and eras and their quite different practices of theatrical production. Words like *method* and *model* may be read as quasi-scientific. *School* and *pedagogy* refer to lineage and teaching, while *convention* evokes social constructionism and semiotics. Of all these, *approach* is perhaps the most useful because it is so vague, while *way*—as previously mentioned—comes closest to my notion of technique as branching pathways through materiality. Who can deny that there are many different “approaches” to acting or “ways” to act? But what constitutes an approach to acting? How many “ways” are there? And how do these ways and approaches relate to styles, brands, methods, or pedagogies?

Lacking an epistemological perspective, contemporary teachers and practitioners of acting—like their counterparts in yoga—are faced with a stark choice: to market themselves either as torch-bearers of unchanging tradition or inventors of a hot new Method, perhaps worthy of being legally trademarked.¹³ Many of the authors in Hodge’s *Actor Training* face a similar issue as they attempt to trace the legacies and influence of individual directors and teachers,

¹² Take, for example, the following apparently simple statement by Rhonda Blair: “I use ‘Method’ to include all the major American approaches to acting based in Stanislavsky’s fundamental principles and strategies. Though this lacks subtlety, the term allows us to place these related approaches together and refers explicitly to two of the main forms, Stanislavsky’s method of physical actions and Strasberg’s Method.” (Krasner, *Method Acting Reconsidered*, 217n1.) In this short passage, Blair makes use of the following terms: *approach, principle, strategy, form, and method*. Are these synonyms? If not, how should we understand the differences between them?

¹³ Kari Margolis claims trademark status for her method in “An Introduction to Margolis Method™: A Dynamic Physical Approach to Actor Training,” in Potter, *Movement for Actors*. Richard Schechner’s Rasaboxes has also received legal trademark status.

many of whom explicitly denied the existence of any system that might be propagated in their name. As Stanislavski paradoxically asserted: “The System is a handbook, not a philosophy. ... There is no System.”¹⁴ Joan Littlewood “denied the existence of any method or way of working to a system,” while Joseph Chaikin expressed “a resistance towards describing exercises, and a resistance to ‘recipe-books’ that document exercises.”¹⁵ Jerzy Grotowski “became increasingly wary about providing descriptions of specific physical and vocal exercises, as he observed a tendency to fetishise such techniques.”¹⁶ Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux, and Philippe Gaulier “would strenuously deny that their teaching practice represents a ‘method,’ and most certainly would be dismayed to have their work yoked together in a common ‘system’ or ‘technique.’”¹⁷ These individuals, each of whom is considered to have made an important contribution to the field of actor training, are united in their explicit rejection of the idea that acting can be systematized. Their writing reveals an acute sense of caution about how quickly the articulation of an embodied practice may be reduced to the status of recipe. Rather than see the most superficial aspects of their work neatly packaged and sold, many artists prefer to underestimate the transmissibility of what they discovered through long-term practice.

At its most extreme, such denials of system and method can lead to a dichotomy in which training and the transmission of knowledge are radically divorced from a reified quality of “presence” in the actor that cannot be traced to any such process. It then becomes possible to speak about the specific exercises or “techniques” of renowned individual artists and ensembles,

¹⁴ Cited in Sharon Marie Carnicke, “Stanislavsky’s System: Pathways for the Actor,” in *Actor Training*, 23.

¹⁵ Clive Barker, “Joan Littlewood,” in *Actor Training*, 130; Dorinda Hulton, “Joseph Chaikin and Aspects of Actor Training: Possibilities Rendered Present,” in *Actor Training*, 168.

¹⁶ Lisa Wolford, “Grotowski’s Vision of the Actor: The Search for Contact,” in *Actor Training*, 201.

¹⁷ Simon Murray, “Jacques Lecoq, Monika Pagneux and Philippe Gaulier: Training for Play, Lightness and Disobedience,” in *Actor Training*, 215.

while maintaining that these have little to do with what makes an actor great. In her introduction to *Actor Training*, Hodge summarizes Jane Goodall and Erika Fischer-Lichte to this effect:

Jane Goodall cites two distinctive definitions [of presence]: firstly, presence as an intrinsic, mysterious, essential “inner power being radiated outwards” by the actor and, secondly, presence as constructed through skills and techniques that actors can acquire through training. Erika Fischer-Lichte also distinguishes between the innate “sheer presence” of the actor’s phenomenal body and the actor’s active ability “to command both space and the audience’s attention” through a “mastery of certain techniques and practices to which the spectators respond.”¹⁸

These theories, as summarized by Hodge, use what I have called the trope of “more than” to posit a separation between technique and that which transcends it. They suggest not only that practice exceeds technique—as I argued in Chapter 1—but that there is a particular zone of practice, a kind of magical excess, that is fundamentally inaccessible to technique. Nicholas Ridout takes the same position when he writes, “talent is an elusive quality that cannot be taught or learned. It seems to exist separately from skill, technique, and knowledge.”¹⁹ One of the goals of this chapter is to argue against these models in which talent or presence is divorced from technique and knowledge. I believe that much of what is called “natural talent” or that “special something” is very much part of the field of embodied technique as I have defined it.

¹⁸ Hodge, *Actor Training*, xxii. The original sources are given as follows: Jane Goodall, *Stage Presence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 8; and Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 96. See also Fischer-Lichte’s elaboration of three different concepts of presence, which she calls weak, strong, and radical (94-99).

¹⁹ Cited in Prior, *Teaching Actors*, 21.

Furthermore, the genuine, practical, pedagogical question of what can be taught is far more interesting than the rhetoric of the unteachable.

Today, actors and acting teachers continue to struggle with the question of what in acting is transmissible. Carol Martin and Henry Bial have identified Bertolt Brecht as one of the first theorists of theatre to be struck by the recognition of technique as “transportable” across national boundaries, and many actors today use the term when talking about their own work.²⁰ However, technique has not become a keyword in the theorization of acting or been put forward as an important conceptual issue.²¹ It is not explicitly theorized in any of the works cited above. Instead, “training” has come into vogue as one of the primary concepts through which different approaches to acting may be compared. This is evident in the titles of many of these works, where we find frequent references to actor training, performer training, and physical training for actors. As John Matthews observes in *Training for Performance*, “training” (like performance) has become a common term, not only in theatre but also in education and professional development more generally. Moving between disciplines, training now carries a “generic” meaning, so that “what constitutes training has little to do with the specificity of each exercise, but more to do with something about exercising itself.”²² Since training takes place in many different fields, it cannot be defined by reference to its content in any of those fields. I agree with this and with Matthews’s assertion that another word is needed “to describe that which exists in,

²⁰ Carol Martin and Henry Bial, “Introduction,” in *Brecht Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5; and see Brecht’s own comment that “technique is international” (21). For comments from several well-known British actors on the subject of technique, see Prior, *Teaching Actors*, 29-32.

²¹ A new annual publication *Emergency INDEX*, eds. Yelena Gluzman and Matvei Yankelevich (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2012), tracks the language artists use to describe their own performances. It has no index entry for technique. Similarly, Paul Allain and Jen Harvie’s *Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2006) has no entry for technique in its section on “Concepts and practices.” A rare exception to this rule, cited in Chapter 1, is Robert P. Crease and John Lutterbie’s “Technique,” in David Krasner and David Z. Saltz, eds., *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006): 160-79.

²² Matthews, *Training for Performance*, 2-3; 5.

on, over and beyond the existences of training.”²³ In the theoretical framework proposed here, that word is technique. Matthews, for his part, coins the term “askeology” to describe the “meta-disciplinary” study of training across multiple fields. Under this rubric, Matthews analyzes four dimensions of training: vocation, obedience, formation, and automatization—each of which has relevance to my discussion of embodied technique.²⁴ Matthews does not, however, make what I consider to be the fundamental epistemological point, namely that training involves the transmission of knowledge.

It is worthwhile to ask how the concept of training came to dominate the analysis of acting while technique largely fell by the wayside, becoming one of many terms used in these discussions but rarely a key concept or theoretical touchstone in itself. Stanislavski worked in a time when the attitude towards technique was largely positive. (In the quotation above, it is a “philosophy” of acting that Stanislavski rejects, not a technique.) At that time, philosophers had yet to draw connections between technology, war, and the mechanization or deadening of the human spirit. Many still believed that science held the solution to long-standing social problems. For Stanislavski, then, the difference between what he was doing and what other actors and directors did was not a matter of technique versus its transcendence but of discovering new and better technique. Throughout *An Actor’s Work*, he repeatedly refers to “our technique” or “our psychotechnique” as distinct from that which existed previously.²⁵ There is a passage in Sharon Marie Carnicke’s *Stanislavsky in Focus* in which Stanislavski rails against actors who “only know how to report a role from the stage, e.g., to recite it by heart, grammatically” in a kind of “mechanical gymnastics.”²⁶ Carnicke identifies this as “technical acting” performed by “mere

²³ Ibid., 11.

²⁴ Matthews’s keen observations on automatization and “automaticity” were discussed in Chapter 1.

²⁵ Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁶ Cited in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 113.

technicians,” but as far as I can tell Stanislavski did not use the word technique in this sense. For Stanislavski, rather, the issue was finding the best or most effective technique through a research that he likened to scientific research and which he hoped would enable a similar kind of forward progress in acting.²⁷

As I have argued, the idea that technique itself is dangerous and potentially deadening is a later development, linked to an increasing sense of alarm concerning the technologization of society. In the post-war writings of Martin Heidegger, the link between technique and technology renders the former suspect, an accomplice to the loss of human freedom and creativity in a technological age.²⁸ Later on, in 1978, William Barrett argued against the “illusion of technique” with reference to Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey, all of whom in different ways understood the technical as dangerously reductive of humanity and nature.²⁹ Throughout the middle part of the twentieth century, technique gradually accrued double-edged connotations via its association with technology: on the one hand, enabling; on the other, deadening. By the 1970s, this meaning was firmly in place, so that it is not surprising to find Eugenio Barba dismissing technique in 1972, using terms that closely resemble Barrett’s more philosophical treatment of several years later:

In the beginning, we had a programme of set exercises that we taught everyone and that everyone had to follow. These were exercises of every kind, taken from ballet, mime, pure gymnastics, Hatha Yoga and acrobatics. ... In the beginning of our activity we too believed in the ‘myth of technique,’ something which it was

²⁷ See Toporkov’s memoir, cited extensively below, for examples of this scientific metaphor and the significance attached to it. But see also Jean Benedetti’s note, also discussed below, on the role of Soviet political context in Stanislavski’s use of scientific language to describe his work.

²⁸ See Chapter 1.

²⁹ William Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978).

possible to acquire, to possess... This faith in technique as a sort of magic power which could render the actor invulnerable, guided us also in the domain of the voice. ... For a long time the ‘myth of technique’ nourished our work. Then gradually it brought me to a situation of doubt. I had to admit that the argument for technique was a rationalization, a pragmatic blackmail—if you do this, you obtain that—which I used to make others accept my way of working...³⁰

Barba evokes a narrative that has now become familiar, even cliché: One begins with technique and follows it to a certain point, after which it must be abandoned lest it become stultifying and restrictive. Barba revealingly dismisses yoga, ballet, mime, and gymnastics as stepping stones on the way to a different approach that will be “more than” just technique. For Barba, the “argument for technique” was based not just on error, but on a kind of “blackmail”—a lie about the reliability of the world. However, it is crucial to realize that what Barba rejects here is not technique itself but the myth of technique: the idea that technique has a deterministic relationship to practice so that “if you do this, you obtain that.” Barba’s rejection of the myth of technique reveals much about the way in which technique has come to connote a danger as well as a promise. At the same time, Barba’s emphasis on training has played a significant role in the expansion of that term to the point where it is now a central concept for theorizing acting.

It is not uncommon today to encounter the idea that training is “more than” just technique.³¹ This is heavily ironic, given that training has much stronger and deeper associations

³⁰ Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (Aberystwyth, UK: Black Mountain Press, 1999), 80-84. First published in *The Drama Review* 53 (1972). Part of this essay is also reproduced in Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, eds., *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 244-46.

³¹ Mark Evans and Simon Murray write: “training *must ultimately aim* to transcend mere demonstration of technique.” Elsewhere on the same page, they affirm, “training *is inevitably* more than just the acquisition of technique.” A conceptual sleight-of-hand is at work here, for both statements cannot be true. Does training

with mechanical repetition and externally imposed discipline than does technique. As Simon Shepherd recently pointed out, “The word ‘training’ only started to become associated with the activity of education in the early to middle sixteenth century,” and its “application to theatre and music came pretty late in the history of training.”³² Prior to this shift, training was primarily a military concept “associated not only with transmitting skill and technique but also with creating coherent group entities that are outside the traditional structure of relationships.”³³ Derived etymologically from a French verb meaning to “pull” or “drag,” training was originally associated with external constraints and with forces that act upon a passive object, as in a train of wagons or railroad cars.³⁴ Technique, on the other hand, carries an epistemological meaning dating back to Aristotle’s *techne*, or practical knowledge, and has only acquired the connotation of mechanicity within the past hundred years, thanks to the colossal rise of the cognate word, *technology*. If we are looking for a term with which to describe the knowledge content of acting—that which can be learned and transmitted from one actor to another—as well as the grounds on which different approaches to acting might be compared, “technique” is far more versatile and rich a concept than “training.” Rather than conceiving of training as “more than” technique, I suggest that we rethink technique as a vast territory of knowledge that is sometimes transmitted through training.

From an epistemological perspective, we could say that training refers to any process through which existing knowledge is intentionally inculcated and absorbed. In this sense, it may refer to a wide variety of practices including mandatory or imposed training, self-directed

“inevitably” transcend technique or must one assiduously strive for such transcendence? “Editorial,” *Theatre, Dance, and Performer Training* 3.2 (2012): 141, italics mine.

³² Simon Shepherd, “The Institution of Training,” in *Performance Research* 14.2: *On Training*, eds. Richard Gough and Simon Shepherd (2009): 5-6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ “train, v.1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press). <www.oed.com/view/Entry/204410> (accessed 12/11/12).

training, military training, dance training, actor training, spiritual training, strength training, physiotherapeutic training or “re-training,” the training of animals, and more. What training cannot refer to is the development or discovery of new technique, new relatively reliable pathways through materiality, new patterns and potentialities in which one might then later proceed to train. For this, as I have argued, we need the word and concept of research. In the present context, it is essential to confirm that *training and research together* constitute an active field of knowledge. Without research there can be no training, for there would be nothing in which to train. Indeed, every application of knowledge in a new context is to some degree an exploration of whether and how it will work. On the other hand, without training there can be no research, for it is training that defines a core of knowledge in relation to which research can be said to produce something genuinely new. If training is the transmission of what is known, then research is the edge of that known territory. As core and edge, training and research mutually constitute a field or discipline of knowledge. There is every reason, then, to avoid limiting the discussion to “actor training,” and to speak instead of acting technique as a field in which both training and research are continual and mutually defining.

Although “training” is the key term organizing Hodge’s *Actor Training*, the word “research” also appears in some of its essays, especially when the authors strive to articulate the innovative character of what was done—its newness in comparison with what went before. Hodge herself refers to the “deep research processes of Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and Włodzimierz Staniewski,” while Dorinda Hulton describes Joseph Chaikin as working in a “research theatre.”³⁵ Likewise, although without using the word research, Augusto Boal clarifies the purpose of a workshop called “New Techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed” by

³⁵ Alison Hodge, *Actor Training*, xix; 173.

declaring that “techniques don’t come out of the blue sky.”³⁶ In each of these cases, research is implied as a centrally important process through which new acting technique is developed. Elsewhere, the word research is used in the titles of certain institutions to point out how their work extends beyond the production of public spectacles. Thus, Peter Brook’s institute in Paris is called the International Centre for Theatre Research; what is now the Grotowski Institute in Poland was previously called the “Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research”; and in New York City the dance organization Movement Research carries on the legacy of what Ramsay Burt has called the “movement research” or “performative research” of the Judson Church pioneers.³⁷ To my knowledge, none of these institutions has put forward a precise definition of what they mean by research, but an examination of their relationship to relevant fields of artistic practice reveals something very like the “research and development” wing of a wider community of knowledge.

To summarize: The use of “research” in these varied but related contexts indicates a desire to emphasize a continual process of discovery that is too easily forgotten when “training” becomes the dominant concept for theorizing acting and performance.³⁸ Acting technique, like other areas of embodied technique, is continually undergoing transformation through research. As Diana Taylor writes: “Sports enthusiasts might claim that soccer has remained unchanged for the past hundred years, even though players and fans from different countries have appropriated the event in diverse ways. Dances change over time, even though generations of dancers (and

³⁶ Frances Babbage, “Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed,” in *Actor Training*, 312; 322n15.

³⁷ International Centre for Theatre Research <www.bouffesdunord.com>. The Grotowski Institute <www.grotowski-institute.art.pl>. Movement Research <movementresearch.org>. Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57; 74; and passim. See also the Centre for Performance Research, Wales <www.theopr.org.uk> and the Center for Performance Research, NYC <cprnyc.org>. All sites accessed 12/11/12.

³⁸ Sometimes the word “process” itself is used in a similar way, but this carries none of the epistemological weight of “research” as I have defined it, through reference to the sociology of (scientific) knowledge.

even individual dancers) swear they're always the same.”³⁹ Titles like *Actor Training* and *Training for Performance* hide the extent of ongoing research in fields like acting by emphasizing the moment in which knowledge is acquired over the moment in which it is discovered for the first time. In fact, many of the practices that take place under the name of “actor training” combine both training and research, and it is research—not training—that leads to innovative discoveries like those surveyed in *Actor Training*. Until we acknowledge this, we will continue to paint a lopsided picture of acting technique, drawing on vague and problematic notions like talent and “sheer presence,” when what we really want to talk about is the relationship between technique and practice; the different effects of similar technique in different circumstances; and the ways in which actors go beyond their training to encounter the unknown, conceived not as a mystical confrontation with the unknowable but as a research project in embodied technique.

Stanislavski's Threshold

At the end of his life, Konstantin Stanislavski gathered together a small number of actors to work on Molière's *Tartuffe*. According to Vasili Toporkov, a member of that group, Stanislavski chose this play for its small cast and because it would allow him to prove that the acting technique he had spent a lifetime developing was not limited to the genre of realism.⁴⁰ This project had a different goal from that of most rehearsals: It was to be a period of “work on technique, on the re-education of the actor and the acquisition of a new method of working on

³⁹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 20. A similar point was made about practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga in the previous chapter.

⁴⁰ Toporkov, Vasily, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 104.

oneself.”⁴¹ Stanislavski had no intention of premiering *Tartuffe*, and indeed the production was not mounted until after his death in 1938. Instead, Toporkov explains, “Stanislavski had undertaken his work on *Tartuffe* purely for teaching purposes, and it was accordingly conducted with great rigour and purity of method. No concessions were made to the usual, traditional rehearsal procedures.”⁴² I would add that, in addition to being an important site for the transmission of knowledge (actor training), this last period of Stanislavski’s work was also a continuation of his research in acting technique. Arguably, this was the first time Stanislavski undertook a project of relatively pure (as opposed to applied) research, rather than conducting research within the context of production.

In this section, I re-read Stanislavski’s work through the epistemological approach to technique developed thus far. If Stanislavski conducted research, then we should be able to articulate the results of that research in terms of new technique; to identify the precise points at which his research branched off from previous technique; and to compare the new technique he discovered with that practiced by other teachers and practitioners before and since. As Sharon Marie Carnicke observes, Stanislavski “never envisioned his System as complete. He suggested no final answers, only various experiments. As he cautioned, ‘There is no system. There is only nature.’”⁴³ Here, using the same word as his contemporary Marcel Mauss—“nature”—Stanislavski points to the dimension of his work that I am calling research, namely the engagement of technique with the relative reliability of material existence and of human embodiment in particular. This is “realism” in the sense given by Hubert Dreyfus, not in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 154.

⁴² Ibid., 114.

⁴³ Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 61.

literary sense that has long been associated with Stanislavski.⁴⁴ It refers not to a resemblance between theatrical production and everyday life but to a grappling with the material world and a search for relatively reliable pathways through it. There is “no system,” as Stanislavski declared, because such pathways are never entirely reliable—particularly when the substrate of technique is as diverse and developmental as human embodiment—and because, in any aesthetic context, the goals of embodied technique continually change along with changes in society at large. But there is also “no system” because if the goal is to explore what people can do—in this case, what actors onstage can do—that search is never-ending. One may encounter revolutionary findings, as Stanislavski did, but one is never finished, because there is always more to be known and more areas of technique to explore. Carnicke and others have recently highlighted the diversity of Stanislavski’s interests and pointed to the fact that he focused on different areas of acting technique in different periods of his life. According to Carnicke, each time a generation of Stanislavski’s students began to transform his most recent discoveries into routines, he would start up a new studio or group with which to continue his research.

In Jean Benedetti’s translation, Toporkov does not use the word “research” to describe Stanislavski’s work. It could be that the notion of research in acting was simply not available to him at the time. However, I would argue that the absence of this concept could also serve (as with “actor training” above) to highlight the finality and completeness of Stanislavski’s findings rather than their place in an ongoing process of exploration. There is a kind of epistemology at work in Toporkov’s memoir, but it is not the one I have elaborated here. Rather, Toporkov grounds his analysis of Stanislavski’s work in the assumption that knowledge progresses from one hypothesis to another until it arrives at final, superior truths. Thus, he describes

⁴⁴ For my discussion of realism in the former sense, see Chapters 1 and 4. For an overview of the complex relationship of Stanislavski to realism in the latter sense, see Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 28-33.

Stanislavski's approach as a "new, improved, more effective acting technique" and dismisses all other approaches as mistakes, dead ends, or failures.⁴⁵ Such a naïvely positivistic epistemology is exactly what Barrett calls the "illusion of technique" and Barba the "myth of technique," namely the idea that technique develops through progressive improvement towards perfection, rather than through subsequent explorations of adjacent areas.⁴⁶ As Benedetti notes, this progressive model was the required framework for the production of art under Stalin. Writing in the 1940s, after the assassination of Meyerhold and the rise of Socialist Realism, Toporkov is "toeing the party line" when he extols Stanislavski's technique as uniquely valid.⁴⁷ In this context, Toporkov's claim that "Stanislavski achieved results that were unprecedented in the history of world theatre" must be distinguished from his parallel assertion that these results constituted a "most perfect weapon in our struggle for great ideas on the cultural front."⁴⁸ The first is an epistemological claim and should be assessed in those terms. I will argue here that Stanislavski did in fact uncover historically unprecedented areas of embodied technique. This has nothing to do with the claim that what he discovered was superior to all previous technique. As Carnicke writes, we should avoid "investing the System with linear and teleological development."⁴⁹ Instead, we should see it as a series of research outcomes, guided by precise questions but necessarily limited by the scope of Stanislavski's investigations.

By the time Toporkov went to work with him, Stanislavski was already well known for his "bizarre methods" and the "new kind of acting" he promoted.⁵⁰ As Benedetti explains, acting pedagogy at that time "consisted mainly in students preparing scenes that were then reworked by

⁴⁵ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 101 and passim.

⁴⁶ For an elaboration of this distinction in the sociology of scientific knowledge, see K. Brad Wray, *Kuhn's Evolutionary Social Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). "Kuhn alleged that scientific knowledge was not cumulative ... Yet he adamantly insisted that there is scientific progress" (1).

⁴⁷ From the translator's introduction to Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 41n2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁰ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 8-9.

the tutor. Sometimes a student would prepare one or two scenes throughout his entire studies and would merely learn to copy his master's tricks."⁵¹ Toporkov's description of his own substantial acting career prior to joining the Moscow Art Theatre adds detail to this picture, as he describes some of the greatest actors struggling to pass along their abilities to their students.⁵² One great actor named Davydov, we are told, would regale his pupils with inspiring stories and provide insightful analysis of dramatic scripts. When he was done, his "students would rush onstage and start rehearsing, only to realise that they could not do what had seemed so simple, clear and easy a moment before. *Their technique was inadequate.* They couldn't achieve even a hundredth of what their beloved teacher had so clearly explained."⁵³ Other teachers faced the same limitations. As Toporkov writes, they "could not explain to their pupils" the secrets of acting technique, "although they tried to do so with all their heart and soul."⁵⁴ These actors knew the "secrets" of acting in that they had found relatively reliable pathways through their own personal embodiment. But they had not undertaken the systematic research necessary to generalize these pathways as more widely transmissible knowledge in the form of technique. At least partly because of assumptions about the unteachability of talent, they had not rigorously investigated the difference between what they actually did to produce strong performances on a regular basis and what they were having their students do.

A radically new area of research is often one that branches off close to the roots of previously existing knowledge. Instead of taking existing knowledge for granted, and seeking to discover new possibilities at the edges of what is already known, radically new research locates a

⁵¹ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, xvii. At the time, there was "no available language or terminology to which he could turn. Many concepts which we now take for granted such as non-verbal communication or body language did not exist. Even the notion of comprehensive, systematic training did not exist."

⁵² The word "abilities" here, as previously discussed, refers to an aspect of practice that can only be transmitted to the extent that it can be translated into knowledge in the form of technique.

⁵³ Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, xvii, italics mine.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

hidden doorway or threshold—a branch of technique that had previously gone unseen or been dismissed as unimportant—and dives through it into hitherto unexplored or underexplored territory. One way to understand Stanislavski’s research in acting is to see it as based on the realization that some of the most important technique employed by the “great” actors of his day was not directly perceptible to the audience. Another way to say this is that acting technique itself can involve not only choosing how to move or speak onstage, but also engaging with the play and the production in ways that only become visible (or audible) indirectly. My usage of the term “indirect” here is borrowed from Nick Crossley, who uses it to describe technique that achieves its ends via the stimulation of unconscious processes.⁵⁵ For Crossley, the summoning of sleep by lying down and closing one’s eyes is an example of indirect technique. The idea of using technique indirectly in the preparation of actors is similar in some ways to common, present-day notions of “inner” and “outer” or “internal” and “external” acting technique. However, a distinction based on the perception of the audience is more precise than one that distinguishes between the “inside” and “outside” of the performer.⁵⁶ In what follows, I therefore refer not to the inside and outside of the actor but to direct and indirect uses of technique, and also to the gap between the repeatable and the perceptible—that is, between what actors reliably do and what audiences reliably perceive.

Stanislavski’s contributions to acting technique can be seen as resting fundamentally on the recognition that the perceptible dimension of performance is to a great extent an indirect effect or byproduct of an actor’s largely imperceptible score. However, it is important to clarify here that it is not just the indirect use of technique that defines Stanislavski’s work. There is

⁵⁵ Nick Crossley, “Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity,” in *Thinking Through Rituals*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack (New York: Routledge, 2004). This essay is discussed in Chapter 1.

⁵⁶ For an example of the latter, see Phillip B. Zarrilli’s discussion of multiple bodies, based in part on the work of Drew Leder, in *Psychophysical Acting*, 52.

ample historical precedent for indirect acting technique in this sense, as Mel Gordon illustrates when he argues that “substitution as an acting strategy” has a history as old as acting itself. Gordon offers two evocative examples of actors in other eras focusing on memories from their own lives rather than on those of the fictional characters they played—one from classical Greece and the other from nineteenth century England. During an ancient Athenian performance of *Electra*, Gordon tells us, “the tragic actor Polus placed the actual ashes of his dead son in an urn that was supposed to contain the remains of Orestes.” Similarly, Edmund Kean in 1814 “reflected upon his deceased adopted uncle when he held up the skull of ‘Poor Yorick’ in *Hamlet*.”⁵⁷ In these examples, actors do things that are hidden from the audience in order to achieve perceptible results. Along the same lines, James McTeague argues that Steele MacKaye’s adaptations of Delsarte’s theories anticipated Stanislavski’s work by focusing on spontaneity and on the emotional and imaginative relationship between “inner state” and “outward expression.”⁵⁸ These are pre-Stanislavskian precedents for indirect acting technique.

Although acting technique is notoriously undocumented, it is hard to doubt that countless performers throughout history have structured their performances using embodied technique that was only indirectly perceptible to their audiences. Yet how many of them explored the use of indirect technique as a comprehensive approach to acting? How many of them taught what Gordon calls “substitution as an acting strategy” to their apprentices, not merely as a trick of the trade but as a substantial area of technique alongside movement, gesture, and vocal production? From an epistemological perspective, there is a vast difference between using something as “a”

⁵⁷ Mel Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 54. Unfortunately, Gordon does not provide the sources of these stories, but Judith Milhous has located the earlier anecdote in Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 264. According to Aulus Gellius (ca. 180 AD), the ancient actor “took his son’s urn from the grave and, embracing it as the urn of Orestes, filled everything about him not with representations and imitations, but with real living grief and lamentation. The audience was deeply moved to see the play acted this way.”

⁵⁸ James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875-1925* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 10; and see 1-43.

technique and treating it as a starting point or gateway into a new *area* of technique. In European theatrical traditions, including those of dance and opera, it had long been assumed that what one rehearses should coincide with what one wants the audience to see. Stanislavski made a radical break with that assumption. Rather than seeing the hidden or indirect use of technique as a single idea or exercise, he treated it as a threshold to an entire area of technique. He did not simply want acting teachers to include more of what they actually did in their teachings. Rather, he wanted to thoroughly map the territory of indirectly scoring performances, to make it widely available and comprehensible for actors in training. This is what made Stanislavski a great researcher as well as a great actor, and why his work departed so radically from prior acting pedagogy that it changed the very definition of acting.

Stanislavski drove a wedge between the actor's score and those aspects of performance that are perceptible to the audience. This was the first major problem Toporkov encountered when he joined the Moscow Art Theatre, where he found himself continually admonished by Stanislavski for thinking too much and too early about what an imaginary audience would perceive. The borderline of the perceptible is clearly at issue when Stanislavski scolds Toporkov for trying to set (make repeatable) his movements and vocal production too early in the rehearsal process: "At best you were trying to find ways of saying the dialogue, how you would deliver your first line, when you open the window to your office, when *the part of your role the audience can see* begins. You didn't put down roots through which to feed your role."⁵⁹ In this example, and many others, Stanislavski exhorts Toporkov to explore what lies beyond the threshold of audience perception.

⁵⁹ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 18, italics mine. The metaphor of a tree's roots illustrates the notion of indirectly perceptible acting technique. One perceives the roots of a tree only through the flourishing of the part of the tree that is visible above ground.

This was a radically counterintuitive step for an actor at that time, as Toporkov recalls: “It was absorbing, fascinating, but, it seemed to me, had nothing to do with the practicalities. Of course, I can achieve certain limited results by doing as he says, but *that’s not what the audience is going to see.*”⁶⁰ Toporkov had conceptualized the indirect use of technique as an additional trick or add-on that can “achieve certain limited results.” He had not yet realized that for Stanislavski this was the largest and most important area of acting technique. It is no wonder that Stanislavski’s methods were considered bizarre, since they seemed to be predicated on ignoring the audience. Toporkov was shocked to observe: “During an intensive, active rehearsal period, nobody appeared to give a thought to the end result—the performance—they *seemed to ignore the audience* who would come to see them, and, very strange indeed, they paid far greater attention to *things the audience wouldn’t see.*”⁶¹ Instead of practicing movements and line-readings that would be directly perceived by future audiences, Stanislavski’s actors worked on various kinds of embodied technique that Toporkov only retrospectively understood to have profound indirect effects on what the audience saw.

This turn away from the audience marks a significant branching-off point in embodied technique. By postponing the question of what the audience would eventually see, Stanislavski opened the door to a territory of embodied technique that, in the history of theatre as public spectacle in Europe and the United States, had perhaps never been thoroughly explored. In the early stages of his research, Stanislavski turned to psychology and yoga, two contemporary areas of embodied technique that he suspected might indirectly bring depth and power to an actor’s performance. The best known of these experiments are those relating to “affective memory,” a concept Stanislavski borrowed from French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916)

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19, italics mine.

⁶¹ Ibid., 21, italics mine.

and which became central to the understanding of Stanislavski in the United States. During the same time period, Stanislavski also worked with what he knew of yoga, drawing on sources that included the writings of Yogi Ramacharaka (the assumed name of Chicago lawyer William Walker Atkinson, 1862-1932) and the experiences of his colleague Leopold Sulerzhitsky at a Canadian commune.⁶² Later on, he shifted to what he called the “Method of Physical Actions.”⁶³ What remained constant throughout the phases of Stanislavski’s research was his emphasis on the indirect use of technique. This was essential for him, because it was in the gap between technique and its effects that what he called “organic” reaction took place.⁶⁴ As in Crossley’s examples of the person who lies down and closes his eyes in order to bring on sleep—or the group that sings at a protest march in order to awaken their own feelings of anger—Stanislavski saw acting less as the composition of a perceptible score than as a sustained investigation of the relationship between technique and its indirect, organic effects.

Such an approach requires the actor to surrender a significant degree of control over the performance. The actor must relinquish to some extent the responsibility for directly shaping what the audience will see, turning instead to the creation of a score that will indirectly give rise to the perceptible performance. For example, if one’s score is defined by a task or short-term goal, the way that will be achieved remains open-ended. In Stanislavski’s words to an actor:

“You must hide Marianne from her cruel father. That’s what you have to do. So, how? If you use

⁶² Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 138-45; R. Andrew White, “Stanislavski and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-of-the-Century Occultism on the System,” in *Theatre Survey* 41.7 (2006): 73-92; and Gordon, *Stanislavsky in America*, 9. The intersection of yoga and actor training, throughout the twentieth century, has such a rich history that it can be said to constitute an area of interdisciplinary research in its own right. See also Maria Kapsali, “‘I don’t attack it, but it’s not for actors’: the use of yoga by Jerzy Grotowski,” in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 1.2 (2010): 185-98; and Phillip Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, 65-72 and passim.

⁶³ Carnicke claims that, at a certain point in Stanislavski’s research, “the Method of Physical Actions becomes more precisely Active Analysis of text” (*Stanislavsky in Focus*, 156). I do not argue here that the Method of Physical Actions was the final result of Stanislavski’s research—only that it was a valuable discovery worth analyzing in detail. Active Analysis as Carnicke describes it may have superseded it, but they are not the same.

⁶⁴ According to Benedetti, Stanislavski used this word “in its original sense as relating to the human organism, its natural functioning. Acting is organic when it is based on normal psychological processes, not on artifice” (Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, xi). I return to this point later, in the context of Grotowski’s work.

the usual actors' clichés, you will hide her by putting out your hands behind your back and looking anxious, etc., but if you are creative, *I don't know how you will do it*. But the main thing is 'to hide' her."⁶⁵ The repeatable score here is the task of hiding Marianne. This is repeatable in the sense that the actor can try to hide Marianne again and again throughout the scene, as well as each time the scene is repeated. However, the perceptible manifestation of this task—how it is visibly accomplished—may be different every time. Thus, the score becomes perceptible only indirectly, and a degree of genuine spontaneity is introduced in the gap between the repeatable and the perceptible.⁶⁶ This genuine spontaneity was of such interest and value to Stanislavski that he was willing to dismiss all other kinds of acting technique as focusing too directly and simply on those aspects of the performance that would be perceived by the audience.

The degree to which control is surrendered and unpredictability introduced into the actor's process can vary tremendously. In the example just given, Stanislavski seems to imply that there are countless ways to accomplish the task, all of which are permissible. Yet in the work on *Tartuffe*, and in his own work as director and actor, Stanislavski did not leave such enormous room for unpredictability in performance. Although he worked extensively with open-ended improvisation in rehearsal, he would not have permitted it onstage in a public performance. Ultimately, then, Stanislavski was not interested in pushing the idea of indirectly perceptible technique to its extreme. He had no wish to perform a structured improvisation in front of an audience. Rather, Stanislavski looked for ways to weave together the perceptible and the imperceptible in an actor's score such that what the audience saw could be reliably composed

⁶⁵ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 111, italics mine.

⁶⁶ Joseph Roach is wrong to describe Stanislavski technique as "a means of manipulating levels of consciousness to achieve certain specific effects on the body, especially the illusion of spontaneity." If this spontaneity is illusory, it is so only in the sense that one can always analyze ever-deeper layers of hidden technique at work, including those that have nothing to do with professional training. The actor's spontaneity, in this sense, is no more or less illusory than that of anyone else. Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 206.

and at the same time involve some degree of genuine spontaneity. The heart of Toporkov's memoir is a fascinating turn in Stanislavski's work back towards perceptible technique that is nonetheless used in an indirect way to stimulate the actor. This is the "Method of Physical Actions." It is a very particular interest of Stanislavski's and cannot be identified with "Stanislavskian" acting in the larger sense. (Indeed, it is much closer to Grotowski's work than to that of Strasberg, Adler, or Meisner.) I want now to give a brief account of this technique, as I understand it, not because it is the final result or ultimate achievement of Stanislavski's research, but because it constitutes a clearly framed and historically unprecedented research outcome.

As Toporkov describes it, the method of physical actions is a way of developing a performance score based on the relationship between the imperceptible thoughts, intentions, and feelings of the actor and their perceptible movements and vocal utterances.⁶⁷ Unlike the embodied technique of affective memory or yogic "rays of energy," which Stanislavski had previously investigated, the notion of physical actions does not proceed only in one direction, from the imperceptible to the perceptible. Rather, it works in both directions at once, or alternates quickly between them. In the example of the task "to hide her," this could work in the following way. During the course of successive improvisations, the task will give rise to different movements, different possible ways of executing the task, each of which will be visible to an observer. At a certain point, one of those ways, one particular "choice," will be selected and set as part of the actor's score. The next time the scene is done, it will not be the imperceptible task "to hide her" that is repeated but the perceptible movement sequence. However—this is the crucial point—in Stanislavski's method of physical actions, the question of which movement choice to set will not be determined by reference to a future audience but to the organic reactions

⁶⁷ I choose not to capitalize "method of physical actions" for the same reason that I do not capitalize other areas technique like "modern postural yoga," or even the word technique itself, as in "Alexander Technique." Capital letters imply a stable object, while lowercase suggests the porous borders and processual development of technique.

of the actor. In other words, when a perceptible movement is set, this will not be because it “worked” in the sense of fitting into an overall audience-oriented composition (for example, by conveying the meaning of the story, creating a strong stage image). Instead, a movement will be set (or not) based on whether it is expected to provoke a fuller engagement on the part of the actor. Only when the physical movement is deemed likely to be more thoroughly engaging for the actor than the imperceptible task will it be made part of the repeatable score. On this basis, Toporkov draws a technical distinction between “expressive movement representing action,” which is set because of its perceptible qualities, and “genuine” psychophysical “action,” which is set because of how it affects the actor.⁶⁸

The method of physical actions is defined neither by a painstaking work on highly detailed, perceptible movements, nor by the genuine commitment of the actor to accomplish certain tasks, but by the relationship between the two and the “organic” unfolding reactions that take place in the gap between them. Functionally, this means that the actor continually weaves and layers multiple kinds of technique in creating the repeatable score: movement technique, “tasks” that can be accomplished in various ways, imaginative associations, and more. Some of this layering is directly perceptible to the audience, but much appears only indirectly, through the unfolding, unconscious reactions that Stanislavski called organic and which he prized as the bounty of genuine art. The purest version of the method of physical actions would include only two kinds of perceptible movements: those intended to provoke organic reaction and those resulting from organic reaction. This does not mean that Stanislavski never asked his actors to incorporate movements simply because they looked right from the outside. But it does seem that, during the work on *Tartuffe*, he strove to go as far as possible in the opposite direction, to the point where even the rooms in the rehearsal space “were not to be allocated with the performance

⁶⁸ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 110.

of a dramatic episode in mind, but in response to a genuine, real-life question of how to divide up a house with twenty rooms.”⁶⁹ In this case, even the marked location of a potential future audience is erased so as to avoid influencing the movement of the actors and ensure that they develop their scores entirely on the basis of the method of physical actions.

I have elaborated this technically dense example in order to clarify the importance of conceptualizing technique as a network of branching pathways rather than as a flat array of choices. In choosing to study how imperceptible technique can give rise to perceptible performance, Stanislavski opened up what had previously seemed like a single trick (or “a” technique) and discovered inside it a vast territory worthy of ongoing exploration. In Karin Knorr Cetina’s terms, he took a closed or stable object and turned it into an epistemic object by treating it as worthy of intensive study. My discussion of Stanislavski’s approach to physical action is also intended to show how an epistemological perspective on embodied technique can explicate the value of certain discoveries without implying that they are universally superior. For Stanislavski—and for many who followed, from Strasberg to Grotowski—the search for movements arising organically from an imperceptible score came to exceed what I consider its epistemological significance—the discovery that such things are possible—and take on much greater aesthetic and even spiritual meaning. Rather than seeing “physical actions” as a new and fascinating area of technique, Stanislavski heralded it as the only honest and legitimate way of acting. He rejected what Toporkov calls “expressive movement representing action” as if it had nothing to offer actors—as if it were a dead end in the branching networks of technique. This amounts to a policing of disciplinary lines, in this case between “acting” and dance, mime, or any other area of embodied practice that works extensively with the perceptibility of the body. In

⁶⁹ Ibid., 116.

effect, Stanislavski redrew the border around acting even as he expanded the field, by defining true acting in opposition to the structuring of movement with spectator perception in mind.

In this sense, Stanislavski's radical turn away from what had previously been understood as acting technique—the direct composition of what the audience will see—may offer a key to understanding the importance of acting (and “actor training”) in the twentieth century. For in the gap between the repeatable and the perceptible, it has since become possible to include not only yoga, ritual, and therapy but every imaginable kind of embodied technique. Arguably, everything that one has experienced in life—from childhood to adulthood to just five seconds ago—may be *indirectly* perceptible in one's actions. The repeatable, if it is not required to be directly perceptible, is synonymous with technique itself—and so every kind of embodied technique can now theoretically be seen as preparation for acting. Psychology, physical culture (both athletics and somatics), religious ritual, and even the technique of everyday life are revealed as part of what an actor brings to performance.

While the perceptible is the specific issue of the performing arts—their domain, their definition, their problem—Stanislavski discovered that it need not constitute the boundary of performance technique. Even as he policed the borders between acting and other, more “artificial” genres of performance, Stanislavski reconnected acting to the much larger field of embodied technique that exists outside theatre. “This is no longer theatre,” he declared. “Don't think about the audience, there isn't one, it does not exist as far as you are concerned.”⁷⁰ Far from being tied to the aesthetics of realism, Stanislavski's work should be seen in the context of the radical expansion of acting technique surveyed by works like Hodge's *Actor Training*. For this reason, his work remains extremely valuable for any attempt to reframe acting technique as an area of legitimate knowledge and ongoing research.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 122.

Grotowski's Legacy

Of all the teachers and practitioners of embodied technique studied here, Jerzy Grotowski is the one most closely associated with the idea of research. At this point, there is considerable consensus that research is an appropriate framework for understanding Grotowski's work, even if it does not capture the more personal or mystical dimensions of his life. Grotowski himself used the language of research as early as 1967, when he compared the Laboratorium Theater to the Niels Bohr Institute, saying: "An institute for methodical research is not to be confused with a school that trains actors... Nor should this activity be confused with theatre (in the normal sense of the word)."⁷¹ By that time, the Laboratory Theatre had already moved to Opole and added a subtitle to its name: the "Institute for Research into the Actor's Methods."⁷² Later, as Grotowski broke away from the institution of theatre, the notion of research remained central to discussions around his work. In 1969, Grotowski spoke at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, saying of his paratheatrical work, "this type of research most often existed outside theatre."⁷³ Of his "Theatre of Sources" period, he wrote: "In this research, the approach was rather solitary... [W]e were looking mainly for what the human being can do with his own solitude."⁷⁴ Indeed, Thomas Richards, Grotowski's last student and artistic heir, summarized the relationship between his

⁷¹ Jerzy Grotowski, "Methodical Exploration," in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Denmark: Odin Teatret, 1968), 97.

⁷² Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Grotowski and Flaszen: Why a Theatre Laboratory?," in Paul Allain, ed., *Grotowski's Empty Room* (New York: Seagull Books, 2009), 55.

⁷³ Jerzy Grotowski, "Reply to Stanislavski," trans. Kris Salata, *TDR* 52.2 (2008): 39.

⁷⁴ Jerzy Grotowski, "From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle," in Thomas Richards, *At Work With Grotowski on Physical Actions* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 120. I note a striking resemblance between this formulation and Deleuze's Spinozan question: *What can a body do?* In my view, these are precisely questions of technique.

mentor and Konstantin Stanislavski by observing that “both dedicated their lives to research on *craft*.”⁷⁵ This is very close to my own idea of research in embodied technique.

In taking up the question of Grotowski’s research, my project continues that of Lisa Wolford Wylam to “demystify” Grotowski’s work.⁷⁶ I too want to work against the image of “Gurutowski” that, as Wolford said, came “to dominate critical discourse, particularly in America, obscuring any more pragmatic understanding of Grotowski and his work.”⁷⁷ In *Grotowski’s Objective Drama Research*, Wolford does much to frame the later phases of Grotowski’s work as a kind of research. As her title suggests, research was the primary framework through which the Objective Drama project at the University of California, Irvine (1983-1986), was articulated. Wolford herself makes frequent reference not only to research and knowledge but also to “investigations” and “experiments” with and through performance and performance technique.⁷⁸ Wolford also offers a useful clarification when she suggests that Grotowski’s final years at UC-Irvine “should be viewed as a sort of teaching engagement, a pedagogical seminar for the benefit of young actors, rather than as a forum for the continuation of his own research.”⁷⁹ Such distinctions between pedagogy and research are crucial, as I pointed out in my discussion of actor training.

Equally valuable is Wolford’s assertion that Grotowski’s research in technique can and should be distinguished from his mystical orientation: “Not only is it *possible* to separate Grotowski’s metaphysics from the body of artistic knowledge that informs his artistic practice,

⁷⁵ Thomas Richards, *At Work With Grotowski on Physical Actions*, 5, italics original.

⁷⁶ Lisa Wolford, *Grotowski’s Objective Drama Research*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), xx. Lisa Wolford Wylam passed away in 2011, to the great sadness of those who knew her, as well as many more in the broader community of theatre and performance studies. I dedicate this section of my dissertation to her valiant and sustained efforts to articulate Grotowski’s practice in rigorous theoretical terms, and I regret that I will not have the opportunity to share its contents with her.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

but, I would suggest, it is *advisable* for anyone who wishes to apply these techniques outside the specialized context of Grotowski's own research."⁸⁰ In this book and elsewhere, Wolford does not explicitly problematize the notion of research or provide analytical tools that would allow us to tease Grotowski's technique apart from the increasingly spiritual and mystical uses to which he put it. Her methodology is largely descriptive and personal, using theory to provide context but not necessarily to present alternative views on Grotowski's achievements. The essays in a recent volume edited by Paul Allain, *Grotowski's Empty Room*, go further in seeking to articulate the nature of Grotowski's "research methodology" more precisely.⁸¹ In this volume, Leszek Kolankiewicz asks: "What made [Grotowski] borrow these scientific terms—'laboratory,' 'institute'—and use them as names? Why did he constantly place his artistic work in the context of scientific research?"⁸² Kolankiewicz concludes by suggesting that Grotowski's research bears the same relationship to science as does alchemy to chemistry.⁸³ Noting that alchemy always developed "in close relationship to one or another mystical tradition," he attempts to articulate the rigor of Grotowski's work in alchemical terms.⁸⁴ In my reading, this sidesteps the important issue of technique and the question of what is transmissible. Such parallels could be useful if our goal were to contextualize Grotowski's work alongside the history of mysticism and the emergence of new and "New Age" religious movements in the twentieth century. But they do not shed much light on the relationship between Grotowski's practice and concurrent developments

⁸⁰ Ibid., 139-40.

⁸¹ Paul Allain, *Grotowski's Empty Room*, xv.

⁸² Kolankiewicz, "Grotowski and Flaszen," 58. Although I argue for the substantive meaning of "research" in this context, we should also remember Benedetti's note about the political context in which Toporkov wrote. In the Soviet cultural context, from Stanislavski's Moscow to Grotowski's Wroclaw, "research" was a legitimate framework and mysticism was not. To an extent, the same thing is true of academia in the United States, so that the framing of Objective Drama as "research" can also be seen as a strategic move. For more on Grotowski's strategic compromises with Communism, see Seth Baumrin, "Ketmanship in Opole: Jerzy Grotowski and the Price of Artistic Freedom," in *TDR* 53.4 (2009): 49-77.

⁸³ Kolankiewicz, "Grotowski and Flaszen," 60.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 64.

in ensemble theatre, postmodern dance, drama therapy, postural yoga and physical culture, with which it has less in common ideologically and more in common at the level of technique.

Although Grotowski came to emphasize the personally transformative and revelatory dimensions of his work, he never abandoned embodied practice based on repeatable technique as the field in which such mystical experiences could occur. During his “paratheatrical” phase (roughly 1969-1978), Grotowski did temporarily set aside a certain kind of highly specialized technique.⁸⁵ This period of work bordered closely on therapy or applied theatre, insofar as it was the facilitators rather than the participants who had specialized training.⁸⁶ Yet as Wolford suggests, Grotowski’s mid-career “attempt to de-emphasize structure and technique provided sufficient empirical evidence (for his own purposes)” that such work was not for him.⁸⁷ Instead, he recognized, a certain degree of specialized technique was necessary on the part of the doers in order to realize the embodied possibilities that interested him. “Once Grotowski arrived at this awareness, his research was guided by a renewed emphasis on structure and mastery.”

As Peter Brook poetically observes, Grotowski’s

quest was not only in a personal need to force the crust of the earth to open so as to reveal the blazing core hidden in its depths. It was also, in his own chosen field of theatre, to guide others, to help them discover in exact, detailed and repeatable ways what laws what practices make this deep inner penetration possible. In this

⁸⁵ These are the dates provided in the table of contents to Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁸⁶ See, for example, Zygmunt Molik’s “Acting Therapy” work in that period. The short film *Acting Therapy* (1976) is included on the attached DVD with Giuliano Campo with Zygmunt Molik, *Zygmunt Molik’s Voice and Body Work: The Legacy of Jerzy Grotowski* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁸⁷ *Grotowski’s Objective Drama Research*, 14.

way, he could develop a craft that could be transmitted directly, from person to person.⁸⁸

Brook juxtaposes the language of spiritual revelation to that of detail and repetition, craft and transmissibility. Indeed, there is no reason why the two cannot be intertwined in a given practice or life. Many scientists have strong spiritual lives and do not find this incompatible with their research. Karin Knorr Cetina reminds us of the “libidinal dimension or basis of knowledge activities” and the extent to which scientists pursue their work not merely for reasons of instrumentality or intellectual curiosity but also with joy, passion, and pleasure.⁸⁹ Why not then see Grotowski in this way, as a researcher whose attachment to his field of study was deeply spiritual as well as personal and artistic? Acknowledging the importance of Grotowski’s spiritual quest need not mean setting aside the question of concrete research outcomes.

Yet, as Richard Schechner recently observed, Grotowski was “of a double mind” regarding the dissemination of research outcomes proceeding from his practices.⁹⁰ He was not simply a researcher whose spirituality informed his investigations. Rather, his orientations towards research and towards mysticism were often in conflict with one another. Generally speaking, Grotowski was exceedingly cautious about sharing the results of his research through any medium other than direct, interpersonal communication. Even the knowledge he called “objective” (as in Objective Drama) had to be passed along through such interpersonal contact. Kolankiewicz notes that, despite its taking place at a public university, the research outcomes of the Objective Drama project were not disseminated as such. “Neither during the course of the

⁸⁸ Peter Brook, *With Grotowski: Theatre is Just a Form* (Wroclaw: The Grotowski Institute, 2009), 47-48.

⁸⁹ Karin Knorr Cetina, “Objectual practice,” in Schatzki, Cetina, and Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 186.

⁹⁰ Richard Schechner, “Comment: Grotowski and the Grotowskian” *TDR* 52.2 (2008): 11.

work, nor after its completion, were the hypothesis and results subjected to any open discussion; they were made known only to a small coterie or to select individuals from within the circle of Grotowski's supporters. They were never verified in the way scientists do, by publishing their findings in journals such as *Nature* or *Science*.”⁹¹ Although Grotowski spoke often of knowledge and research, his notion of their transmissibility was very different from the one I have employed here. Transmission for Grotowski referred above all to a long-term relationship of great intimacy, as in his thirteen years of work with Thomas Richards. He was highly skeptical of the capacity of modern forms of mediated communication to disseminate the kind of knowledge he valued. In his last years, Grotowski continued to speak “frequently and powerfully to large gatherings,” as in his lectures at the Collège de France. But he also designated Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini as his “universal heirs,” thereby producing a single official legacy.⁹²

Grotowski ultimately saw his ideal working conditions as “almost invisible,” giving rise only to “anonymous influences” in the wider world.⁹³ This sets his research apart from scholarly research, which has dedicated so much effort to developing systems for peer review and citation.⁹⁴ At the same time, it also indicates that Grotowski did not wish to keep his knowledge entirely secret or inaccessible. Rather, he was searching for adequate means of transmission. I agree with Ferdinando Taviani, who suggests that we “do not yet possess the conceptual instruments” to describe the field of Grotowski's research.⁹⁵ This is because existing scholarly models tend to see the difference between ritual and theatre as fundamental and categorical,

⁹¹ Kolankiewicz, “Grotowski and Flaszen,” 60.

⁹² Richard Schechner, “Comment: Grotowski and the Grotowskian,” 11. As Schechner notes, this is a major difference between Grotowski and Stanislavski, who did not designate any official heir (7).

⁹³ Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle,” 135.

⁹⁴ The importance of stable, circulating documents in establishing the rigor of academic research is discussed at length in the Conclusion. Grotowski's brief period of work at the University of California exemplifies both the potentials and pitfalls of embodied research projects in academia.

⁹⁵ Ferdinando Taviani, “Grotowski's Double Vision,” in Paul Allain, ed., *Grotowski's Empty Room*, 120-21.

rather than as a matter of discursive framing and institutional support.⁹⁶ As a result, Grotowski's crossings between ritual and theatre may appear to be a strictly individual matter—a kind of change in careers—rather than a telling anomaly that should compel us to rethink the field of embodied technique. Taviani concludes by noting that Grotowski's energy was severely limited in his final years and that he chose to dedicate almost all of it to the process of transmission and continued research taking place at his Workcenter in Italy. He therefore “did not have the time to mobilize his intelligence and intellectual experience to think up less clumsy frames of reference than the current paradigms of theatre and ritual.”⁹⁷ I agree that this, rather than an outright rejection of the public sphere, explains why Grotowski did not say more in his final years about how he understood his work in a broader, global context.

I offer the epistemological theory of embodied technique as a possible “less clumsy” framework within which to assess Grotowski's practice. It describes a level at which theatre and ritual may be directly compared: that of embodied technique. It also offers a solution to the epistemological conundrum indicated by Wolford when she juxtaposes Grotowski's claims to “objective” knowledge with Donna Haraway's feminist argument that knowledge is always “situated.”⁹⁸ As I have argued, the criteria of “relative reliability” and transmissibility across time and space suggest a flexible way to conceive of knowledge, which to some extent reconciles the divergent emphases of objectivity and situatedness. On the one hand, technique is situated, in that its applicability is always limited by the extent of the material similarity between diverse practices. On the other hand, as the examples of postural yoga and “Stanislavskian” acting so clearly illustrate, technique can travel great distances and even become a global phenomenon

⁹⁶ As I have argued, even the “broad spectrum” approach to performance studies, which aims to cut across such divisions, remains limited insofar as term performance inherently emphasizes the theatrical over other frameworks for embodied technique.

⁹⁷ Taviani, “Grotowski's Double Vision.”

⁹⁸ Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, 31-32.

precisely because it is not entirely bound to local circumstances. The latter point is crucial in assessing Grotowski's later work, for it reminds us that the quality and value of research are not determined by the size of the room in which it takes place or the number of participants who directly participate in it. Unlike a theatrical performance, which may reasonably measure its impact in terms of the number of people who see it (the size of its public), the impact of research can be traced through multiple generations, because knowledge is transmissible.

I cannot hope, within the span of this chapter, to give a comprehensive reading of Grotowski's research through the many phases of his work. Instead, I wish to show how an epistemological perspective on technique could add rigor and precision to the discussion and analysis of Grotowski's final phase of work, which he called "Art as vehicle" or "ritual arts." This period of practice took place at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski—later the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards—in Pontedera, Italy.⁹⁹ The question I want to address is that of the relationship between two sources of technique that were central to the Workcenter in this period: first, the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, especially on physical actions as described above; and second, traditional songs from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, or what Grotowski called "songs of quality."¹⁰⁰ I do not mean to suggest that these are the only two relevant sources of embodied technique, but only to use them as examples in testing the application of an epistemological framework to the Workcenter's practice. In some recent writing by and about the Workcenter, the relationship between these two areas of technique is obscured or oversimplified. This is problematic in two different ways, both of which can be

⁹⁹ My primary reference points here are Grotowski's published texts; the books of Thomas Richards; the film documentation of *Downstairs Action (Art as Vehicle)*, 1989; and the experience of seeing *Action* live (2004 and 2005) and on film (*Action in Aya Irini*, 2003). Although not publicly available, these films are shown regularly at conferences and gatherings organized by the Workcenter. I also draw on informal conversations with past and current members of the Workcenter teams. I do not here address *Dies Irae*, *I Am America*, *The Living Room*, or any of the more recent works developed by Richards and Mario Biagini since Grotowski's death.

¹⁰⁰ Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, 40.

articulated in epistemological terms. First, there is a risk of failing to acknowledge the importance of the songs as knowledge and to adequately credit and cite those individuals or communities who developed or discovered them. Second, there is a risk of oversimplifying the Workcenter's practice in ways that could render its research outcomes less comprehensible and less useful in a broader context. I will analyze each of these problems below.

Grotowski came to understand his own work to a large extent as a continuation of Stanislavski's—especially in the area of “physical actions,” which Richards describes as the “axis” of his own first book, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*.¹⁰¹ As I have argued above, Stanislavski's notion of physical actions (contrasted with expressive movement) arose out of an even more basic premise, namely that the actor should work to some extent, or for some time, without thinking about what an audience will eventually see. This technical step is a crucial branching-off point in performance technique—as I argued above—and is crucial to understanding the connection between Grotowski and Stanislavski. In Toporkov's book, we see that Stanislavski's rehearsal techniques were considered “bizarre,” because they involved dedicating an extraordinary amount of time and energy to “things the audience wouldn't see.”¹⁰² Grotowski took this line of investigation even further, placing more and more emphasis upon technique that would directly affect the performers or participants and only indirectly affect someone who might be watching them. Echoing Stanislavski, he wrote: “The actor should rather seek to *liberate* himself from the dependence on the spectator, if he doesn't want to lose the very seed of creativity.”¹⁰³ Ryszard Cieslak's score in *The Constant Prince*, the experiments of “paratheatre” and “Theatre of Sources,” and the ongoing practice of the Workcenter can each be

¹⁰¹ Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 4. See also Jerzy Grotowski, “Reply to Stanislavski.” Mario Biagini also discusses physical actions at length in “Meeting at La Sapienza” *TDR* 52.2 (2008): 158-64.

¹⁰² Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 21; and see additional citations above.

¹⁰³ Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle,” 124.

seen as distinct research projects within an area of technique that was first opened by Stanislavski, when he took acting technique beyond the threshold of audience perception.

Stanislavski's work on *Tartuffe* was particularly significant in this regard because it was not aimed toward public performances. In describing the founding of the Workcenter, Richards quotes a statement made by Grotowski in 1988, when he paraphrased Stanislavski's invitation to the actors as they began to work on *Tartuffe*: "I want to transmit to you the technique of work, and only the technique of work. We are not going to do a premiere, we are just going to work to understand what the technique of work is."¹⁰⁴ During rehearsals for *Tartuffe*, as mentioned in the previous section, the location of the audience was not even marked, and the rooms in the rehearsal space were organized not for dramatic effect but "as if" in real life.¹⁰⁵ To an even greater degree, Grotowski's work in Pontedera took place without the kind of audience-focused spatial awareness that defines most theatrical rehearsals. Richards recalls: "*Downstairs Action* was constructed without any consideration for someone who might be in the room watching... We never even thought about the angle a visitor might see that opus from."¹⁰⁶ However, even when there were no external observers at all, repeatability and perceptibility remained fundamental to the Workcenter's practice. If these criteria were to be abandoned, then something more like dance/movement therapy, improvised ritual, seated meditation, or even postural yoga might have developed. Yet as Thomas Richards writes of his own practice: "Our basic elements are the same as the basic elements of acting. And on a level related to an aspect of craft, the work is the same for an actor in public theatre and a person who is doing this work."¹⁰⁷ The similarity

¹⁰⁴ Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 71.

¹⁰⁵ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 116, also cited above.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Richards, *Heart of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 27. Since Grotowski's death the Workcenter has increasingly come into public view. This fascinating turn, and the epistemological and technical questions it raises, are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

here is above all found in the use of physical actions as technique for developing and structuring scores that are both repeatable and perceptible.

As defined above, “physical actions” refers to the use of both perceptible and imperceptible technique in a feedback loop wherein each organically provokes the other. For Stanislavski, this meant that pursuing a short-term task would give rise to precise, visible movements, while the detailed repetition of such movements might likewise provoke the indirectly perceptible engagement of the actor. Richards evokes such a two-way process in his discussion of how actors differ, suggesting that for some actors a focus on “exterior form” could lead to a score being fixed “in forms and not in actions,” while for others the same technique could help the performer “to *remember* the initial line of actions” and enter more deeply into the relevant associations.¹⁰⁸ In *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Richards offers a clear and precise account of Grotowski’s approach to physical actions, including many technical details that could be useful for actors in general. In this regard, Richards’s book resembles Toporkov’s *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* and Stanislavski’s *An Actor’s Work*, each of which uses the voice of a student remembering the learning process to render comprehensible a considerable amount of technical detail.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, no such clear technical discussion is offered regarding the work on “songs of quality.”

It is true that this book treats only the first three years of Richards’s apprenticeship with Grotowski, ending just when Richards is beginning “to rediscover the process hidden in the work on the ancient Afro-Caribbean and African songs.”¹¹⁰ After this, the work on physical actions “continued to be utilized, but the work itself entered a *completely new stage*, in which all of the

¹⁰⁸ Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 89.

¹⁰⁹ This can be compared with the very different format of the schematic textbook, as in Iyengar’s *Light on Yoga*. The fictional student narrative and technical manual are two of the most common genres used to document embodied technique in writing.

¹¹⁰ Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 8; 92.

main elements changed.”¹¹¹ Yet work on songs already constituted a major portion of the work as Richards describes it. Published in 1995, the book comes six years after the filming of *Downstairs Action*. It describes the period after that of Welford’s book, in which traditional songs (such as those of the American Shaker movement) already figure prominently. Furthermore, Richards devotes three short final chapters to analyzing the difference between Stanislavski and Grotowski in their approach to physical actions, impulses, and organicity. Richards writes that Stanislavski “worked on physical actions within the context of the common life of relations: people in ‘realistic’ daily-life circumstances, in some social convention.”¹¹² Grotowski, on the other hand, wished “to remove the actor’s art from the realistic foundation, dear to Stanislavski, and to reach a higher level.”¹¹³ Richards’s book clearly aims to place Grotowski in relation to Stanislavski, and perhaps for that reason underplays the importance of dynamic physical and vocal technique. But in my view, it is not really possible to discuss the difference between Stanislavski and Grotowski—especially Grotowski’s interest in a “higher level” of acting—without reference to the use of songs and expressive movement.

Even if Stanislavski’s work had been defined by realism, Richards’ reference to a “higher” level lacks specificity and is troubling in its implied ranking of performance genres. Yet it is not at all the case that Stanislavski worked with “daily” or “common” situations. Like Grotowski, and like perhaps most dramatists throughout history, Stanislavski was interested in emotional climaxes, extraordinary moments, and matters of life and death. Even in Chekhov’s plays we do not witness “everyday” interactions, but moments of extreme tension, emotion, and crisis. This is even truer in his adaptations of Kataev’s *The Embezzlers* or Gogol’s *Dead Souls*,

¹¹¹ Ibid., italics original.

¹¹² Ibid., 99.

¹¹³ Ibid., 101.

where the characters are constantly on the verge of total destruction.¹¹⁴ There is nothing “daily” about the situations depicted in these plays. Finally there is *Tartuffe*, which as I have noted represented a special challenge precisely because it is a classical play, originally written in verse. Instead of reducing Stanislavski to “realism” and “daily-life circumstances” (which are quite different things), would it not be more accurate to say that Stanislavski worked primarily from dramatic scripts, whereas the Workcenter’s opuses are primarily structured by songs? This is a major difference in embodied technique. Even in those Theater Laboratorium productions that were based on classical scripts, the musicality of the voice signaled a difference between Grotowski and Stanislavski.¹¹⁵ It is misleading to attribute the differences between them to Grotowski’s search for a “higher” level of acting, without connecting this to Grotowski’s specific interest in the dance and song technique of a variety of global folk and ritual traditions.

Grotowski hated to be associated with “physical theatre,” preferring to contextualize his work in relation to Stanislavski. Yet there is no escaping the role of non-Stanislavskian technique in every phase of Grotowski’s work, from the Laboratorium Theatre to the Workcenter. Such technique is evident already in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, in a passage cited by Richards: “The human being in a moment of shock, of terror, of mortal danger or tremendous joy, doesn’t behave ‘naturally.’ The human being in this type of *inner maximum* makes signs, rhythmically articulates, starts to ‘dance,’ to ‘sing.’ Not common gesture or daily ‘naturalness’ but a sign is proper to our primal expression.”¹¹⁶ The (research) problem, for Grotowski, was always to find that conjunction in which sign, song, or dance could be as fully and “believably” enacted—to use the classic Stanislavskian criterion, which Grotowski also employed—as the actions that arise

¹¹⁴ These are the plays described in Toporkov’s book.

¹¹⁵ According to James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, “One could even say that all of Grotowski’s performances were sung.” *Jerzy Grotowski* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 107.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 104, italics original. For additional discussion of this passage and its translation, see Slowiak and Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski*, 50.

from dramatic scenarios like those of Chekhov or even Molière. Grotowski resisted the “multiplication of signs,” which he associates with traditional Asian theatre, and called instead for the “*distillation* of signs by eliminating those elements of ‘common’ behavior which *obscure pure impulses*.”¹¹⁷ A survey of his practice, however, reveals that what Grotowski sought, or at least what he found, was not so much “pure impulse” as new technique. If Grotowski looked for the “inner maximum” that appears in moments of “mortal danger or tremendous joy,” he also returned, again and again, to the criteria of repetition and perception. Questions of technique are therefore essential in understanding of his practice, since no matter how pure the connection may be between an impulse and the dance or song to which it gives rise, one still has to ask: Which song? What kind of dance? The fact that these choices were often made with the energetic engagement of the performer in mind rather than the perception of the spectator does not make them any less relevant.

Grotowski’s entire oeuvre can be seen as a series of research projects on this question: How can technique that is composed according to its direct perceptibility, as in dance or song, be made to arise organically out of human embodiment? Or, to put this another way, how can human embodiment be brought to enact such precisely composed, directly perceptible technique, without losing its organicity? In my discussion of Stanislavski, I defined the organic as taking place in a gap between the repeatable and the perceptible. Organicity here is the unconscious, embodied unfolding of one thing into another, as when an action manifests through movement or when a movement evokes an association. In this sense, organicity is profoundly related to training and to technique. It is not formless, but derives from the relationship between perceptible and imperceptible technique. In an iterative process, the imperceptible score both proceeds from and is shaped by the perceptible score. As Grotowski put it: “The fundamental

¹¹⁷ Cited in Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 104, italics original.

thing ... is always to precede the form by what should precede it, by a process which leads to the form.”¹¹⁸ We should not see form and process here as two discrete entities. It is rather a question of iteration and layers, the sedimenting of technique through practice, and the shaping of future impulses and possibilities through technique. There be no sharp distinction between internal and external technique. It is rather a question of what is perceptible, and to whom. Grotowski wrote: “Organicity is something which one has more of when one is young, less of as one gets older. Obviously, it is possible to prolong the life of organicity by fighting against acquired habits, against the training of common life, breaking, eliminating the clichés of behavior.”¹¹⁹ Yet if this is a fight to retain a wide range of technique as organically accessible to the individual, then it is a fight that takes place through daily repetition—through practice.

Grotowski thoroughly explored movement—distinct from physical action—as structuring technique for the performer. At the beginning of his career, he listed the following sources: “Dullin’s rhythm exercises, Delsarte’s investigations of extroversive and introversive reactions, Stanislavski’s work on ‘physical actions,’ Meyerhold’s bio-mechanical training, Vakhtangov’s synthesis,” as well as the “training techniques” of Chinese opera, Kathakali, and Noh.¹²⁰ Later on, through extended research, Grotowski and his actors developed new areas of technique, two of which were called the “plastiques” and the “corporeals.” The former were based on technical details taken from Delsarte, Dalcroze, and European pantomime, among other sources, while the latter were adapted from the *asana* of modern postural yoga.¹²¹ In a letter from 1963, Grotowski recalls the moment in which “the imaginative factor” was introduced into all the physical

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹¹⁹ Grotowski, “From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle,” 128.

¹²⁰ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 16.

¹²¹ See James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski*, 137-40.

exercises, leading to their visible transformation.¹²² A key research question is apparent here, namely: How can physical technique be combined with imaginative technique? Like Krishnamacharya and his students, Grotowski wanted yoga to be more athletic and less meditative, with more fluid and choreographed movement between poses. Unlike them, he sought continual movement without stillness, and he wanted the actors to be able to interact with each other and with imaginary partners while moving through the *asana*.¹²³ Still later in his life, Grotowski oversaw the development of another new area of technique, called Motions, which Richards compares to postural yoga while noting significant differences.¹²⁴ At the same time, Grotowski worked with vocal technique, from his well-known research on “resonators” to the folk and ritual songs of his last period.

Songs ultimately became central to the Workcenter’s embodied technique. Mario Biagini recalls: “That Polish gentleman threw us a challenge: ‘Sing—can something happen?’”¹²⁵ In Biagini’s essay, the “something” that can happen turns out to be an experience of unity with the world and expansion or dispersal of the ego, described in spiritual terms. But there are also concrete research questions here: Sing—now, what can happen while you are singing? What can be done without breaking the song? What movements, interactions, experiences, and physical actions might the song provoke, and how might these in turn transform your way of singing? How far can you go physically and emotionally before the structure of the song breaks? What are the differences between the songs in this regard? How does physical and imaginative technique become indirectly audible in singing? How does song become indirectly visible in movement?

¹²² Cited in Franco Ruffini, “The Empty Room,” in Paul Alain, ed., *Grotowski’s Empty Room*, 98.

¹²³ For an essay on Grotowski’s sources on and adaptations of yoga that is informed by the work of Elizabeth de Michelis, see Maria Kapsali, “I don’t attack it, but it’s not for actors’: the use of yoga by Jerzy Grotowski.”

¹²⁴ Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, 54. See also I Wayan Lendra, “Bali and Grotowski: Some parallels in the training process,” in Schechner and Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, 324-26; and photographs, 401-404.

¹²⁵ Mario Biagini, “Meeting at La Sapienza,” 170.

How does the imperceptible give rise to the perceptible and vice versa? A whole area of research is here, focusing on the intersection of Stanislavski's work on physical actions and a particular body of songs, with a secondary emphasis on movement technique like the Motions and the Haitian *yanvalou*. Even if the aims of the project are mystical, its research content can be described in technical terms. In fact, there is a grave danger in subsuming the singing of these particular songs within the spiritual goals of the practice.

There may be a relationship between the choice of songs and the esoteric orientation of the Workcenter, but these two things must not be conflated. The former is a matter of embodied technique while the latter is more related to the discursive framing of the work. Unfortunately, recent and current writing by and about the Workcenter tends to skip directly from Stanislavski's physical actions to the language of mysticism, without articulating song and movement as areas of embodied technique that are fundamental to the Workcenter's practice. For example, Wolford writes that the aim of *Action* is "to facilitate a special process that can occur within practitioners performing with and around certain songs taken from African and Afro-Caribbean ritual traditions."¹²⁶ She describes the songs in some detail, but neither traces their origins nor analyzes them technically. This absence is not surprising, given Wolford's preference for first-person methodology in her writing about Grotowski. But it is striking how often the same thing is repeated in the writings of Richards, Biagini, Wolford, and others.

In one recent essay by Kris Salata, Richards describes his experience as a doer:

You cannot assume your own tempo-rhythm, for example. The logic of "I follow you for the tempo, the tuning, the rhythm of the song" always has to be respected.

¹²⁶ Wolford, "Action, the Unrepresentable Origin," in Schechner and Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, 409; and see 499n1, where she notes that not every song in *Action* comes from an African or Afro-Caribbean source.

But the moment may arrive in which it's as if the limits of what you perceive as "I" expand, become more transparent; nevertheless, you continue to respect to the score. This "transparency" can happen when the work is on a good level.¹²⁷

Within this citation, Richards shifts from technical language (tempo, tuning, rhythm) to mystical language (the expansion of the self). Salata follows up on the latter, linking it to Martin Buber's "I-thou" relationship, but not on the former. Again, this is surprising only because it repeats a pattern found also in the writing of Richards, Biagini, and other recent Grotowski scholars. While the work on physical actions is described in great detail, the technique of song (and movement) is given short shrift.¹²⁸

As an analytical strategy, this is risky—even problematic—because it is not the search for meaningful encounter that ultimately makes the Workcenter's practice unique. The expansion of the "I" and the possibility of authentic meeting are goals found in many spiritual traditions. To suggest that this is the defining characteristic of the Workcenter's practice is to ignore or dismiss countless other mystical endeavors. The problem from an analytical perspective is that one cannot be specific about the mystical urge. It is asymptotic. Framing the Workcenter in this way makes it difficult to draw comparisons with other practices, from the "physical theatre"

Grotowski rejected to Haitian rituals to other practices of music, martial arts, expressive arts

¹²⁷ Kris Salata, "Toward the Non-(Re)presentational Actor: From Grotowski to Richards," *TDR* 52.2 (2008): 119. Both Woford's essay in the *Sourcebook* and Salata's essay in *TDR* position the Workcenter's practice in opposition to "representation." I respect this theoretical framework but I wonder how it can be applied to other practices as well. There is a risk of exaggerating the uniqueness of the Workcenter in this regard. For more on the Workcenter's current research, see Kris Salata, *The Unwritten Grotowski: Theory and Practice of the Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 2012), especially 15-18.

¹²⁸ This omission carries forth Grotowski's own desire to position his work in particular ways. As Dominika Laster observes, despite the fact that Grotowski "undoubtedly borrowed—or stole, as he liked to say—cross-culturally, he liked to trace the lineage of his work and associate it most intimately with that of Stanislavsky." Dominika Laster, "Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory: Embodied Memory, Witnessing and Transmission in the Grotowski Work," PhD dissertation, New York University (2010), 31. In her dissertation (forthcoming as a book from Seagull Press), Laster begins to trace the importance of "Afro-Haitian song and movement" in Grotowski's later work (240-48). See also Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Grotowski in a Maze of Haitian Narration," *TDR* 56.3 (2012): 131-40.

therapies, and more. Instead, to analyze the research of Grotowski's later work in epistemological terms, it may be more useful to return to the language of technique. Tempo, tuning, and rhythm are crucially important and are among the important features that distinguish the Workcenter from other ensembles and groups. These are not empty shells into which the method of physical actions (or the yearning for mystical union) are inserted. They are the structure of the practice. If we avoid technical language in describing this practice, we risk both of the serious epistemological problems mentioned above.

First, we risk failing to acknowledge the importance of the songs as a body of knowledge that derives from a particular people and place and has come to the Workcenter through particular channels. It is hardly necessary to invoke Linda Tuhiwai Smith's critique of the stealing of indigenous knowledge—cited in Chapter 1—in order to suggest that it may have been incumbent upon Grotowski (and may now be upon the Workcenter) to name the sources of their songs. The fact that doing so would significantly demystify their practice is an additional reason for doing so. As Wolford notes, "Grotowski traveled to Haiti, Nigeria, Mexico and Bengal to study traditional bodily techniques."¹²⁹ Yet he rarely spoke publicly of these encounters.

I always looked to frequent people that were in an unbroken relation with this or that technique or tradition. And there, in different fields, I received a direct transmission. I have been helped a lot in my life from this point of view. There are also certain figures or 'elders' for whom I feel an enormous gratitude. In Central Asia, in India, in Latin America, in China, in the Caribbean...¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, 8-9. This passage includes a reference to Marcel Mauss.

¹³⁰ Cited in Lisa Wolford Wylam, "Living Tradition: Continuity of Research at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards," *TDR* 52.2 (2008): 133.

Why not mention the names of some of these elders? If Grotowski sought to protect their identities, why not at least describe what he did with them in technical terms? If he believed they would prefer not to be credited individually (as we saw with Krishnamacharya), why not name the lineages or traditions to which they belonged? Which songs—and which aspects of singing technique—came from Haitian practitioner Maude Robert, and which from the recordings of Alan Lomax or other ethnographers? What kinds of traditions do these songs come from and across what historical or geographical transitions are they “unbroken”? An honest account of the sources of knowledge is an essential premise for any claim to research. To conceal such information is to deny the broader context, the field of knowledge in which the research intervenes. This is particularly ironic in the case of Grotowski, given his own frequent frustration when hearing about people who claimed to work in his name or spirit after having had only a brief period of contact with him.

The second epistemological problem, less obviously political but in my view no less important, is that failing to acknowledge the technical content of the work on song and movement risks oversimplifying the Workcenter’s practice in such a way as to render it less useful and less meaningful to those who encounter it. If the Workcenter’s practice consists of taking Stanislavski’s approach to acting and transforming it into a spiritual practice, then this may only be of interest to those who have direct personal contact with the Workcenter—those for whom it serves a spiritual purpose, as monasteries do for their religious communities. If, on the other hand, the Workcenter’s practice constitutes rigorous and sustained research in an area of embodied technique defined by the intersection of physical actions, movement technique (what kind?), and a particular group of traditional folk songs (which group, exactly?)—then, I would argue, it may have value beyond its personal and interpersonal connections, value in the

public sphere and for society at large. This is an alternative way to think about the public value of Grotowski's later work, outside the frame of theatrical production. Yet with the exception of the work on physical actions, the Workcenter's main areas of technique have not yet been articulated. Movement technique in particular is elided in discourse surrounding the Workcenter. They use it, but they do not speak about it. The centrality of singing is undeniable, but as an area of technique it too remains under-examined in public discourse surrounding their practice. There may be a legitimate desire to protect these areas of technique from scrutiny, but I worry that such protection may in the long run do more harm than good.

Grotowski said: "This whole family of ritual practices which we can sum up as African and Afro-Caribbean, constitutes a field of study where the tools of dramatic techniques, in the sense of organicity, can be applied."¹³¹ I propose that this constitutes a major research outcome in and of itself: *It is possible to work on physical actions and organicity, in Stanislavski's sense, within the structure of African and Afro-Caribbean ritual songs.* Once again, it is not the mere idea of combining "Stanislavski" with "Afro-Caribbean folk songs" that makes for compelling research, as Grotowski would have been the first to point out. What is interesting is the area of technique—the epistemic object—discovered at their intersection. Only through competence in both fields can this intersection be explored, leading to an area of technique that may well be historically unprecedented. Certainly, the Workcenter's practice is radically different from that found in opera or musical theatre. It is also very different from other song-based research projects in experimental performance, such as those of Meredith Monk or of Włodzimierz Staniewski and the Gardzienice Theatre Association. While there are points of commonality, neither Monk nor Staniewski works with anything like a Stanislavskian conception of physical

¹³¹ Cited in Marc Fumaroli, "Grotowski, or the Border Ferryman," in Paul Allain, *Grotowski's Empty Room*, 212.

actions.¹³² On the other hand, this area of technique is also radically different from any religious ritual with which I am familiar, not least because of the level of detail at which repeatable scores are elaborated. Only the Workcenter, and perhaps some younger companies directly influenced by it, uses the method of physical actions to create precisely elaborated and repeatable scores within a sequence of folk and ritual songs. An analysis of movement and other technique in their work would lend further specificity to this claim. Why these songs? If these songs work differently on their singers than do popular songs or the songs of opera or musicals, then what exactly are these differences? What aspects of melody, harmony, rhythm, call-and-response, and vocal timbre make these songs useful in relation to the method of physical actions? This is a genuine research project. Why not frame it in those terms?

When I have witnessed *Downstairs Action* or *Action*, whether live or on film, I see performers who are rigorously trained in choral harmonic singing and who, while singing Afro-Caribbean songs together, pass through a score of actions and interactions that are extremely believable as well as physically dynamic. The resonance of the singing, and the way in which it seems to derive from the performers' interactions within a context of narrative and even character, is indeed so powerful that the "vibratory qualities ... become the meaning of the song."¹³³ I understand the actors to be working both with real-time interpersonal contact and with memories and associations, much like Stanislavski's actors. Indeed, if I squint, I can see an entire drama unfold, full of pathos, with such good acting that I am not bothered by its lack of explicit narrative. This is a fascinating new area of embodied technique, a substantial legacy in its own right. There is no need to claim *sui generis* legitimacy through reference to mystical attainment. Nor is there any need to seek historical or anthropological knowledge from this research practice,

¹³² I compare the Workcenter with Gardzienice in Ben Spatz, "To Open a Person: Song and Encounter at Gardzienice and the Workcenter," in *Theatre Topics* 18.2 (2008): 205-22.

¹³³ Grotowski, "From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle," 126.

as if singing these songs could tell us what life was like at another time or in another culture.¹³⁴

Grotowski's research took place through embodied technique and gave rise to a knowledge of relatively reliable pathways through human embodiment, some of which may never previously have been traced by anyone in the history of human existence. The assumption of a progressive historical narrative, in which technique moves towards perfection, only distracts from the substantive merits of the work.

For a Research Culture in Acting

The notion of research in acting technique—as distinct from historical or theoretical research on the subject of acting—is hardly thinkable in the present cultural moment. Despite the fact that the practices lauded by Hodge and so many others, from Stanislavski to Augusto Boal and Anne Bogart, are all the result of sustained research in embodied technique, there is as yet no broad-based institutional framework for the support of such research. In the final section of this chapter, I argue that cultivation of a research culture in acting technique is a valid and potentially productive undertaking. I ask what this might look like—in the United States, in the twenty-first century—and how it could be achieved. What are some of the questions this research culture might hope to answer? How would it go about doing so? What would a vibrant and dynamic research culture bring to the field of acting? What would it look like to organize, fund, and carry out research in acting under its own name, without hiding it away in the shadows of training and production? Can we envision institutions, academic or otherwise, that would actively explore

¹³⁴ See Grotowski, "Performer," 378-79; and see Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, 158-59, on such "claims to literal or historical 'truth.'"

performance technique, and only secondarily present shows or teach students? How might such institutions be organized and assessed, given that neither the standards of pedagogy nor those of the performing arts would apply?¹³⁵

A number of urgent questions for contemporary theorists of acting technique are raised by Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud's anthology, *The Politics of American Actor Training*. Many of these have to do with the commercial pressures that influence contemporary acting from every angle. In her essay, Renaud asks: "What is an actor in a profession buffeted by commercial demands?"¹³⁶ In the same volume, David Wiles calls for graduate-level actor training programs to recognize that their work does "not need validation from the entertainment industry" and to challenge especially the "appearance standards established and maintained by the industry."¹³⁷ Similar questions run through Ross Prior's *Teaching Actors*, where they appear most prominently in the ongoing debate between those who emphasize vocational training and those who see acting as part of a broader vision of education.¹³⁸ Most provocatively stated, the question is whether acting schools should take a reactive or proactive stance with regard to the "industry" and "profession" of acting. Prior asks: "Is it the role of drama schools to react to industry requirements alone or should they set the agenda with their own idealism?"¹³⁹ My purpose here is not so much to argue that schools and teachers of acting should take a more proactive stance with regard to the entertainment industry—even if I do believe this—but to

¹³⁵ In the conclusion to this dissertation, I argue for a central role for academia in fostering and maintaining such a research culture. However, universities are not the only places where high-level research can take place. The Grotowski Institute in Poland and Movement Research in New York City are two important examples of non-academic institutions that are leading the way in embodied research.

¹³⁶ Lissa Tyler Renaud, "Training Actors or Consumers? Commentary on American Actor Training," in Margolis and Renaud, *The Politics of American Actor Training*, 79.

¹³⁷ David Eulus Wiles, "Beyond Race and Gender: Reframing Diversity in Actor-Training Programs," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, 130-31.

¹³⁸ Prior, *Teaching Actors*, 44-47 and passim. This volume focuses on the UK and Australia, although the point is applicable to the United States. For more on the US, see Peter Zazzali, "The Commodification of US Acting as Seen Through the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs," PhD dissertation, CUNY Graduate Center (2012).

¹³⁹ Prior, *Teaching Actors*, 69.

provide more rigorous theoretical foundations for such a stance than have thus far been articulated. As in the previous chapter, I aim to offer an epistemological perspective on training and research as an alternative to the economic framework according to which acting schools, and performing arts institutions in general, are most often structured and assessed today.

Developing such a perspective means reclaiming the notion of “experimental” theatre as distinct from the physical or ensemble-based theatre with which that term is now associated. Experimentation is not a matter of aesthetics but of epistemology. Embodied technique can be pictured as a network of branching pathways and overlapping areas of exploration. An active research culture is one that acknowledges the value of a diverse array of ongoing research projects. In Deleuze and Guattari’s overused but still evocative terms, a research culture is “rhizomatic” and ecological, as opposed to a commercial or aesthetic model that sees technique as a single line or ladder towards universally valid achievements (Barba’s “myth of technique”). There is a spectrum between pure and applied research, but an active research culture depends on both. In research, there is no such thing as perfect knowledge, as every area of discovery remains an unfolding epistemic object. The notion of a single coherent line of progressive improvement is the opposite of research culture. While recognizing the achievement of specific individuals and institutions, a vibrant research culture works against individual lionization, preferring to support an ecology sustained by many small independent projects. This is the opposite of the celebrity/genius culture fostered by commercialism. To envision a research culture in acting technique could therefore be a significant paradigm shift. Institutions that provide actor training, both within and outside academia, might have to let go of many of the shorthand notions of quality and success that currently define acting, and begin to think instead in terms of ongoing, parallel projects that explore different areas of technique.

One of these potentially harmful ideas is that vastly different kinds of actors seek the same kinds of success. Phrases like “the craft” or “the actor’s work” suggest a single actor who scales a single ladder of capability. A similar assumption undergirds debates over whether “the actor” experiences genuine emotion during performance.¹⁴⁰ In fact, there is nothing contradictory in the idea that different actors make use of different kinds of technique, or even that the same actor may work differently from one day to the next. Some may experience intense emotions onstage, others may not, and both may appear fascinating or dull to particular spectators who likewise have their own preferences and investments. Stanislavski rejected the exaggeration of movements onstage for comic effect as “Pluses, extras, lead[ing] nowhere. They’re a big lie.”¹⁴¹ But comic exaggeration is not a big lie. If explored thoroughly, that pathway leads to clowning and melodrama, and perhaps to other fields worth exploring. In a research field, precisely those branching points that are deemed uninteresting now may be revisited later as thresholds verging on new areas of exploration. One person’s dead end is another’s unexpected pathway into the unknown. Scholars have long argued that “great” acting is culturally relative, but this point is incompletely made if we do not offer a framework for comparing practices that acknowledges similarity as well as difference. It is true that actors in different cultures and time periods work towards different goals and frame their work in different ways. Yet there may also be substantial overlap and interconnection in the embodied technique they employ. While there is no such thing as “the craft” in a universal sense, there is such a thing as craft, and it can link actors together even when they do not share language, ideology, or aesthetics.

¹⁴⁰ Toporkov, in all seriousness, refers to an actor’s attempt to provoke his own feelings directly as the “forbidden path,” as opposed to the “correct path” of physical actions (4). Joseph Roach’s *The Player’s Passion* weighs in on this debate, taking Diderot’s side against Grotowski, among others (226). And who could have guessed that Richard Schechner would start using Sanskrit terminology to propose direct work on the emotions in the late twentieth century?—see Richard Schechner, “Rasaesthetics,” *TDR* 45.3 (2001): 27-50.

¹⁴¹ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 22.

Three additional concepts, still widely in use today among Anglophone teachers and theorists of acting, likewise tend to reduce the field of acting to a linear pathway or binary opposition rather than an epistemic field. These are the concepts of “neutral” technique, “extra-daily” technique, and “empty” technique. I will briefly critique each of these before moving on. Regarding the first, Mark Evans argues that the concept of the “neutral” body derives from an earlier focus on the “natural” body and shows how both are culturally determined and fail to work across differences in ability, gender, and ethnicity.¹⁴² As Carrie Sandahl has argued, the assumption of “neutrality” in actor training—even with the inclusion of somatics—breaks down when applied to “disabled” bodies that do not share the expected reliability of common anatomy.¹⁴³ In an interview with Victoria Anne Lewis, Sandahl recalls a class in which students were instructed to imagine that the sacrum was the “seat of their soul”—an upsetting command given that Sandahl has never had a sacrum bone.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, much of the “neutral body” technique described by Evans is incoherent when applied to a body without a sacrum. Yet rather than simply prompting the acknowledgment of a category of differently structured or differently abled bodies, this example should serve to remind us that all human embodiment is only relatively reliable.¹⁴⁵ As I have been arguing, technique works on the basis of a material reliability that is only ever relative. For this reason, research in technique is never finished. Nothing is guaranteed in the passage of technique from one body to another. Instead, the question of the underlying reliability that enables technique must remain continually open.

Eugenio Barba’s notion of “extra-daily technique” is similarly problematic in that it seems to assume a universally applicable difference between the daily and the extra-daily. Yet

¹⁴² Evans, *Movement Training for the Modern Actor*, 69-119.

¹⁴³ Carrie Sandahl, “The Tyranny of Neutral,” in Sandahl and Auslander, *Bodies in Commotion*, 259.

¹⁴⁴ Victoria Ann Lewis, “Disability and Access: A Manifesto for Actor Training,” in Margolis and Renaud, *The Politics of American Actor Training*, 187.

¹⁴⁵ For more on this point, see my discussion of (dis)ability and sexual difference in Chapter 4.

elsewhere Barba acknowledges that the “social use of the body is necessarily the product of a culture” and sees training as the development of a “second colonisation” of the body by technique.¹⁴⁶ It is striking that Barba, who is so deeply associated with the idea of training as empowering to the performer, should in this passage characterize it in terms more readily associated with the cultural criticism of Bourdieu, Foucault, and Butler. In any case, I believe there are legitimate uses for the concept of the “daily” and the everyday, when these terms refer to what counts as common knowledge in a particular context. Everyday technique, as I will argue in the next chapter, can be used to refer to knowledge that is widely available to a population, whether it is learned in school or informally. This means that “extra-daily” technique can be made daily, and vice-versa. For example, in many countries today, literacy is daily technique, not because it is natural or easy but because years of mandatory schooling make it so. I have also argued that physical education makes some aspects of physical culture “daily” in this sense. The daily can also refer to what a specific person does every day. In this sense, even the most highly specialized technique becomes daily for those highly-trained athletes or performers who dedicate their lives to making it so. From an epistemological perspective, the important point is that technique may be daily or extra-daily depending on how many people practice it and how often. The extent to which a given area of technique is daily therefore has as much to do with socially established curricula—including implicit pedagogies—as with its inherent, material properties.

Finally, as I argued in Chapter 1, there is in practice no such thing as “empty” technique. Technique may serve many ends, both predictable and unknown. It can produce multiple outcomes, including those that are not intended. But it is never simply mechanical or automatic. Highly trained athletes and performers strive to make their technique automatic. In doing so, they

¹⁴⁶ Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 245. As one of the only books to attempt a cross-cultural survey of embodied performance technique, this tome reveals considerably more technical specificity and nuance than the now-common notion of the extra-daily implies.

do not forsake agency or intention. Rather, a satisfying account of agency must find ways to include that which is no longer explicitly conscious. When we examine a practice from a political, ethical, or artistic angle, we should acknowledge that there can be different kinds of agency at work, overlapping and intersecting each other through the residues and sediments of embodied technique. The notion of “empty” technique, which harkens back to the anti-technical arguments of Heidegger and Mumford—see Chapter 1—has no place in a discussion of actor training. It is a red herring that works to conceal the variety of goals and desires that motivate practice. When Toporkov describes his sense of failure in delivering a monologue before Stanislavski—“There was not one living line, not a spark of real-life feeling, it was all dead, empty, artificial”—we should not take this notion of emptiness at face value.¹⁴⁷ Instead, we might ask: What emotions was the actor feeling at that moment, however inappropriate to the character? There is nothing “empty” about delivering a monologue while feeling nervous and embarrassed, even if the sensation of emptiness is sometimes used metaphorically to describe such states. Similarly, there is nothing “empty” about performing a dance while thinking about an unrelated topic. In my view, it is the responsibility of the teacher or critic to unpack, in technical terms, what is desired in the next moment of practice, rather than relying the reductive concept of “empty” technique.

I have now critiqued several common ideas that, in my view, block the development of research culture: unitary notions of “the actor” and “the craft,” as well as reductive notions of neutral, daily, and empty technique. In closing, I will now describe what I consider two important areas of current research in acting technique. Each is too large to be thoroughly discussed within the scope of this chapter, but I hope that by pointing them out I can suggest some of the value that might be gained from supporting the development of a research culture in

¹⁴⁷ Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 25.

this field. The first area I want to mention is the intersection of acting technique and physical culture. In the previous chapter, I defined physical culture as embodied technique in which movement plays a central role, whether that movement is subtle or spectacular. In this chapter, I have already mentioned the extent to which Stanislavski, Grotowski, and other innovators in acting technique were influenced by postural yoga and other developments in physical culture. Indeed, many of the best-known twentieth-century research projects in acting technique were intercultural and interdisciplinary, drawing extensively on specialized technique that was not considered to be part of “acting” at the time. Sometimes the sources of this technique were credited but, as I have suggested, very often they were not. In any case, due to unequal power relations, the nature of the relationships between practitioners was frequently obscured. Even when the sources of such technique were acknowledged, they were rarely understood in epistemological terms, as knowledge. Accordingly, the development of a more explicitly framed research culture in acting technique could shed light on the meaning and continuing relevance of the practices conducted under the banner of experimental and physical theatre during the twentieth century. Rather than seeing physical culture as a useful addition to actor training that helped produce new genres of performance, we could see the interaction of acting technique and physical culture as a massive research project in embodied technique.

To give one example, Daniel Mroz has traced the integration of taijiquan into actor training programs, historicizing the process and debunking the common assumption that taijiquan is “an archaic and quasi-religious system of movement training concerned with health maintenance and personal enlightenment.”¹⁴⁸ According to Mroz, the “different schools of taijiquan served a spectrum of needs that ran from militia training, to bodyguard skills, to

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Mroz, “Technique in exile: The changing perception of *taijiquan*, from Ming dynasty military exercise to twentieth-century actor training protocol,” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 28.2 (2008): 127.

personal self-defence, to health enhancement, to national identity construction, with plenty of overlap between categories.”¹⁴⁹ In his more recent book, Mroz traces the impact of Chinese “body technologies” on European and North American theatre before discussing his own research and production work at that particular juncture.¹⁵⁰ Similar historical tracings are needed to show how research in physical culture, from the athletic to the somatic, has interacted with research in actor and performer training in Europe and the Americas. Technique from China, Japan, and India has been particularly influential in this regard, along with the somatic pioneers discussed in the previous chapter. Sara A. Barker observes: “In the past thirty years of actor training the Alexander Technique has come to be considered a standard component in programs throughout the United States.”¹⁵¹ Whereas Stanislavski’s actors might have cross-trained in ballet or fencing, contemporary actors in the United States are more likely to experience the embodied technique of yoga, taijiquan, Feldenkrais, or Alexander, as a supplement to what still remains the defining feature of “acting” (as opposed to “performance”) technique—namely, work on monologues and scenes from dramatic scripts. From an epistemological perspective, the interdisciplinary project unfolding at the borders of acting technique and physical culture is nowhere near complete.

Phillip B. Zarrilli has played an important role, through both embodied and scholarly work, in the advancement of acting technique as a field of research. His most recent book, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*, begins by critiquing American “method” training as hyper-intellectual, unable to fully integrate the mind and body of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Mroz, *The Dancing Word: An Embodied Approach to the Preparation of Performers and the Composition of Performances* (New York: Rodopi Press, 2011), 17-31.

¹⁵¹ Sarah A. Barker, “The Alexander Technique: An Acting Approach,” in *Theatre Topics* 12.1 (2002): 35-48.

the actor.¹⁵² Zarrilli then goes on to propose a “psychophysical” approach to acting based in his own practice, highlighting the extent to which Asian martial arts may help the actor to engage the full “bodymind” rather than working in an overly intellectual way. Zarrilli outlines a radically interdisciplinary and intercultural approach to acting technique, one that ambitiously seeks to integrate technique from drawn from yoga, taijiquan, and the south Indian martial art *kalaripayattu* with work on European dramatic scripts like those of Samuel Beckett and Sarah Kane. Overall, his project is exemplary in its sustained effort and in the impact it has had upon theories of acting. Zarrilli’s work, including his much older anthology, *Acting (Re)Considered*, is cited not only in theatre and performance studies but also in the emerging field of martial arts studies.¹⁵³ It is also worth noting that Zarrilli’s ongoing research has long been supported by academia, first in the United States and later in England. This could make him an important figure for current debates of whether and how academia will support such research.¹⁵⁴ However, Zarrilli’s theorization of acting does not go far enough, in my view, to escape the reductive tropes described above and put forth an alternative view of the field. Throughout *Psychophysical Acting*, Zarrilli relies on precisely those concepts of neutral, extra-daily, and empty technique that I have critiqued. Furthermore, Zarrilli fails to articulate the sources and technical framing of his own practice in precise and rigorous terms, sometimes seeming to put his own work forward as a universal solution for the problems of “the actor,” rather than as a specific research project in a particular area of embodied technique.

¹⁵² Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17. Zarrilli exempts Meisner’s work, saying that it is “arguably less prone to dualism than other early American method approaches.”

¹⁵³ For example, Zarrilli is cited in C. S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge’s introduction to *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 5.

¹⁵⁴ The place of embodied research in academia is more thoroughly discussed in the Conclusion to this dissertation. Mroz is another such figure, less well known but similarly successful in mobilizing academic support for embodied research. His three-year actor training project “Atelier” (2010-2013) is funded by a research/creation grant from the Canadian government and is currently ongoing at the University of Ottawa (personal communication).

Zarrilli draws on some of the same sources in the science of embodiment to which I have previously referred, and his notion of the performative score as a “horizon of possibilities” resonates with my image of technique as a network of branching pathways.¹⁵⁵ He also beautifully describes the way in which embodied repetition can lead a practitioner to the discovery of unknown possibilities within technique: “As one continues to repeat a particular form or structure over time, a larger field of experience accumulates as an expanding field of possibilities. Ideally one is able to improvise within this larger field of possibilities.”¹⁵⁶ Yet when it comes to the question of how different kinds of training relate to one another, Zarrilli does not take us much further than where Barba had arrived in the 1970s.

Zarrilli continues to rely on a notion of the “extra-daily” that is surprisingly ahistorical, given his commitment to the intercultural. “What, precisely, is acquired or brought to accomplishment through long-term bodymind training?” Zarrilli asks. He answers: “To become accomplished is to achieve an optimal level and quality of relationship between the doer and the done where ‘the body(mind) becomes all eyes.’”¹⁵⁷ Phrases like “to become accomplished” and “optimal level” bypass the variety of technique in favor of a unitary notion of quality and success. Throughout the book, Zarrilli develops a model in which “long-term bodymind training” seems to lead to a singular and apparently universal goal: the development of “a non-ordinary, extra-daily bodymind that is totally open in the moment.”¹⁵⁸ This is deeply troubling insofar as it does not distinguish between different kinds of training, different kinds of bodymind, or different kinds of openness “in the moment.” Surely there are many different approaches to “long-term bodymind training” and these do not all produce the same “non-ordinary” body. How should we

¹⁵⁵ Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, 48.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

understand Zarrilli's psychophysical acting in relation to that of Stanislavski—or, for that matter, the “psychophysical” technique of Mabel Todd or F. M. Alexander?¹⁵⁹

Zarrilli elevates his psychophysical approach to acting above other practices that he considers too intellectual, too physical, or too technical. As in the writing of Barba (and many yoga practitioners), sports and athletics receive strong criticism, with Zarrilli dismissing his youthful (pre-Asian) “sports body” as masculine, aggressive, and dominated/dominating.¹⁶⁰ At one point, Zarrilli seems to suggest that playing a sport, unlike psychophysical acting, does not normally involve working with emotions.¹⁶¹ It is certainly valid to critique normative masculinity for its aggressive and objectifying approach to the body, as many others have done.¹⁶² This point was part of my critique of athleticism and healthism in the previous chapter. But Zarrilli does not unpack the specific ways in which sports worked upon his body, or the technical and embodied differences between *kalaripayattu* as a martial art and the sports of football or soccer. He does not explain the difference between how sports and acting work with emotion and affect. Instead, the reader is given to understand that some technique trains the “bodymind” while other technique trains only the body—or only the mind. In addition, the reader is repeatedly warned of “the tendency for form training to become empty and habitual.”¹⁶³ In order to avoid this, according to Zarrilli, we have to engage “consciously” in our practice. This is an old account of agency in which the empty shell of the body is animated by conscious intent. It is a common rhetoric among practitioners in many areas of embodied technique, but surprising to find here,

¹⁵⁹ Michael Huxley, “F. Matthias Alexander and Mabel Elsworth Todd: Proximities, practices and the psychophysical,” in *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 3.1-2 (2011). See also Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of the “embodied mind” in *The Transformative Power of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 99.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶² On the “dangerous masculinity” of school sports, see Michael Atkinson and Michael Kehler, “Boys, Gyms, Locker Rooms and Heterotopia,” in Kehler and Atkinson, eds., *Boys' Bodies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). See also Ian Wellard, *Sport, Masculinities and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁶³ Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, 97. The phrase “form training” refers to repeatable patterns of movement, as in martial arts “forms,” as opposed to more openly structured modes of training, such as sparring or improvisation.

given Zarrilli's theoretical sophistication in other regards. In any case, Zarrilli's work provides a valuable starting point for additional work that could more precisely address the relationship between actor training and physical culture.

The second area of current research I wish to mention is the intersection between acting technique and cultural identity. While just one or two essays in Zarrilli's *Acting (Re)Considered* and Krasner's *Method Acting Reconsidered* address identity politics, many of the essays in Margolis and Renaud's *Politics of American Actor Training* do so. I hope that this indicates an increasing interest in this important area of research. Yet as these essays show, there is a significant gap between the theories used to analyze acting technique on the one hand and identity politics on the other. Acting technique, for the most part, continues to assume a neutral or unmarked body that transcends divisions of race and gender. Those who theorize race and gender, on the other hand, are often working from a strategic essentialism that prioritizes such categories over the recognition of how embodied technique moves between bodies and practices, linking them together in continually unexpected ways. I believe that an epistemological perspective on embodied technique, drawing on the ideas of agency and knowledge offered in Chapter 1, offers a more nuanced framework theoretical within which "acting" and "identity" could come into a more thorough and rigorous dialogue with one another.

Over two decades ago, Sue-Ellen Case wrote:

Social conventions about the female gender will be encoded in all signs for women. Inscribed in body language, signs of gender can determine the blocking of a scene, by assigning bolder movements to the men and more restricted movements to the women, or by creating poses and positions that exploit the role

of women as sexual objects. Stage movement replicates the proxemics of the social order, capitalizing upon the spatial relationships in the culture at large between women and the sites of power.¹⁶⁴

Case is concerned here with the extent to which acting technique unwittingly replicates the sexist power dynamics of everyday life. In Rhonda Blair's formulation of the same time period, this process works in the other direction as well, since "performing a role is a kind of 'training for life,' a rehearsal and patterning of a way of being in the world."¹⁶⁵ Thus, there is flow in both directions between the technique of gender and that of ("Stanislavskian") acting. From a feminist perspective, the danger is not just that acting will re-present hegemonic sexism onstage, but equally that it will support the ongoing reproduction of inequality by offering training in normative gender under the guise of actor training. This is confirmed by Elizabeth C. Stroppel's suggestion that "acting classes claiming to free students physically, in order to develop characters from a more neutral basis of gestures, in fact allow students to remain locked into gendered behavior" as long as gender is not explicitly problematized as part of the process.¹⁶⁶ Judith Butler's work in the 1990s seemed to many to confirm the interpenetration of gender and performance—even though, as I previously discussed, Butler herself did not believe the gap between gender performativity and theatrical performance could be so easily bridged.

Two important points can be drawn from these feminist analyses of acting. First, if hegemonic cultural identity can be perpetuated through an approach to actor training that

¹⁶⁴ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (1988; New York: Palgrave, 2008), 117-18. Lauren Love cites this passage in "Resisting the 'Organic': A Feminist Actor's Approach," in Zarrilli, *Acting (Re)Considered*, 283.

¹⁶⁵ Cited in Mary Cutler, "'Typed' for What?," in Margolis and Renaud, *The Politics of American Actor Training*, 137. The reference is to Blair's essay "Liberating the Young Actor: Feminist Pedagogy and Performance," in *Theatre Topics* 2 (1992): 16.

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth C. Stroppel, "Reconciling the Past and the Present: Feminist Perspectives on the Method in the Classroom and Stage," in Krasner, *Method Acting Reconsidered*, 123n19. See also Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares: Women and "the Method"* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

replicates assumptions about how men and women use their bodies, then it must also be possible to open up alternatives to this hegemony through innovative approaches to actor training. Given the complexity of present-day thinking on gender and sexuality, this would certainly not be as simple as “cross-casting” male actors as female characters and vice versa. Instead, it would require a thorough unpacking of gender technique in technical terms—such as the “proxemics” mentioned by Case—combined with an experimental attitude towards the training and transmission of this technique. To articulate gender in technical terms is already a step forward, one that I will pursue more thoroughly in the next chapter. To offer gender technique as an area of training and research available to everyone is potentially a radical move. The notion of alternative training in gender technique is distinct from Butler’s notion of parodic citation and suggests quite a different approach to political transformation.

The second point I would draw from these feminist critiques of acting technique is that not only gender but other kinds of identity categories may involve differences in embodied technique that can both feed into and be influenced by explicit training in fields like acting. The past fifty years have seen substantial discussion of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and most recently (dis)ability in the context of theatrical representation. However, few scholars have addressed these types of socially and politically urgent difference in the context of acting technique and actor training. In one essay in Krasner’s *Method Acting Reconsidered*, David Wiles argues that Method acting fails to provide actors “tools for forging a relationship” with the audience.¹⁶⁷ This is not surprising, given what I have said about Stanislavski’s turn away from the audience to discover the vast potential of basing performances on the indirect use of technique. In the work of Stanislavski and Grotowski, the actor’s implicit trust in the director’s

¹⁶⁷ David Wiles, “Burdens of Representation: The Method and the Audience,” in Krasner, *Method Acting Reconsidered*, 172.

vision is assumed, because the actor does not establish a direct relationship with the audience. What if this trust is not present? Wiles recalls performing a role in which he was subjected to a racial slur and notes that his relationship to the performance “changed depending on who was in the house from show to show.”¹⁶⁸ Indeed, several essays in *The Politics of American Actor Training* speak about conflicts between “becoming” a fictional character and avoiding the reproduction of oppressive stereotypes. Derek Mudd recalls being directed to speak a line in Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank’s *The Exonerated* in a homophobic way; Micha Espinosa and Antonio Ocampo-Guzman describe the impact of mainstream stereotypes upon Latino actors; and Victoria Anne Lewis remembers being rejected from an acting conservatory because her readily apparent disability meant in their eyes that she could never become a “professional” actor.¹⁶⁹ Each of these examples evokes the powerlessness actors experience when the alignment of hegemonic acting technique and hegemonic cultural values allows directors, teachers, and producers to enforce stereotypes through the language of training and craft. Yet these essays only scratch the surface of the collusion between acting technique and repressive social norms. It is easy enough to argue for more “diversity” in actor training programs and in mainstream theatre institutions—but such arguments risk implying that acting technique itself is a stable edifice into which “others” must enter. Instead, I suggest that we conceive of both acting technique (beyond the European tradition) and cultural identity (including white and other dominant identities) as operating in and through embodied technique. In doing so, we potentially open many new doors for research into their mutual transformation.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 174. This issue is similar to the one Lauren Love describes in “Resisting the ‘Organic,’” where she proposes Brechtian acting technique as an alternative for the feminist actor, precisely because it allows for a direct rather than indirect relationship with the audience. See also Shonni Enelow, “The Method and the Means: James Baldwin at the Actors Studio,” *Theatre Survey* 53.1 (2012): 85-103.

¹⁶⁹ Derek Mudd, “‘They accused me of bein’ a homosexual’: Playing Kerry Cook in *The Exonerated*,” 146-47; Micha Espinosa and Antonio Ocampo-Guzman, “Identity Politics and the Training of Latino Actors,” 156; and Victoria Ann Lewis, “Disability and Access,” 178.

The only monograph-length work I know of that specifically tackles the intersection of race and ethnicity with the field of actor training is Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento's *Crossing Cultural Borders Through the Actor's Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge*. In this book, Nascimento draws on her own experience, and her connections with performers Ang Gey Pin and Roberta Carreri (whose work has been deeply formed by their relationships with Grotowski and Barba respectively), to theorize intercultural theatre and acting at the level of embodied technique. While Nascimento duly acknowledges the importance of representation and the public dimension of theatre, she wants to draw our attention instead to the deep layers of embodied technique that are, as I have also argued, not directly but only indirectly perceptible in the moment of performance. She writes:

It is unavoidable that the actor's body is an obvious visual marker for the viewer, an instrument that unequivocally displays her race. ... That which remains invisible—the length of her apprenticeship, the way in which she acquired a given performance technique, her personal experience in crossing cultural borders, her artistic justifications to do so—is seldom taken into consideration.¹⁷⁰

Throughout *Crossing Cultural Borders*, Nascimento emphasizes the difference “between the trivial utilization of foreign elements in a performance and the long-term embodiment of foreign performance techniques.”¹⁷¹ While the first takes place at the level of representation and can be critiqued in relation to an assumed public sphere, the second involves the transmission of embodied knowledge on a level that exceeds the domain of the public.

¹⁷⁰ Nascimento, *Crossing Cultural Borders*, 75.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

Nascimento's critique of those who analyze intercultural theatre only in terms of cultural representation is similar to Saba Mahmood's discussion of the ways in which Islamic practices are reduced to signs and symbols in the discourse of Europe and the United States. As I explained in Chapter 1, Mahmood argues that it is not enough to "read" practices of prayer or dress (like the wearing of the veil) as cultural signs. Rather, such practices must also be understood as embodied technique that ethically and politically shape individuals and communities in complex ways.¹⁷² For my purposes, the crucial point illustrated by both Nascimento and Mahmood is the continuity between the domain of public spectacle and the domain of everyday life at the level of embodied technique. When critics assess publicly visible performances only in terms of their symbolic meaning in the landscape of discourse and representation, they miss the ways in which such "performances" also operate as embodied technique. Furthermore, as is clear in the writing of both Nascimento and Mahmood, this problem attends not only the technique of acting and religion but also supposedly stable identity categories like those of race and gender. As Nascimento writes, the "transmission of knowledge" through long-term training is often downplayed by critics of intercultural theatre, who instead "privilege the individual performer's race or nationality over how rigorously that actor acquired a certain technique."¹⁷³ To move ahead with acting and performance technique as a field of knowledge, we must understand that race and nationality are at least partly acquired in the same way that a profession or a religion is acquired. Culture itself "is not a natural but, rather, a learned and embodied practice," and "cultural border crossing in acting is not any less authentic or natural than one's relation" to an allegedly "original" culture.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For specific citations, see Chapter 1.

¹⁷³ Nascimento, *Crossing Cultural Borders*, 26.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

Nascimento borrows the concept of “intersectionality” from Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back*, applying it here to how culture itself may be learned through processes of actor training and ensemble creation.¹⁷⁵ These two points are equally important: Identity categories are acquired through embodied training—but also, professional training constitutes identity in no less fundamental a way than does cultural training or socialization. As Nascimento reminds us, training in performance has a permanent effect upon the actor. Through training, actors acquire technique so deeply that it becomes their second nature, and the actor’s “process of embodying such techniques is irreversible.”¹⁷⁶ In applying the concept of intersectionality to actor training, Nascimento suggests that it is not just gender, race, and sexuality that intersect in the body of each individual person. Rather, as I have also tried to show, specialized and explicit training like that of athletes and performers interfaces with these kinds of identities through intersectionality. What Randy Martin calls the “composite” body, with its “residue” of technique learned in vastly different contexts, is not only the body of the trained performer. Rather, as I will argue in the following chapter, it applies to the learning of everyday identity as well. We can therefore legitimately speak of intersectionality between what are usually dichotomized as professional versus cultural identities: acting and race, for example, or dance and gender, or sports and sexuality.¹⁷⁷ An analysis of intersectionality in these terms is not the same as one that treats race, gender, and sexuality as stable categories that may be represented or explored through embodied practices like those of acting, dance, or sports. Instead, such an analysis requires that we examine all kinds of identity formation and training processes at the level of embodied technique.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 74. For a personal account of this process from Roberta Carreri, see 106.

¹⁷⁷ This also calls to mind Randy Martin’s notion of “residue,” discussed in Chapter 1.

Turning somewhat aside from a politics of the public sphere, such an analysis would ask how the various kinds of training we receive in all areas of life enable certain embodied possibilities while obscuring or foreclosing others. Nascimento's book defends the validity of deep research processes, which may become caught in the net of public discourse when they start to emerge into the public sphere. I do not wish to deny the responsibility of artists of all kinds to consider how their work will be perceived at the level of cultural representation. However, I agree with Nascimento that critics and scholars should take a more sophisticated view of embodiment, one that acknowledges the depth of technique as well as its symbolic meaning.¹⁷⁸ It may be that what has been called "intercultural theatre" is more accurately a kind of "research theatre" in which interculturalism is the methodology. Such theatres ideally work against the alignment of actor training with racism and sexism, not by inserting "other" identities into existing theatrical infrastructure but by conducting sustained explorations at the border between acting technique and cultural identity. I think this is what David Wiles has in mind when he asks us to go "behind race and gender" in considering what "diversity" means in the context of actor training programs.¹⁷⁹ Certainly, he does not mean that we should ignore race and gender and return to earlier models of "neutral" bodies and "neutral" training. Rather, I think his suggestion implies an understanding of cultural identity that has the potential to more thoroughly transform acting and theatre than the notion of diversity usually implies.

Research projects at the intersection of acting technique and cultural identity could benefit theatre institutions by radically expanding their scope, reach, and relevance. At the same time, I believe that such projects could offer benefits in the other direction as well. Could our

¹⁷⁸ This is what I tried to do in my critique of the Grotowski and Richards Workcenter, where I attempted to acknowledge both the depth of their work on Afro-Caribbean songs and the importance of clarifying what those songs have meant in other contexts both current and historical.

¹⁷⁹ David Wiles, "Beyond Race and Gender: Reframing Diversity in Actor-Training Programs," in *The Politics of Actor Training*, 123-36.

understanding of gender, race, religion, and “everyday life” be transformed by interdisciplinary research projects that explore the borders between these kinds of identities and what has so far been seen as highly specialized or professional technique? Could acting and performance technique be a source of interdisciplinary inspiration for how we organize our communities and social groups outside theatre? The technique of sports, yoga, dance, and acting is not separate from everyday life. It is already part of the “everyday” curriculum of embodied technique in the lives of many people, both formally and informally. What are the politics of acting technique, seen not as a vocational skill or an element of theatre but as an area of knowledge about the possibilities of human embodiment? I do not wish to venture an answer to this question here, but only to point out that this is a significantly different way to theorize the politics of acting. Not a politics of spectacle and representation, this is perhaps more like the “anonymous influences” Grotowski hoped his later work might have. This would be a politics of spreading knowledge and gradually shifting priorities, as in the distinction Sharon Marie Carnicke draws between the Actors Studio and the Group Theatre: “The Studio did not attempt to create an alternative theatre, as had the Group. Instead, it set its sights on a vast arena. Studio actors would infiltrate and transform from within the entire commercial system that had spelled the doom of the American Laboratory and Group Theatre.”¹⁸⁰ The current theoretical framework of performing arts in the public sphere cannot account for such a politics, which is accomplished more in the laboratory or studio than on a public stage. Yet there can be no doubt as to which institution, the Theatre or the Studio, has had a greater long-term impact. Ultimately, it is not performance but embodied research that opens new pathways in how we live our lives.

¹⁸⁰ Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 48.

CHAPTER FOUR: GENDER, IDENTITY, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

The previous two chapters focused on areas of embodied technique that would typically be considered specialized. Although physical culture is taught in elementary schools, and postural yoga is increasingly common in globalized urban contexts, these areas of technique are still understood as distinct from everyday life, being practiced in particular times and places or by a particular subset of the population. The same can be said for acting and other performing arts, despite their prevalence in schools, summer camps, and elsewhere. Perhaps for this reason, issues of power and identity are still applied mainly as secondary considerations or afterthoughts to discussions of physical education, sports, yoga, theatre, and dance. The common view remains that there exist, first of all, sports and performing arts, and that these can be analyzed secondarily in terms of gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, and other “social” variables. As a result, it may seem confusing to follow a chapter on yoga and a chapter on acting with a chapter on gender. Are these not wholly different kinds of things? I analyzed gender dynamics in the chapter on yoga technique, but that is quite different from analyzing gender itself as an area of technique. In this chapter, I argue that gender is indeed an area of embodied technique, and by extension that at least some of the categories we call “identities” can and should be closely examined through the epistemological lens developed in previous chapters. The question then becomes, as Ben Highmore asks in his introduction to *The Everyday Life Reader*: Just “whose everyday life” are we talking about?¹

¹ Ben Highmore, “Introduction: Questioning Everyday Life,” in *The Everyday Life Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

Gender is not something that one simply chooses to have or to do, not a specialized area of technique practiced by a particular group of people. While most people do not identify as athletes, yogis, or performers, arguably everyone has a gender identity of some kind. Society is organized around the assumption that everyone has a gender, so that, as Judith Butler has written, having a gender is a basic “condition of cultural intelligibility.”² In this sense, gender is a powerful example of the embodied technique of everyday life. There are spectacular displays of gender—many of which overlap with physical culture and performing arts—but examining these will not necessarily tell us how gender works in everyday life. Much gender practice in everyday life goes unnoticed and unlabeled as such. Of what does the practice of gender consist? What does it mean to “have” a gender, and why must everyone have one? Can male and female, or masculine and feminine, be seen as technical specializations insofar as each involves training in particular areas of embodied technique? Are such binary divisions the best way to think about and understand gender? How might an epistemological, technical perspective on gender reconcile current tensions in queer and feminist theory? These are some of the questions I hope to address in this chapter.

As in previous chapters, my overarching goal is to further develop an epistemological theory of embodied technique, this time asking what such a theory might have to offer recent and current theories of gender. My argument locates gender within the broader category of everyday life, building on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and others who have claimed that social identity is habituated or performed. To these social and cultural analyses of everyday life, I bring a new emphasis on the *epistemological* dimension of practice: the extent to which practice is structured not only by habit (or habitus) and performance (or performativity), but also by knowledge. I do not deny that gender is at times both a habit and a performance. However, I

² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52.

argue that habits and performances are determined as much by knowledge, in the form of technique, as by the social dynamics of power. In addition, I claim that knowledge of technique results from ongoing research that continually tests the limits of similarity and difference between bodies. While previous chapters have examined the relative similarities or “reliabilities” between bodies that allow for technique to spread across sometimes vast distances of time and space, this chapter focuses on the dissimilarity of bodies—in particular, the heavily debated but still unresolved notion of sexual difference and its relationship to gender.

I begin by asking what it means to analyze gender as embodied technique. Complicating Gayle Rubin’s notion of a “sex/gender system,” I propose a more fluid model of sexual difference and variation, which acknowledges the material reality of physiological differences without locking them down into stable categories. I then apply this model to a few key examples of gender technique, in each case showing how an epistemological perspective can shed further light on the relationship between gender technique and the materiality of bodies. In the third section, I examine what Butler calls “the new gender politics” and show how theorizing gender as technique can help to explain both the deeply felt reality of gender identity and its availability to change. In the final section, I touch upon several current and ongoing embodied research projects in gender, analogous to those in yoga and acting identified previously, but perhaps more risky and potentially far-reaching insofar as the technique they innovate is that of everyday life. I then return to the concept of the everyday as an area of technique that includes not only gender but also race, class, religion, and more that could potentially benefit from an epistemological analysis. I end by revising the Situationist call for a “revolution of everyday life” and proposing in its place a more patient approach to social transformation through “research in everyday life.”

Gender and Sexual Difference

In Chapter 1, I put forth a “realist” premise for technique based on the writings of Hubert Dreyfus and Laurent Thévenot, for whom the realism of any practice refers to “the relation between human agency and material environment.” According to Thévenot, practice goes beyond “symbolic work, meaning, understanding, [and] interpretation” because it engages with a material environment that continually “responds” with the force of its own reality.³ This realism is the basis of my claim to an epistemological perspective on technique, since by “epistemology” I mean that practice actively encounters and *comes to know* reality through technique, rather than simply producing it. As I have argued, the technique of yoga, dance, and acting results from sustained investigations aimed at discovering relatively reliable pathways through human embodiment. Because of its rich engagement with the material world, technique is as much discovered as it is invented. We come to know ourselves, others, and the material world through the myriad pathways of technique. As Thévenot writes, the reality that one encounters “depends on the different ways one has to ‘take hold’ of the environment.”⁴ For my purposes, this “environment” is not only external but also includes the capacities and limitations of human embodiment, which we come to know through embodied technique. No strict division between agency and environment is needed to study the workings of technique.

Feminism, queer theory, feminist masculinity studies, and transexual and transgender accounts are all centrally engaged with the problematic of realism in this sense. The question of

³ Laurent Thévenot, “Pragmatic regimes governing the engagement with the world,” in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, eds. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eiki von Savigny (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58; 64-65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

what is “material” in human embodiment—as opposed, frequently, to what is “cultural”—has been at the heart of many productive but also divisive debates about sex and gender. On the one hand, a realist account of gender must acknowledge the material and physiological differences that exist between bodies, and the extent to which such differences may affect subjectivity and experience. In my language, this means recognizing that not all technique is equally available to all people. Different bodies may afford different technical pathways and possibilities. On the other hand, we cannot know in advance exactly which bodies will be capable of which kinds of technique. Technique tells us what is possible; it does not tell us what is impossible. Because the material reliabilities with which technique deals are only ever relative, there is always a chance that technique will not work when it is expected to, or will work when it is not expected to. How then should we talk about the relationship between the materiality of bodies and the range of possible technique? This is a central question for theories of gender, where the “materiality of bodies” has often been understood as constituting a binary difference or dichotomy between female and male, feminine and masculine, women and men.

Realism in Thévenot’s sense suggests a continual engagement between technique and materiality. I call the particular materiality with which a given area of technique deals its “substrate.” The premise of realism is that this substrate exists independently of the technique that grapples and works with it. However, since we only come to know a given material substrate through technique, it may not be possible to distinguish one from the other conclusively. For example, the substrate of wood-working is the materiality of wood, but we only come to know the properties of wood through working it. Likewise, the substrate of electrical engineering may be the material properties of electricity and of the substances that conduct it—but this technique is also how we come to know what electricity “is.” In the context of gender, the relationship

between technique and substrate echoes a distinction commonly drawn between “sex” and “gender.” Gayle Rubin defined the “sex/gender” system in 1975 as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.”⁵ Following Rubin, we could see “gender” as the technique and “sex” as its substrate. Accordingly, gender works with and through the “biological” reality of sex, but gender is also how that we come to know that reality.

In its suggestion that society produces gender, Rubin’s anthropological model reiterates Simone de Beauvoir’s famous observation: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”⁶ However, Rubin’s formulation adds something not present in Beauvoir’s: the notion of a material substrate upon which gender works, a ground upon which gender is constructed, which Rubin calls “biological sexuality” and later simply “sex.” In the context of 1970s feminism, Rubin’s essay was aimed at opening new possibilities for gender by distinguishing it from the merely biological “sex.” However, drawing a line between gender and sex can also effectively reify the latter by excluding it from the domain of culture and all that may be open to change. What exactly is the “sex” with which gender works? What material reliabilities does gender assume? Are the categories of male and female part of “sex,” or part of gender? If one is not born a woman, is one nevertheless born female? The most famous critique of sexual difference as materially distinct from gender is that put forth by Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, where she writes that sexual difference “is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices.”⁷ For Butler, “sex” is not a biological reality separate from gender, but a socially constructed “regulatory ideal” in its own

⁵ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 159.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 273.

⁷ *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1. See also *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

right. However, Butler was not the first to question the sex/gender distinction, or to suggest that the binary of sexual difference is itself a cultural phenomenon.

In their landmark work on the sociology of gender, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna question the biological as a synonym for that which is “natural” and therefore “unchangeable.”⁸ On the contrary, Kessler and McKenna argue, scientific data supports a much more complex view of sexual difference. Their prescient rejection of the sex/gender dichotomy (they use the term “gender” exclusively, to emphasize the cultural work that produces even the most basic male/female dichotomy) has been borne out by subsequent decades of scientific and critical thinking. In nature as measured by science, including biology and the life sciences, there are no ideal paradigms of maleness or femaleness—only populations of individuals that each possess a particular set of attributes. Measuring these traits provides quantitative data, which may reveal correlations between these attributes, but such data is statistical in nature and derives as well from the historical context of those taking measurements. In any case, quantitative data can only tell us how particular attributes are distributed in a population, not how to get from individuals and populations to ideal categories. According to J. Edgar Bauer, the seeds of a more complex view of gender can already be found in the writings of Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* “marks the inception of sexual Modernity” in its foregrounding of variation and change over the categories of sexual as well as species taxonomy.⁹ However, one does not have to go that far back in history to recognize that binary gender is less a product of science—as a mode of

⁸ Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 42.

⁹ J. Edgar Bauer, “Darwin, Marañón, Hirschfeld: Sexology and the Reassessment of Evolution Theory as a Non-Essentialist Naturalism,” in *(Dis)Entangling Darwin: Cross-disciplinary Reflections on the Man and His Legacy*, eds. Sara Graça da Silva, Fátima Vieira, and Jorge Bastos da Silva (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). Elsewhere, Bauer has addressed sexual variation in the work of Magnus Hirschfeld and Alfred Kinsey.

investigation that seeks to quantify the reliabilities of the material world—than of the social world in which scientists operate.¹⁰

As Kessler and McKenna demonstrate, scientists and doctors actively reproduce binary gender as a conceptual model, not through their special grounding in science but despite it, by dealing with gender “in the same way everyone else does.”¹¹ In other words, scientists do not use differential data on the distribution of physiological attributes to determine how many sexes there are. Instead, they begin by assuming—just like everyone else—that there are two sexes, and then seek to measure and quantify the differences “between” them. To illustrate this point, Kessler and McKenna enumerate the following measurable physiological traits, several of which have been offered in various contexts as a fundamental basis for binary sexual difference: chromosomes (XX or XY), gonads (ovaries or testes), internal reproductive organs (e.g., uterus, sperm ducts), external reproductive organs, prenatal hormones, and pubertal hormones.¹² Kessler and McKenna then proceed to diagram the unreliability of the supposedly essential correlations between each of these traits. As it turns out, the only time when a physiological trait is perfectly correlated with a binary sex category is when the appearance of external genitals is used to classify a newborn child as either male or female. In all other cases, and in all adult situations, the relationship between a person’s gender and each of the physiological traits mentioned above can vary to a greater or lesser degree.¹³ In other words, neither chromosomes nor any other quantifiable measurement of the body can tell us with certainty what gender a person is. Far from

¹⁰ For a reading of how current trends in science support a more complex theory of sexual difference, see Riki Lane, “Trans as Bodily Becoming: Rethinking the Biological as Diversity, Not Dichotomy,” *Hypatia* 24.3 (2009): 136-57. For a related “theory of complex embodiment” from a disability studies perspective, see Toby Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 25 and passim.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹² Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*, 47-55; 59-68; 73-75.

¹³ In a chart indicating how each matches up with a person’s gender, the only definitive correlation appears at the junction between “external reproductive organs” and “gender attribution” at birth and in early childhood.¹³ As noted above, Kessler and McKenna make no distinction between “sex” and “gender” in their writing.

having special tools with which to assess a person's gender, scientists and doctors use the same everyday technique as everyone else to determine whether someone is "male" or "female," and then organize their thinking around that assumption.

Despite the fact that no single physiological trait can be used to define or determine a person's "true" gender—and that many individuals do not fit neatly within the binary classification scheme at all—scientists and others work tirelessly to maintain binary gender and, in Kessler and McKenna's words, to "construct dimorphism where there is continuity."¹⁴ In some cases, the construction of gender is literal, as when doctors surgically operate upon newborn babies to make their genitals more closely match either a male or the female cultural ideal.¹⁵ In other cases, the construction of binary gender unfolds through the teaching of different embodied technique to those who have already been classified as either female or male. Either way, the reification of two normative body types ("sexes") leads to the identification of bodies as abnormal or disordered if they do not fit into either of these imaginary ideals. Indeed, once the dimorphism has been constructed, the continuity and complexity of physiological variation is no longer perceptible as such. Instead of seeing continuous natural variation, we begin to perceive bodies as either normal or abnormal, prioritizing imaginary ideals of "male" and "female" over the reality of diverse embodiment and sexual variation. As a result, a "woman" who turns out to have a Y chromosome will be seen as a defective or abnormal female rather than as a case that reveals the insufficiency of the binary gender paradigm.

If we were to avoid constructing this dimorphism and instead acknowledge continuity and variation where it exists, then we might arrive at a very different notion of sexual difference.

¹⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁵ For "intersex" bodies and infant genital surgery, see Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), especially the chapter "Should there be only two sexes?" (78-114); and see Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 63-67.

Certainly, bodies differ in terms of their chromosomes, reproductive gonads, internal and external organs, and hormonal patterns. Not only do these measurable physiological traits vary between people, but they also change radically throughout the lifetime of an individual.¹⁶ Such a complex field of similarity and difference cannot be adequately described by a binary model, or even by a linear spectrum with male and female poles and an infinite number of points in between. Instead, we should see each measurable, physiological trait as its own dimension, perhaps statistically correlated with the others, but never identical to them. The important question, then, is not why some bodies are not easily classified as one or the other sex, or whether a classification scheme with a different number of sexes would be more accurate.¹⁷ Rather, the question is: What can be done with or made of the complex materiality of sexual variation? That is, given the distribution of physiological attributes in a population, how might sexuality, reproduction, kinship, and other areas of life be structured and organized? This is a research question in embodied technique, which takes as its substrate bodily difference and physiological variation as well as similarity.

From this perspective, gender is an ongoing exploration of the possibilities afforded by sexual variation in all its complexity. In this paradigm, the materiality of sexual difference is not forgotten or ignored, but is reconceptualized as the substrate of a field of knowledge that is continually in development: the embodied technique of gender. Furthermore, once the complexity of sexual variation is acknowledged, the border between it and other kinds of

¹⁶ Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests that “age categories should form a more integral part in feminist theories of gender so that all gender would be conceptualized developmentally.” Gardiner, “Theorizing Age with Gender: Bly’s Boys, Feminism, and Maturity Masculinity,” in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 94.

¹⁷ Anne Fausto-Sterling identifies five sexes in “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* (March/April 1993): 20-24. These are: male genitals with male gonads; intersex genitals with male gonads; intersex genitals with intersex gonads; intersex genitals with female gonads; female genitals with female gonads. But a system with five sexes is no less schematic than one with only two. As long as there are categories, there will be bodies that fall in between or outside those categories.

physiological and anatomical variation—such as height and weight, body shape, skin color, and those that we call “disabilities”—becomes porous. In other words, gender as embodied technique does not simply work with sexual difference, it also substantially determines which kinds of bodily difference are classified as sexual. Different approaches to gender may take different aspects of anatomy and physiology as their substrate. This does not mean that gender has an arbitrary or merely symbolic relation to the distribution of physiological traits. Rather, gender engages, wrestles with, and comes to know its biological substrate through embodied research.

Gender is open-ended, because we can never say that we have discovered all the possible ways of organizing and working with sexual variation. Just as we may yet find new ways of working with steel or electricity, the material substrate of gender may afford pathways in gender technique that have not yet been discovered, or are long forgotten. Elizabeth Grosz makes a related point when she writes of the body in general that it “is constrained by biological limits ... whose framework or ‘stretchability’ we cannot yet know, we cannot presume ... Processes and activities that seem impossible for a body to undertake at some times and in some cultures are readily possible in others ... The scope and limit of the body’s pliability is not yet adequately understood.”¹⁸ Today, it is possible to reshape bodies—through surgery and hormonal injections—in ways that were previously unimaginable. That which was presumed to be a stable and necessary substrate for gender has been rendered plastic. At the same time, we continue to search for new embodied technique with which to make use of and come to know the materiality of sexual difference and sexual variation. “We do not yet know what a body can do.”

The fact that societies and cultures of virtually every period and region have worked with concepts similar to those of female and male, or feminine and masculine, is sometimes taken as

¹⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 187; 190.

proof that such categories are natural or unavoidable. Even in societies where three sexes or three genders may be said to exist, this triangulation is still most often governed by a basic opposition between masculinity and femininity.¹⁹ However, there is another explanation for the ubiquity of binary gender, one that does not require us to accept it as an unalterable feature of human life. If a binary approach to gender is found in many cultures, this could be because it is a particularly obvious pathway in that area of technique. After all, the physiological differences between bodies are real, and some of them correlate significantly with one another, including several that cluster around reproductive sexuality. It is therefore not surprising that so many societies have defined two categories of people based on these correlated characteristics. However, the fact that binary gender is so common need not be taken as an endorsement of its value. The most obvious technical pathway is not necessarily the only one, or the best.²⁰ This leads us to a concrete question: Can other kinds of gender technique be developed and made to work as well as or better than binary gender? That question cannot be answered through theory alone, but must be investigated in practice, through what I am calling embodied research.

Fracturing Gender Technique

Many individuals and communities are currently engaged in the search for new ways of doing gender. Before considering some of these, I want to ask how an epistemological approach

¹⁹ For a collection of examples, see Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1993). For a critique of the “third” sex or gender trope, see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 157-66.

²⁰ In the previous chapter, I suggested that having actors rehearse what they were planning to do onstage might be another example of “obvious” technique. It seems that no one before Stanislavski seriously entertained the notion that actors might prepare for performance by extensively exploring scenarios that would never be performed. In this case, too, the most obvious technical pathway is not necessarily the only one or the best.

to gender might transform the way we think about typically “masculine” or “feminine” behaviors in relation to bodies classified as male or female. Which aspects of material, bodily variation constitute the substrate of a given area of gender technique? How does an area of gender technique assume and work with the relatively reliable distribution of particular physical traits across a population? Upon what kinds of physiological attributes and capacities does training in a particular area of gender depend? In asking such questions, I am simultaneously pointing to certain areas of embodied technique—analogue to the yoga, sports, dance, or acting discussed in previous chapters—and rethinking the construction of gender in everyday life. For if gender is technique that works with the relative reliabilities of sexual difference, then these examples also illustrate the wide range of things to which this “difference” can refer. In the previous section, I argued that sexual difference is complex rather than binary. Now I will ask how gender technique works with and through sexual difference in this sense.

Feminism is the founding critique of gender, and many of its classic texts work to disassociate the feminine from the female, often through recourse to the sex/gender model described above. However, the separation of sex from gender has never been completely achieved, since, as Butler notes, many feminists have assumed “that in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body.”²¹ At issue in tensions between cultural and materialist feminist theories—or what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “more and less historicizing” approaches to feminism—is the question of realism in the relationship between gender and sexual difference.²² Even Grosz, who argues for radically questioning our understanding of what bodies can do, ends *Volatile Bodies* with a call for “new productivity between and of the two sexes,” leaving the assumption of underlying binary sex

²¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 28.

²² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 11.

intact.²³ In contrast, I have argued that sexual difference is a complex array of correlations between different aspects of physiological variation across a population. If this is the case, then there is no singular “sexed specificity” in which binary categories of male and female might be grounded. How then might we reconceive gender as technique in relation to the complex substrate of bodily differences with which it works?

An epistemological perspective invites us to examine every aspect of sexual difference independently, rather than grouping them into two categories. This leads to the fracturing of gender into multiple areas of technique, rather than just two, since for every example of gender there may also be a different referent for “sexual difference.” While arguing for the radical separation of sex and gender may sometimes be strategic, doing so forecloses the possibility of an epistemological approach by overstating the independence of culture and biology. This has sometimes been the case in recent feminist studies of masculinity. In *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, Rachel Adams and David Savran ask: “Does the study of masculinity need to consider men at all? What is the role of the sexed body in the analysis of masculinity?”²⁴ Elsewhere, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called for the study of masculinity “to drive a wedge in, early and often and if possible conclusively, between the two topics, masculinity and men.”²⁵ Both citations address the problem of realism: how the materiality of sexual difference can be distinguished from the cultural constructions that make use of it. Following earlier feminist scholarship, both work from the sex/gender paradigm, treating “men” as a stable category—defined by “the sexed body”—from which masculinity can be distinguished. On the contrary, I propose that every kind

²³ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 201.

²⁴ Rachel Adams and David Savran, Introduction to *The Masculinity Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 2.

²⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ““Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity!”” in *Constructing Masculinity*, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.

of “masculine” technique works with the materiality of sexual difference in a unique way. Thus, there are as many varieties of maleness as there are of masculinity.

This point can be clarified by an examination of rape, which has been a key site for analysis in feminist masculinity studies since the 1970s. Despite the many successes of feminism over the past century, the continuing prevalence of male rapists and female victims seems to indicate an ongoing radical difference in the lived experience of men and women. As feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine McKinnon have argued, rape is not simply an isolated crime, but is part of the fabric of gender in many contemporary and historical societies.²⁶ Although many people neither experience nor commit rape, feminism points to the ubiquity of “rape culture” as a field of everyday gender technique in which the possibility of rape figures centrally. This makes rape an important starting point for an analysis of masculinity as embodied technique. Insofar as rape culture is the field of everyday technique that constitutes all men as potential rapists and all women as potentially raped, these roles could be said to reflect different kinds of training in embodied technique that determine how people understand and relate to their own bodies and those of other people. If girls are taught from a young age to see themselves as “fragile,” as Iris Young suggests, then the teaching of boys to see themselves as physically powerful and sexual needy—relative to girls and women—could be part of the same oppressive allocation of gender technique.²⁷

What then is the relationship between training in masculine gender and the complex materiality of sexual difference and sexual variation? To what extent is a “male” body required

²⁶ Dworkin’s *Intercourse* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) is the classic work on this subject. For a more recent statement, see Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human? and Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and see Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 53.

²⁷ Iris Young, “Throwing Like a Girl,” in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 269. Young’s work on female embodiment and training in femininity could be a useful starting point for a more extended feminist consideration of embodied technique.

in order to perpetrate rape? That is, to what extent does such a body afford or give rise to such technique? In her classic work on the subject, Susan Brownmiller describes rape as a direct result of the physiology of sexual difference. She writes: “[I]n terms of human anatomy the possibility of forcible intercourse incontrovertibly exists. This single factor may have been sufficient to have caused the creation of a male ideology of rape. When men discovered that they could rape, they proceeded to do it.”²⁸ For Brownmiller, the material fact of (binary) sexual difference is a sufficient explanation for the “ideology” of rape. Yet this is clearly too simple. Women can and do sexually violate men, and men sexually violate other men, but this is not what feminists mean by rape culture—except insofar as the violation of men is often conceived as a kind of feminizing or loss of masculinity. Does this mean that rape has nothing to do with the physiology of sexual difference? Something like an arbitrary relationship between rape and sexual difference is suggested by Sharon Marcus, who describes rape “as a scripted interaction which takes place in language and can be understood in terms of conventional masculinity and femininity as well as other gender inequalities.”²⁹ By analyzing rape as “language,” Marcus shows how it works to construct and produce the categories of sex and gender as much as it results from them. Yet taking language as a metaphor for practice risks dematerializing the bodies involved—as I suggested in Chapter 1—and overlooking the way in which rape makes use of sexual difference. While the phenomenon of rape does not simply reflect or derive from the distribution of physiological variations across bodies, it does work through and upon these. The relationship of rape to sexual difference is part of its meaning. Although rape culture does not result from sexual difference, it does rely upon it.

²⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 13-14.

²⁹ Sharon Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 390.

Like other kinds of binary gender technique, rape culture works, as Kessler and McKenna put it, to “construct dimorphism where there is continuity.” In place of complex variations in sexual anatomy, desire, attraction, and sensation, rape culture constructs a radical dichotomy between those who need sexual release and those from whom it can be obtained. As embodied technique, this construction is dependent upon certain relative reliabilities of sexual difference, which are its material substrate. Rape is embodied technique that makes use of sexual variation in particular ways. It is one way of dealing with or coming to know the possibilities afforded by sexual difference—in this case, through the starkest hierarchical dichotomy. The kind of masculinity constructed by rape culture—in which heterosexuality figures centrally—locates sexual pleasure in the female body. As Gayle Rubin and others have shown, this is not simply an individual matter. The identification of women as objects of pleasure also structures relationships between men, who through it create a male “homosocial” domain in which homosexual contact is forbidden.³⁰ Other kinds of masculine technique, such as that which makes the body hard and impenetrable—indeed, precisely those kinds of technique that prevent bodies from being fragile, and which are central to athletic and military training—can also be seen as part of the everyday technique that makes rape so common and so profoundly gendered.

Responding to the persistent links between masculinity and violence—rape in particular—John Stoltenberg has called not only for the abandonment of traditional masculinity but for the abandonment of the identity category of “men” itself.³¹ Judging that this identity is too deeply linked to gender inequality and rape culture to be salvaged, Stoltenberg looks beyond the sex/gender model to ground his argument in a realist understanding of sexual difference as material variation. In *Refusing to Be a Man*, Stoltenberg replaces identity categories like “boys”

³⁰ See Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women” and Sedgwick’s *Between Men*.

³¹ John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man* (Portland, OR: Breitenbush Books, 1989).

and “men” with descriptors like “the child-with-a-penis” and “some of us with penises.”³² This is not a simple rejection of sexual difference. Rather, Stoltenberg’s anatomical descriptors remind us of the material basis for sex categories even as they deconstruct those categories. For Stoltenberg, any gender technique that starts by assuming two categories of people—male and female—is already dangerously close to installing the potential for gendered inequality and violence. Instead, Stoltenberg suggests, we should begin by rejecting those categories and finding other ways to work with and through sexual difference.

More recent writing in queer theory has championed masculinity as a legitimate area of embodied technique for women. Some of the clearest discussions of masculinity as technique are found in studies of butch lesbians and other women, where something like a technical analysis of masculinity is enabled by the absence of any possibility to ground gender in sex. For example, Judith Halberstam lists “lesbian fatherhood, butch identities, drag king performances, [and] female sports icons” as examples of “fully realized nonmale masculinities.”³³ For each of these, we might ask: How does this particular masculinity relate to the materiality of sexual difference? Why lesbian fatherhood? What does the word “fatherhood” do in this phrase? To what does it refer? Fatherhood here suggests more than just the situation of raising a child that one did not give birth to, for that applies to many adoptive mothers as well. A father is not someone who happens not to have given birth to a particular child, but someone for whom giving birth to a child is not part of the landscape of possibility. But fatherhood is more than this also, for it refers not just to the situation in which one becomes a father, but also to the transmissible knowledge that has been developed by people in that situation over time. In this sense, fatherhood is an area of parenting technique developed by parents who identify as non-child-bearing. To be a lesbian

³² Ibid., 42; 27.

³³ Judith Halberstam, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity,” in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*, 352. See also *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

father is to engage with the child-rearing technique that other fathers have developed in the past. Whether one hopes to learn from this technique, transform it, or reject it, the notion of lesbian fatherhood puts the lesbian parent in dialogue with a field of knowledge developed and passed along by prior fathers. Fatherhood in this sense is not primarily a material or physiological fact, but an area of gender technique.

The other kinds of “nonmale masculinity” mentioned by Halberstam suggest other aspects of masculine technique, each of which may take as its substrate a different aspect of the materiality of sexual difference and variation. What Halberstam calls “butch identities” may refer in part to technique of flirtation, seduction, sexual encounter, romance, and intimacy. It could involve everything from the ways bodies are dressed to the ways they dance or make love. In her essay on butch lesbian identities, Gayle Rubin surveys a wide range of butch identities, from the “tough yet sensitive” motorcycle-riding icons of the 1950s to butches who are “tough street dudes,” jocks, scholars, artists, and much more.³⁴ She observes:

Butches vary in how they relate to their female bodies. Some butches are comfortable being pregnant and having kids, while for others the thought of undergoing the female component of mammalian reproduction is utterly repugnant. Some enjoy their breasts while others despise them. Some butches hide their genitals and some refuse penetration. There are butches who abhor tampons, because of their resonance with intercourse; other butches love getting fucked.³⁵

³⁴ Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 473; 475.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

This passage indicates how different types of masculinity may relate in radically different ways to the materiality of sexual difference. Some varieties of masculinity may be easily transferred across all kinds of bodies, while in other cases sustained research may be necessary to make a particular kind of technique available to those whose bodies do not afford the relative reliabilities for which it was developed. Such research could be as simple as getting masculine technique to “work” for bodies with certain traditionally female attributes. But it could just as easily lead to the development of new technique designed specifically for such bodies, which might then require another round of research in order to be practiced by bodies with correspondingly “male” attributes. From this perspective, the “border” zone between butch lesbians and transexual men could be reconceived not as a embattled boundary but as an area in which the negotiation between technique and materiality is ongoing.³⁶

It is therefore clear that masculinity is neither limited to “men” nor entirely unrelated to the physiology of sexual difference. Rather, variation in sexual physiology is the substrate with which masculinity works. Accordingly, gender is not simply whatever we choose to make of it. Our freedom to develop new approaches to gender is dependent upon our understanding of the potentials afforded by the differences and similarities that exist between bodies. Recognizing this could perhaps help feminist and other theorists to achieve more “grip” on the practice of gender, by allowing them to engage with the very real sense in which gender is a grappling-with and coming-to-know the possibilities of human embodiment. While conventional approaches to gender assume that it derives from and is caused by sexual difference, some feminist analysis may have taken the sex/gender distinction too far, by implying that embodied technique has no relation at all to the materiality of sexual difference. I propose that the complex interaction

³⁶ Judith Halberstam, “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum,” *GLQ* 4.2 (1998): 287-310.

between gender and sexual difference may best be understood not as a one-to-one correspondence, nor as “discursive production” (by analogy with language), but as the grappling of technique with its material substrate. As embodied technique, gender is both enabled and constrained by the relative reliabilities of the material with which it works. A realist standpoint on practice may therefore be as usefully applied to gender as to postural yoga or acting. In each case, an insistence on the epistemology of technique—its continual discovery of new possibilities afforded by its material substrate—reminds us that gender is both open-ended and finite. Gender is neither a prison nor a zone of free play, but an area of knowledge.

The New Gender Politics

If gender is an area of knowledge, the past few decades have witnessed a blossoming of research in that area. One key research question has been articulated by Butler as follows: “What if new forms of gender are possible?”³⁷ Among feminist, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transsexual, transgender, and asexual communities, new forms of gender are currently being discovered through embodied research that is formally analogous to that which has led to new forms of physical culture and performing arts. Many of the most innovative discoveries in gender technique have come not from controlled laboratories but from deeply engaged and intensely personal research projects, undertaken by individuals and communities whose very lives may well be at stake in the discovery of new practical possibilities for gender. At the same time, research in gender has been plagued by some of the same misconceptions that have led to turf wars between different schools of acting, dance, and yoga. Rather than conceiving of gender as a

³⁷ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 30.

field of research, in which multiple lines of inquiry may be pursued simultaneously, the desire to protect and promote certain discoveries has led to some ongoing conflicts, for example between feminist and queer theory, or between transexual and transgender activism.³⁸ These discoveries and conflicts together constitute what Butler calls “the new gender politics.”³⁹

Conflicts like those just mentioned revolve around the problem of realism discussed above. On the one hand, queer theorists and activists like Butler to Leslie Feinberg have been accused of ignoring the materiality of sexual difference in favor of a view in which gender is radically fluid and changeable. On the other hand, those who argue on behalf of the richness and depth of gender identity—including some butch lesbians and both transgender and transexual activists—have been accused of reifying and essentializing binary sexual difference, thereby preventing the development of more flexible approaches to gender. How to reconcile these differences? As Sedgwick memorably put it, alongside the desire to transform and destabilize gender we must acknowledge “the inertia, the slowness, the process that mediates between, on the one hand, the biological absolutes of what we always are (more or less) and, on the other hand, the notional free play that we constructivists are always imagined to be attributing to our own and other people’s sex-and-gender self-presentation.”⁴⁰ Thus far, I have attempted to rethink both the “biological absolutes” of sexual variation and the “free play” of gender technique. Now

³⁸ “Transexual” with one “s” has largely replaced “transsexual” because of the latter’s pathologizing medical connotations, as David Valentine explains in *Imagining Transgender* (25). For a critique of “transgender” as a term that “privileges an abstracted rubric of identity and with it the experiences and concerns of middle-class and largely white, university-based and queer-identified trans people” over those of poor people and people of color, see Trish Salah, “Undoing Trans Studies,” *Topia* 17 (2007): 150-55; and Vivian Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2005). For “trans” as an open-ended term that could include transgender but also transnational, transracial, transgenerational, transgenic, and transspecies perspectives, see Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, “Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” *WSQ* 36.3&4 (2008): 11-22. I use “transgender” here in the sense developed by Valentine, whose *Imagining Transgender* offers the most comprehensive analysis of that term.

³⁹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 4 and passim. For a detailed survey of recent political and theoretical conflicts around gender, see Patricia Elliot, *Debates in Transgender, Queer, and Feminist Theory: Contested Sites* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

⁴⁰ Sedgwick, “Gosh, Boy George...” in *Constructing Masculinity*, 18.

I would like to consider “the inertia, the slowness, the process” that makes gender so resistant to change even when new technique has ostensibly been found.

What makes gender identity so resistant to change? Why can we not simply choose to be a different gender every day? The testimonies and theories of transexual and transgender individuals, as in the writing of Henry Rubin, have been a key point of resistance to the assertion that gender is a matter of “doing” rather than “being.”⁴¹ While feminist, queer, and some transgender theorists have sought to deconstruct the gender binary, transexuals like those interviewed by Rubin have sometimes described the most apparently radical of gender practices in terms of that very binary. The popular image of the transexual who “crosses” from one sex to another, as suggested by the acronyms MTF (male to female) and FTM (female to male), implies that transexual people were born as one gender and then changed into the other, rather than having been incorrectly gendered at birth. To counter this assumption, Susan Striker has proposed the phrases “male-to-woman” and “female-to-man.”⁴² Following the logic of the sex/gender model, these revised labels imply that people are born either male or female but can subsequently become either men or women. However, as I have argued, dividing infants into two categories at birth is already gender technique, and the common idea of “male-bodied” and “female-bodied” individuals who freely choose their “gender” does not go far enough in deconstructing binary sexual categories.

A crucial point of tension between feminist, queer, transexual, and transgender narratives is the feeling that not only one’s sex or gender assignment but one’s material body is “wrong.” Body dysphoria is an integral part of one approach to transexualism, which sees it as a medical disorder that can be at least partially alleviated through surgical intervention and/or hormonal

⁴¹ Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transexual Men* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003).

⁴² Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 21.

treatments. As Butler notes, the “wrong body” trope may partly be an artifact of a medical system that requires it in exchange for certain services.⁴³ However, this hardly explains the fact that so many transgender and transexual individuals, including those who do not pursue surgery, experience a sense of wrongness located firmly in the physiology and anatomy of the body. Such accounts contrast strongly with the transgender movement as articulated by Kate Bornstein, who emphasizes gender as a performance having more to do with how one is perceived in daily life than with how one experiences one’s own material body. In *Gender Outlaw*, Bornstein writes that both her gender and her sense of fashion “are based on collage. You know—a little bit from here, a little bit from there? Sort of a cut-and-paste thing.”⁴⁴ This account seems to have little in common with those for whom the goal is to become—socially and physically—a particular sex that one already feels oneself intrinsically to be.

The very distinction between “transexual” and “transgender” returns us once again to the sex/gender model, where “sex” refers to the anatomy or physiology of the body, and “gender” to the categorization of people in everyday life. In queer theory following Butler, claims to being intrinsically male or female may be rejected as naïve essentialism when they are made by cisgender individuals—those whose gender identity matches their gender assignment. However, the same assertion cannot be so easily dismissed when it goes against social expectations and is therefore politically and personally risky. If gender were simply available to conscious change, then sexual reassignment surgery and hormone replacement therapy would be in the same category as cosmetic surgery. Instead, as Rubin points out, many transexuals experience such technological interventions as more analogous to “reconstructive surgery after an industrial

⁴³ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 91 and passim; see also *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 231; 350-57.

⁴⁴ Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 3.

accident or a war.”⁴⁵ While Rubin’s analogies are especially masculine—and probably reflect the FTM population with which Rubin worked—the question remains as to why altering the body’s sexual anatomy can feel like a necessary “repair” rather than a voluntary enhancement. It seems that, for many people, gender is much more than just fashion or collage.

In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, Gayle Salamon attempts to chart “a middle course between essentialism and constructionism,” acknowledging both the weight of gender identity and its availability to change.⁴⁶ Countering those for whom essential gender identity is merely false consciousness, Salamon points out that the reduction of gender to its labels and signs fails to account for its determining power. She writes: “The felt sense of identity can, by virtue of its unlocatability, be said to arrive *from elsewhere*; the embodied subject can neither control nor reform it. He cannot name its origin or dispute what it asserts; he can only submit to it.”⁴⁷ This point seems crucial, if we are to avoid a facile celebration of gender bricolage as pure freedom and self-determination. However, I am skeptical as to whether the phenomenology to which both Salamon and Henry Rubin turn can adequately explain the “felt sense” of gender. We do not feel ourselves to be male or female in the same way that we feel a tree or a table, through our senses. The “feeling” of gender is not a phenomenological one, although it may be made up of many small phenomenal encounters. Instead, the experience of gender might better be understood as sedimented technique. I referred to the process of sedimentation in Chapter 1, when I described how what one “does” gradually becomes what one “is.” In that context, I referred to the “automaticity” developed through training in sports, dance, or music. I will now apply the same notion of sedimented technique to gender.

⁴⁵ Rubin, *Self-Made Men*, 60.

⁴⁶ Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and the Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 77.

⁴⁷ Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 83, italics original.

My idea of sedimentation is different from that employed by Butler in *Bodies That Matter*. For Butler, the free play of gender “performance” is preceded and constrained by the “performativity” of social discourse, which take the form of norms and ideals. Thus, the “sedimentation” of gender takes place through the continual “citing of power” and the “history of imaginary relations” out of which subjectivity emerges.⁴⁸ This may be true, but gender is also sedimented more literally and materially in the body of its practitioner. If the layers of gender that constrain daily choice are made out of “power” and “history,” these are realized in the body as technique: knowledge of what to do, ways of doing things, pathways through the world. If the topmost layer of gender technique is that which may be chosen on a daily basis—from clothing to certain aspects of posture and gesture—there are also countless layers of gender technique below this that are less easily altered. For example, in a book of new transgender voices, Joy Ladin describes the lengthy process of developing a vocal range that would allow her to be read as female in everyday life.⁴⁹ Here, training in gender explicitly resembles the training of actors. One cannot simply wake up on a given day and dramatically change one’s voice, posture, or gestural patterns. Doing so requires a lengthy period of practice. In addition, there may be layers of sedimented gender technique that are even more difficult to change—internal structures from early childhood that are hard to modify through even the most rigorous of training regimes in adulthood. Sally Ann Ness has described in detail how dance technique, over time, can actually shape the bone structure and anatomy of the human body.⁵⁰ Why should we expect gender to operate on the body any less deeply, or to shape it any less permanently?

⁴⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15; 74; and see the passage on 234, discussed in Chapter 1.

⁴⁹ Joy Ladin, “The Voice,” in *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, eds. Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010), 249.

⁵⁰ Sally Ann Ness, “The Inscription of Gesture: Inward Migrations in Dance,” in *Migrations of Gesture*, eds. Carrie Noland and Sally Anne Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1-30.

From this perspective, technique is not just the surface of identity, but also its depth. The sedimentation of technique, at the deepest levels of our being, may explain how and why gender may be felt to “arrive from elsewhere,” even though it is produced through processes that are eminently historical. As a result, we can understand both the strength of gender identity and its sociocultural formation. Gender is “real” not in spite of being learned and trained, but precisely because it is learned and trained in the body. By way of comparison, we may observe that after years of training in ballet or martial arts, one “is” a practitioner of those forms in a way that goes far beyond conscious choice. A ballet dancer can wake up one day and decide to stop performing, or even to stop practicing ballet, but does not thereby remove the deep sedimentation of technique within the body. As Mauss observed, it is difficult to un-learn one’s technique, especially that which is learned in childhood. Indeed, we can expect gender identity to be even more deeply sedimented in the body, and less accessible to change, than other kinds of embodied training. For even the strictest regimes of dance or martial arts usually begin no earlier than age six, whereas training in gender begins at birth.

This does not mean that gender is learned without agency. On the contrary, as the analogy with physical culture and performing arts suggests, the learning of gender over the course of one’s life is profoundly agentic until such time as it is fully absorbed and mastered, at which point it becomes automatic and recedes from consciousness. Such acquisition, like the acquisition of language or any other technique, is an accomplishment as much as a prison. Children do not absorb gender passively any more than they do other kinds of technique. Rather, children reject and struggle with gender, they embrace and revel in it, they test its limits and play with its content. They do all of this through interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and the rest of society, including but not limited to representations of gender in books, movies, and other

media. The child who has been classified a “girl” is praised for enjoying what her cultural context understands as appropriately feminine, while being scolded or teased for taking on what is seen as masculine; and vice versa. Yet these interactions are complex enough to ensure that each child’s gender will be somewhat unpredictable and may or may not develop as others intend. Obviously, the fact that some technique is forbidden does not mean the child will not be drawn to it and learn it. Nor does the fact that one is assigned to learn certain kinds of technique mean that one will actually do so. Some children fit well into their assigned gender; others, to differing degrees, do not. We cannot predict what kinds of gender an individual will learn any more than we can predict which infants will become athletes, writers, or scientists.

To paraphrase Butler, there is no subject that precedes technique; the subject is formed through the sedimentation of technique. Only an account of gender technique that remains cognizant of its depth can explain “how essential becoming a gender is to one’s very sense of personhood, one’s sense of well-being, one’s possibility to flourish as a bodily being.”⁵¹ If becoming a gender meant agreeing to fit neatly within one of two categories, then we could hardly call this essential to personhood or flourishing. But gender is more than categorization: It refers to all the ways in which the complex physiology of sexual difference is woven into the fabric of embodied technique in every part of life. If gender is technique that deals with the materiality of sexual variation, then it is crucial in structuring sexual attraction and sexuality, friendship, intimacy, reproduction, familial relations, and many other areas of human life. In this sense, we need gender. As bodily beings, we cannot do without technique in these areas, however it may be labeled. We may not need the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, gay and straight, cisgender or transgender—but we absolutely do need the areas of embodied technique that currently go by those names.

⁵¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 100.

Recognizing the depth of gender as sedimented identity may also help to explain why some people react with such rage and horror to experiments and innovations in gender technique. As Butler writes, those who threaten or murder gay, intersex, and transgender people proceed “from the anxious and rigid belief that a sense of world and a sense of self will be radically undermined if such a being, uncategorizable, is permitted to live within the social world.”⁵² Such anxiety can be understood as the fear of a world in which one’s own ability to reliably find and provide intimacy will be compromised. Many people fear that the gender crossings of others will prevent them from practicing gender in their own lives, rendering them incompetent in love and in everyday communication. I have suggested that gender technique is a basic human necessity, insofar as it is the way we work with and come to know the material reality of sexual variation. A person who is deprived of such technique—not because they fail to acquire gender but because the gender they learn as a child turns out to be incompatible with the world they encounter as an adult—may experience a horrifying sense of disorientation and isolation when it comes to interpersonal relationships of every kind. Ironically, such disorientation and isolation—the fear of which too often motivates violence against those whose practice alternative gender technique—is precisely that which gender non-conformists already suffer.

Consider straight male anxiety around gay men. One need not accept even these two categories to recognize that what becomes unstable for the straight man is the boundary between the sexual and the nonsexual, as well as the technique of bodily relation that he expects to encounter in others. “Straight masculinity” is the technique some men use to guide themselves in knowing when to pay attention to the pleasures of touch and when not. Straight men have learned—at a much deeper level than conscious thought—to base the distinction between sexual and nonsexual contact on the categories of female and male. When those categories are

⁵² Ibid., 34.

interrupted or complicated, the result is not only that the technique of straightness no longer guides the man in knowing how to move towards or away from others. More fundamentally, he no longer knows how to handle his own sensations. Gender is part of the way in which we navigate fundamental issues of bodily integrity, contact, and sensation. The privilege of the straight man is being able to assume that his technique will function reliably wherever he goes. The fear is that his daily technique of touching, from rough to gentle, will no longer function if homosexuality becomes a legitimate possibility. The fact that this fear can be located historically—as Sedgwick notes, there have been many societies in which masculinity is not threatened by homosexuality—does not make it any less powerful for someone whose identity has been sedimented in these ways.⁵³

A related fear may also fuel the rejection of transgender women by other women, including feminists.⁵⁴ One central concern for some feminists is that the politics developed around reproductive rights will be lost if the category of woman is substantially deconstructed. Although this branch of feminism no longer has much legitimacy within academia, it continues to fuel feminist debates online and elsewhere. It may be true that some queer and transgender activism, like the rest of society, has failed to acknowledge the centrality of reproductive politics in the politics of gender. If gender is the technique that works with sexual difference, then there can be no truly radical politics of gender without a politics of reproduction aimed at empowering those whose bodies do the work of pregnancy and childbirth. For feminists who prioritize this point, some transgender rhetoric can seem premature or utopian, especially in a global context where “women” appears to be the only available name for the class of people who produce

⁵³ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 26-27.

⁵⁴ The classic example is Janice Raymond’s 1978 *The Transsexual Empire*, discussed in Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 221-35. See also Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 217-20.

children. But equating the reproductive category with the category of “women” may not be the only or the best way to politicize it. Doing so puts women who don’t or can’t have children into a difficult position not unlike that of transwomen. It also leaves out transmen, for whom many aspects of “female” reproductive healthcare are essential.⁵⁵

Time and again, in debates surrounding gender, the processual and iterative relationship between technique and its substrate is reduced to a simple opposition. The idea that “gender” builds upon “sex” is a kind of shorthand: It takes binary sex as the relatively reliable material substrate upon which the technique of gender works. In doing so, it leaves out the extent to which binary sex itself is constructed through technique; as well as the extent to which gender, when deeply sedimented in the body, can become the substrate for other kinds of technique. Instead, we should recognize that it is not possible to determine conclusively what is and is not potentially mutable through technique. Technique continually becomes material as it sediments in the body, while even the most apparently material “facts” can be rendered malleable through the discovery of new technique. Each theory, each social movement, each area of embodied technique defines its substrate in a way that opens up certain possibilities and forecloses others. For some, the new instability of the material body made possible by advances in technology suggests the end of binary sexual difference. For others, the same unfixity underscores the reality of sex and gender as identities located elsewhere in the body or psyche. The relationship between technique and substrate is not fixed. Technique, sedimented, becomes substrate; substrate, investigated, is revealed to be technique.

⁵⁵ For example, see j wallace, “The Manly Art of Pregnancy,” in *Gender Outlaws*; or “Check It Out Guys,” a website for sexual and reproductive health “developed by and for trans men and our healthcare providers,” which states, among other things: “If you have a cervix, you need a Pap” (<www.checkitoutguys.ca>). In these contexts, reproductive healthcare is integrated into the lives of those men who can benefit from it.

Susan Stryker evokes this back-and-forth movement in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, when she writes: “Transgender studies helps demonstrate the extent to which *soma*, the body as a culturally intelligible construct, and *techne*, the techniques in and through which bodies are transformed and positioned, are in fact inextricably interpenetrated.”⁵⁶ Yet there is an important distinction to be made between *soma* and *techne*—or substrate and technique—insofar as every research project in embodied technique depends upon the assumption of certain relative reliabilities with which it works. These reliabilities may or may not be named, but materially they form the zone or domain of reality with which technique engages and which it comes to know. Rather than attempting to establish once and for all which aspects of materiality are open to change, theorists of gender would do well to recognize this as a question that can only be answered through concrete research projects that deal with and define the areas of embodiment with which they work. What counts as stable material substrate for one research project may be the site of investigation for another. Thus, research in gay and lesbian sexualities, or in transexual crossings, may take binary gender as its starting point—the relative reliability of how male and female characteristics correlate in a population—while queer and transgender research simultaneously questions precisely that binary and emphasizes the extent to which that reliability is only relative. This is not so different from the varying assumptions made by various schools of yoga or acting about how bodies reliably work. In a research context, the goal is not to determine conclusively what bodies are, but to support the continued investigation of what they can do.

Research in Gender and Everyday Life

⁵⁶ Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 12.

I have attempted to show why gender technique is so difficult to innovate: In addition to being constrained by the materiality of human embodiment, so that new technique has to be discovered rather than simply invented, gender is also deeply sedimented in the body through training that begins at birth. I now want to point to some current research projects in gender that may have the potential to bring about real innovation and change. Crucially, these are not the projects of individuals or even small groups, but of communities. My discussion of yoga and acting in previous chapters could perhaps have led to the idea that embodied research always takes place in small, isolated contexts, where a few people explore new possibilities under the protection of the state. Current research in gender is nothing like this. In the first place, it frequently takes place without official support—if not actively outlawed and repressed by the state, then certainly not funded by it as were Krishnamacharya, Stanislavski, and Grotowski. In the second place, because gender deals with sexuality and sexual difference, including the physiology of reproduction, significant innovations in gender rarely result from the experimental practice of individuals. One person can perform the visual, spectacular aspects of gender in original ways, but to experiment with family structure, and the organization of gender across generations, a community is needed.

Focusing on research at the level of communities takes us away from the question of whether any single person's gender is progressive, transgressive, or regressive, and towards an emphasis on communities as sites for the development of new gender technique. In this sense, I agree with Leslie Feinberg's statement: "No one's gender expression is any more 'liberated' than anyone else's."⁵⁷ Because gender is interpersonal, attempts to locate the queerest or most transliterated gender in a single individual will inevitably fail. Queering gender cannot mean the

⁵⁷ Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 53.

same thing for each person. Instead, at a cultural or social level, it can refer to a general tolerance for sexual and gender variation, or more radically to what I would call the cultivation of a research culture in gender. As Butler reminds us, no individual can transform gender “outside the context of a radically altered social world.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, gender is technique for dealing with families and populations, not just individuals, and it is at this level that the most significant innovations may occur. Luckily, the “radically altered social world” to which Butler refers need not be the whole world or even a whole country. It only needs to be large enough to create the context for concrete, practical experiments in alternative gender technique.

This point is born out by recent attempts to raise genderless children. In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam envisions a system of “gender preferences” whereby a person would be considered to have “gender neutrality until such a time when the child or young adult announces his or her or its gender.”⁵⁹ A single family cannot do this. Although one family can attempt to raise an ungendered child, if they live in a society based on standard gender technique, then their child-raising practices will be interpreted not as avoiding gender but as keeping the gender of the child “secret.”⁶⁰ As one increasingly common headline reads: “Parents of 2-year-old refuse to reveal child’s gender!”⁶¹ Moreover, raising a child without a gender in a culture that demands one sets that child up for many difficulties as well as freedoms—specifically, the danger that the individual will be viewed as “fundamentally unintelligible” or even “an impossibility.”⁶² This may not be the case, however, if an entire community makes the shift, as in the case of the Nicolaigarden school in Sweden, where “teachers avoid the pronouns ‘him’ and

⁵⁸ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 101.

⁵⁹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 27.

⁶⁰ *The Daily Mail* (May 24, 2011), “Are these the most PC parents in the world? The couple raising a 'genderless baby'... to protect his (or her) right to choice.” Accessed online: <www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1389593/Kathy-Witterick-David-Stocker-raising-genderless-baby.html>, 12/06/12.

⁶¹ Katharine Mieszkowski, “The baby’s a... we’re not telling!” *Salon* (June 30, 2009). Accessed online: <www.salon.com/2009/06/30/sweden_2>, 12/06/12.

⁶² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 30.

‘her,’ instead calling their 115 toddlers simply ‘friends.’”⁶³ This project—which, extraordinarily, is backed by state legislature as well as the school itself—aims to produce not a single ungendered child but a community in which gender technique functions differently.

The Nicolaigarden experiment posits important questions about how the developmental process of aging complicates the standard binary model of gender. How early does a person need gender? Why force gender on children before they need it? If children grow up without binary gender, what kinds of gender might they develop later in life? At the other end of the spectrum are the many diverse communities in which gender is expanded and proliferated rather than reduced or neutralized. David Valentine offers a rich account of many of these in *Imagining Transgender*, an ethnography of the category of “transgender” as both constituting and constituted by a variety of communities that in some cases have little in common beyond that label. One undated postcard from the NYC Commission on Human Rights lists the following members of the transgender community: bi-gendered, crossdresser, drag king, drag queen, femme queen, female-to-male, gender bender, gender blender, gender gifted, gender queer, male-to-female, new man, non-operative transexual, passing man, passing woman, post-operative transexual, pre-operative transexual, shemale, third sex, trannie/tranny, trans, transbutch, transexual/transsexual, transgender, transgenderist, transie, transperson, transexed man, transexed woman, transvestite, transwoman, and two-spirit.⁶⁴ Even if some of these are simply new names for old practices, such a proliferation of terms is generally indicative of new technique, new ways of doing things. Rather than seeing them as labels, signs, or categories, we might analyze each of these as an embodied experiment, a research project in gender.

⁶³ John Tagliabue, “Swedish School’s Big Lesson Begins With Dropping Personal Pronouns,” *New York Times* (November 13, 2012). Accessed online: <www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/world/europe/swedish-school-de-emphasizes-gender-lines.html>, 12/06/12.

⁶⁴ David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 198.

Earlier in this chapter, I touched upon what Judith Halberstam calls “lesbian fatherhood” as an area of contemporary gender research. It should be clear that the intersection of “lesbian” and “fatherhood” is not simply a matter of labels but of deeply sedimented identities—that is, of embodied technique, from the most superficial to the most profound—and that such an intersection constitutes a research project in its own right. A related but different such project could be the “mothering” practices of gay and transgender men within the Black and Latino house/ball scene described by Marlon M. Bailey.⁶⁵ An earlier epoch of the same subculture was the focus of Jenny Livingstone’s 1990 film *Paris is Burning* and of much subsequent discussion by Judith Butler and others. It is also closely examined in Valentine’s *Imagining Transgender*. Both Bailey and Valentine treat the balls as sites in which new genders are continually under development. According to Bailey, house/ball culture is based on a “six-part gender system” comprising butch queens, femme queens, butch queens up in drags, butches, women, and men. However, these categories are not permanent, and new ones are continually emerging.⁶⁶ Dating from the 1970s or even earlier, the house/ball scene can be understood as a massive and sustained research project in gender.

Among the most significant aspects of this project must be counted the development of alternative kinship, a concept that Butler develops in *Bodies That Matter* and revisits in her more recent *Undoing Gender*. Drawing connections between the house/ball scene and the national debate over marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples, Butler points out the pressing need to “rework and revise the social organization of friendship, sexual contacts, and community to produce non-state-centered forms of support and alliance.”⁶⁷ As Butler suggests, practices of

⁶⁵ Marlon M. Bailey, “Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture,” *Feminist Studies* 37.2 (2011): 365-86.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 375; and see 385n9.

⁶⁷ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 109.

alternative kinship are not imitative but experimental. They are high-stakes research projects aimed at finding new ways to structure intimacy, care-taking, and generational continuity, outside the gender-normative family structures of mainstream society. Butler's analysis of the house/ball scene is supported by that of Bailey, who describes the houses as "familial structures that are socially rather than biologically configured" and which "provide guidance and life skills for their 'children' of various ages, races/ethnicities (usually Black and Latina/o), genders and sexualities, and from cities and regions throughout North America."⁶⁸ If the more spectacular side of gender performance is explored in the balls, the deep connections between gender and kinship are concurrently investigated through the houses.

In my view, it is crucial to claim and comprehend the epistemological dimension of these investigations: kinship as technique. Reconfiguring the family is not merely a question of political will, important as that may be. There are also substantive questions here that can only be answered through practical experimentation. What kinds of kinship technique could replace that which is grounded in heterosexual institutions like marriage? If the state were to sanction family-building relationships between pairs of individuals, without requiring them to consist of one man and one woman, what possibilities for gender would that open up, and what would it foreclose? On the other hand, if the state were to renounce its power to legitimate certain relationships through the bond of marriage, what kinds of alternative family and kinship practices might be enabled? In short, how might society structure the relations between people, and what does or doesn't this have to do with sexual reproduction, long-term committed relationships, the raising and education of children, healthcare, and the law? Contemporary movements for reproductive rights, marriage equality, sexual freedom, and polyamorous relationships come at these questions from different angles. My point here is that such questions are not answerable through any

⁶⁸ Bailey, "Gender/Racial Realness," 367.

amount of scientific or sociological research, which can only measure and document current practices and make educated guesses about the future. The actual new technique that will structure future kinship practice can only be developed through embodied research.

The examples given so far have dealt explicitly with gender. However, research in gender may also take place implicitly, for example through research in sexuality. According to Margot Weiss, the San Francisco community that centers around the practice of BDSM—a portmanteau acronym combining bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism—is fairly conventional in its kinship structures when compared with those I have just mentioned.⁶⁹ However, BDSM’s explicit focus on consensual power exchange can be seen as interacting with the technique of gender in experimental ways. In BDSM, power is explicitly separated from gender insofar as either men or women can equally be “tops” (dominants) or “bottoms” (submissives) in a sexual encounter or partnership. If hierarchical power relations are a significant part of what defines male and female identities, then making those dynamics explicit, and detaching them from gender identity, may be a significant modification of gender as well as sexuality. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of female tops and male bottoms, who learn and practice technique that is not conventionally associated with their gender identities. However, as noted earlier, I would emphasize the research undertaken by communities over that conducted by individuals. Therefore, I would not say that female tops and male bottoms are more experimental in their gender practice than male tops and female bottoms. Rather, the approach developed by the BDSM community as a whole, in which “top” and “bottom” become sexual identities alongside male and female, or straight and gay, strikes me as being a significant contribution to gender technique.

⁶⁹ Margot Weiss, *Techniques of Pleasure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

According to Weiss, BDSM's "bodily experiments" give rise to "new forms of power and knowledge—of technique."⁷⁰ As with the transgender communities described above, the depth and variety of this new technique can best be glimpsed by listing the many labels that BDSM practitioners use to identify themselves, such as "perverts, voyeurs, masters, masochists, bottoms, pain sluts, switches, dom(me)s, slaves, submissives, ponies, butch bottoms, poly perverse, pain fetishists, leathermen, mistresses, and daddies." Within each of these, further categories may obtain: "For those who identified as tops, there were just plain tops, but also service tops, femme tops, switches with top leanings, and dominant tops."⁷¹ In several of these cases, an epithet that was previously used to describe an individual pathology has been elevated to the status of technique. Thus "pervert" and "voyeur" no longer refer only to a person's sexual desires and proclivities, but also to their skills and practices. It then becomes possible to see each of these identity categories as a research project in embodied technique. Insofar as this research interacts with, relies upon, and works through the physiology of sexual difference, it may be counted as an exploration of gender as well as power and sexuality.

In other contexts, BDSM may be even more explicitly bound up with gender. According to Robin Bauer, BDSM in the "dyke+" community has resulted in the development of "new subcultural skills" that are "much more sophisticated than those of sexual 'majorities.'"⁷² Although Bauer frames these new skills as part of BDSM, they seem to have as much or more to do with gender as with power, and they overlap with the innovative embodied technique of queer and transgender communities that do not practice BDSM. For example, Bauer describes the "recoding" of "body parts and sexual practices" that takes place when a "dildo" is treated as (and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 140; 139.

⁷¹ Ibid., 11.

⁷² Robin Bauer, "Transgressive and Transformative Gendered Sexual Practices and White Privileges: The Case of the Dyke/Trans BDSM Communities," *WSQ* 36.3&4 (2008), 236; 240.

therefore becomes) a “dick.”⁷³ In the context of BDSM, this suggests an exploration of how power and desire become sedimented in a particular body part or object. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler poses a related question in the language of psychoanalysis, asking why it is “assumed that the phallus requires that particular body part [the penis] to symbolize, and why it could not operate through symbolizing other body parts.”⁷⁴ In contrast, Bauer’s notion of “new subcultural skills” suggests that the practices she describes cannot adequately be theorized in terms of symbols and symbolization. In describing how the dyke+ community recodes and reclassifies bodies and practices, Bauer takes us into what surely constitutes a dynamic area of contemporary embodied research.

With its endless paraphernalia, drop-in classes, and language of “scenes” and “roles,” BDSM has much in common with modern yoga and acting technique—or even, as Weiss notes, with recreational sports like rock climbing.⁷⁵ (There is a familiar debate within the BDSM community about whether too much emphasis on “technique” has allowed people to engage in the practice “without feeling, just by following the rules.”⁷⁶) I now want to expand my analysis by asking whether the specialized gender technique developed in communities like the ones just described could ever be picked up by society at large. Are the experimental practices of BDSM “kinksters,” gay and transgender mothers, lesbian fathers, and the Nikolaigarden school destined to remain contained within these isolated pockets of alternative gender technique? Or could this technique find itself “borrowed” and “spread” to other communities until it becomes widely accepted by a majority? In fact, terms like topping and bottoming, or femme and butch, are

⁷³ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 84.

⁷⁵ Margot Weiss, *Techniques of Pleasure*, 17; 28.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 75.

already in use outside these communities. Does this represent a significant change in the technique of everyday life? Could these practices be the future of gender?

We have seen how Krishnamacharya's yoga and Stanislavski's acting technique grew from being highly specialized practices, known only to a select few, towards global dissemination. As in these cases, it is important to recognize that the spread of technique usually involves a kind of dilution as well. If "yoga" is now a household word, and "Stanislavski" now a common reference point in theatre schools across the globe, this does not mean that the average actor or yoga practitioner has a deep understanding of the practices of Krishnamacharya or Stanislavski. Indeed, it is eminently debatable which aspects of the technique have spread globally, and which have been forgotten or remain known only to specialists. It is surely important to ask how much of the knowledge produced by these embodied research projects has become widely known, and to what extent the technique has spread in name only. However, it is also worthwhile to ask how substantially everyday life has been transformed by the technique developed in these projects. Even if only the smallest part of the knowledge discovered by Krishnamacharya or Stanislavski has been widely transmitted, this small portion seems to have had a considerable impact on the everyday. Why not expect the same from gender?

I recently attended an academic meeting in which, at the beginning, each person was asked to share their name, departmental affiliation, and "preferred gender pronouns." The meeting was about labor relations and had nothing to do with queer or transgender theory or activism. However, the technique of explicitly articulating one's preferred gender pronouns was added in a simple way to the standard protocol for introductions. Not everyone mentioned their preferred gender pronouns along with their other information. Those who did revealed few surprises, although one person said they preferred "they" over "she," and another said that he

goes by male pronouns “mostly.” Simple but significant, this technique changed in a subtle way how gender was practiced at that meeting. It did not simply create a space for queer or transgender individuals, but slightly queered and transgendered the entire meeting, inviting cisgender folks to recognize the privilege they experience in having their preferred pronouns attributed to them on a daily basis. Being asked to state my preferred gender pronouns changed how I perceived my own gender and the genders of other people in that moment. Instead of seeing men and women, I saw people who preferred particular pronouns, and these pronouns could no longer be taken as transparent or mandatory signs of having particular genitals or any other physiological traits. This is an example of gender technique that was developed in queer and transgender contexts spreading into the common technique of everyday life.

The research projects described here are not “on” or “about” gender. Instead, they are research projects in and through gender, and their outcome is not simply new knowledge about gender but *new gender*. I have focused on gender because of my own investment in feminist, queer, and transgender theory. However, the points I have made could perhaps also be applied to other areas of everyday life and to other identity formations, such as class, religion, or race. While I cannot develop this idea in depth here, I would like to mention some examples of scholarship that move in this direction.

Social class is considered a founding site for theorizing embodied knowledge, because of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. It was Bourdieu who first attempted to study everyday practice from an epistemological perspective, as structured by a special kind of “practical” logic or knowledge. Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” has since been taken up by scholars studying many other aspects of everyday life. Of these, Saba Mahmood’s analysis of Islamic religious practice in Egypt is an important intervention in the increasingly shrill public conversation about Islam,

Christianity, and secularism.⁷⁷ Drawing on Aristotle, Bourdieu, and Foucault, Mahmood argues that the politics of the Egyptian Piety movement can only be grasped through an understanding of Islam as constituted by embodied practice. In a similar way, it could be valuable to analyze other religions and religious identities as practices structured by embodied technique. Even more recently scholars like Mahmood, Charles Hirschkind, and Talal Asad have turned to theorizing secularism along similar lines, asking whether there is such a thing as a “secular body.”⁷⁸ If there is such a body, it is no doubt trained in and structured by particular kinds of embodied technique.

Within critical race studies, blackness in the United States has also been theorized in terms of cultural habits or attitudes that are passed down through informal education, as in the following remarks by playwright August Wilson: “Growing up in my mother’s house at 1727 Bedford Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I learned the language, the eating habits, the religious beliefs, the gestures, the notions of common sense, attitudes towards sex, concepts of beauty and justice, and the responses to pleasure and pain that my mother had learned from her mother and which you could trace back to the first African who set foot on the continent.”⁷⁹ In *Embodying Black Experience*, Harvey Young theorizes blackness using Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus. The notion of a “black habitus” allows Young to explain how blackness can be both “socially constructed and continually constructing its own self.” It also highlights automaticity, the forgetfulness through which race is enacted: “Like driving a car or riding a bicycle, each action becomes an ‘intentionless invention of regulated improvisation.’”⁸⁰ However, in borrowing “habitus” from Bourdieu, Young also takes on board some of the limitations of that

⁷⁷ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Charles Hirschkind, “Is There a Secular Body?” *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (2011), 633. See also Talal Asad, “Thinking About the Secular Body, Pain, and Liberal Politics,” in the same issue.

⁷⁹ August Wilson, “The Ground on Which I Stand,” *Callaloo* 20.3 (1998), 494-95.

⁸⁰ Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 20.

concept. For example, in describing code-switching and complex identity formation, Young suggests that we do not possess a single habitus but “are the sum total of a series of overlapping *habiti*.” Yet it seems more accurate to conceive of identity as a continuous substance, rather than a set of discrete items. And what of the epistemological content of race, which the concept of “*habitus*” does not suggest? In my view, a shift from habit and performance towards technique and practice could have much to offer our understanding of class, religion, secularism, and race. My argument also has much in common with recent disability theory aimed at “inserting the body into debates about identity politics.”⁸¹ An epistemology of embodied technique could valuably supplement identity politics, by articulating the extent to which identity and culture are constituted by knowledge as well as habit.

To clarify: My argument hinges not on the word “technique” but on the relevance of an epistemological perspective to society, culture, politics, and everyday life. I have championed the word technique because its particular etymology and usage seem to offer a powerful hinge on which to rotate epistemological concerns back into political ones, without losing track of the role of embodiment and materiality in the production of knowledge. While the root of technique in *techne* points to knowledge about ways of doing things, its current application in physical culture and performing arts provides a wide range of examples for how technique is developed and deployed; how it can be enabling and stifling at the same time or at different times; how it is best learned and unlearned, trained and retrained; and how it relates to discipline, identity, and power. In this context, technique is a useful word through which to suggest an epistemological approach to embodiment and politics that is not offered by terms like habit, habitus, performance, performativity, culture, affect, or even practice. At the very least, technique suggests a new way of thinking about the relationship between physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life.

⁸¹ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 3.

I want to conclude with a few words on the latter. In his small but incisive work, *Philosophizing the Everyday*, John Roberts traces the history of this concept from revolutionary Marxism through the Situationists and into the cultural studies of the 1970s.⁸² According to Roberts, the “everyday” of Certeau and his successors is a heavily diluted and far weaker version of a concept put forward by Marx and developed by Trotsky and other revolutionaries. Throughout this dissertation, I have avoided positing technique as something that resists or escapes power. I have shown how new and innovative technique is developed through research, but also how prevailing technique can be oppressive and limiting. Furthermore, I have suggested that technique originating in a highly specialized, isolated community can eventually spread far and wide, transforming everyday life as it becomes the new everyday technique of whole societies and cultures. I now want to suggest that this notion of embodied research could be more profound and more far-reaching than the “tactical” approach to everyday life proposed by Certeau. Inasmuch as embodied research has the potential to effect deep-seated change in the fabric of everyday life, it may have more in common—for better and for worse—with what Roberts identifies as an earlier and more profound call for transforming the everyday.

Situationists like Raoul Vaneigem, who imagined a complete overhaul of society, called for a “revolution of everyday life.”⁸³ This would be a revolution in both the technique and the technology of everyday life, completely restructuring human relations and, in a utopian vision, doing away with hierarchical power entirely. Roberts traces the origins of this vision to the avant-garde debates of the 1920s, when Russian theorist Boris Arvatov called for the evaporation of “the barrier between artistic technique and general social technique.”⁸⁴ In those early years of the Revolution, hopes were high for “new forms of cultural production and the revolutionary

⁸² John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

⁸³ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press, 2001), originally published 1967.

⁸⁴ Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday*, 52.

transformation of the everyday.”⁸⁵ The everyday in this context was to be both the source and destination of change. As Roberts puts it: “The arrival to power of subaltern consciousness of the everyday into the experience of a shared, common culture was to enact the promise of the total dehierarchization and dealienation of capitalist production and social relations.”⁸⁶ Of course, this is not what happened. Instead, the revolution in Russia hardened into a totalitarian state and the concept of the everyday lost its visionary political force. By the time it appeared again in France after the Second World War, what Roberts calls “an unprecedented reversal” had overtaken it. Even as capitalism rendered daily experience more and more uniform, the new field of cultural theory began to study the everyday as an “irreducible symbolic remainder” and “a hugely expanded site of interpretative freedom, cultural activity and popular pleasures.”⁸⁷ This led into the cultural studies of Certeau.

The notion of the everyday proposed here is aligned neither with the call to revolution nor with the task of pointing out merely tactical resistances. Instead, I offer a concept of “research in everyday life” that combines the aim of radical transformation with a slower, more patient, but equally determined approach to discovering exactly which aspects of the everyday can be transformed and how. Within the domain of research in everyday life we might locate current and historical projects in fields as diverse as dance, theatre, music, sports, yoga, martial arts, ritual, therapy, communal living, subcultural expression, gender, age, race, religion, class, and (dis)ability. Rather than seeing these in terms of an opposition between tactics and strategy, resistance and power, the particular and the general—as Ben Highmore diagrams in his introduction to *The Everyday Life Reader*—we might understand each as a search for knowledge,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 121.

including the knowledge of embodied technique.⁸⁸ We could then ask to what degree these areas of knowledge overlap; how they have been formed through the interplay of specialization and interdisciplinarity; what kinds of specific methodological rigor each involves; and what future pathways for research (and training) could be envisioned from these starting points.

At the end of the previous chapter, I pointed to some of the ways in which the intersection of performing arts and identity politics could be productively approached as a series of research projects in embodied technique. This can now be extended to include research in any area of life, from the highly specialized to the mundane. Furthermore, as my examples throughout have shown, technique that was once highly specialized can—with sufficient effort—be brought into the realm of the everyday. Today, it may be as difficult to imagine somatic bodywork, Grotowskian song-action, or alternative gender being universally taught as it must have once been to imagine a society in which almost everyone could read and write. But the success of literacy shows how radically everyday life can be transformed by a change in the common curriculum of everyday knowledge. Technique, once discovered, becomes available for dissemination. As knowledge, technique has the potential to travel beyond its community of origin and to effect a widespread transformation of everyday life. Whatever now constitutes the everyday was at some point discovered through research. There is no reason, then, to dismiss current innovations in embodied technique as the practices of fringe minorities. The same technique that is highly specialized today may become the technique of everyday life tomorrow. Through research in everyday life, we do not simply engage in agonistic power struggles. We actually discover new possibilities for organizing life.

Like some approaches to performance, the Situationist concept of the “situation” and Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the “Moment” privilege instances of radical disruption—what Roberts

⁸⁸ Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 5.

calls “that non-heteronomous gesture or action that stands out from the instrumental continuum of the everyday as a critique of the totality” of that continuum.⁸⁹ Here, I am less interested in extraordinary moments than in small discoveries, which might go unremarked in the moment of discovery only to spread and proliferate later in radically unexpected ways. I champion the humble researcher, who knows that no amount of effort or planning can guarantee large-scale impact because, in searching for what is possible, one does not simply create or invent reality. Reality always pushes back, above all through embodiment itself. In this sense, one cannot ever create or invent new technique, but only discover it. Taking that as a substantive social and political goal would require patience and honesty, but not disembodiment or emotional distance. It may even be that the gradual transformation of the ordinary is ultimately preferable, and more profound, than the attempt to produce a special moment, no matter how extraordinary.

⁸⁹ Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday*, 80.

CONCLUSION:

EMBODIED RESEARCH IN ACADEMIA

I have argued that the various kinds of physical culture (sports, martial arts, bodywork, and yoga) and performing arts (acting, dance, song) are products of sustained research in embodied technique. As such, these are less “styles” or “forms” than areas of knowledge about the possibilities afforded by the relative reliability of human embodiment. Further, I have argued that everyday identity categories like those of gender can also be understood as areas of embodied knowledge in this sense. In my discussion of physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life, I have emphasized the spread of technique beyond the cultural context of its original practitioners and shown how it may be used for quite different purposes than those for which it was first intended. My hope is that, by understanding embodied practice through the epistemological lens of technique, we can begin to find a more adequate way of valuing, articulating, and supporting ongoing research and education in these areas. To conclude, I now wish to address the relationship between embodied knowledge in this sense and academia. Words like “research” and “education” suggest that knowledge of embodied technique could be at home in the academy. However, there are several challenges that must be addressed before it will be possible to argue for embodied technique as knowledge in a specifically scholarly sense.

This final chapter considers the place of embodied research within academia. Although I draw on discussions from other countries, my primary focus is academia in the United States. First, I look at recent and current debates over the relationship between theory and practice in the university. While these are often understood as opposing terms, I argue that both theory and practice can be motivated by a fundamentally similar epistemological impulse. I develop this

thesis through a critique of the emerging academic modality called “Practice as Research,” showing how my proposal for embodied research in academia both resembles and differs from existing academic programs and protocols in the UK and elsewhere. While there is much to appreciate in these developments, I argue that its champions thus far have failed to engage thoroughly with academic standards of knowledge production, instead attempting to carry into academia some assumptions about practice in the “arts” that are fundamentally incompatible with the requirements of scholarly research. I argue that what distinguishes scholarly knowledge from other kinds is not its linguistic, propositional, or intellectual nature, but rather its relationship to a synchronic and diachronic archive that enables specific kinds of comparative rigor. In the final section of the chapter, I offer two concrete routes forward towards a vision of embodied research that more fully reconciles the demands of academic knowledge production with the depth and importance of embodied knowledge. Taking the archive as an essential premise of scholarship, I suggest that research of the kind I have described here can find a legitimate place in academia through the development of a rich synchronic and diachronic archive that is specifically designed to capture and disseminate the particular kind of knowledge I have called embodied technique.

The Epistemological Impulse

Within U.S. academia over the past decades, fierce discussions have taken place regarding what is usually framed as an ongoing tension between “theory” and “practice.” As I discussed in Chapter 1, embodiment is currently a central issue for a wide range of academic

fields, including theatre, dance, and performance studies, anthropology, religious studies, gender studies, cognitive science, philosophy, and more. Yet as Jill Dolan has observed, many of these fields remain fundamentally “shaped by tensions between those who purportedly ‘do’ (as if one could ever ‘do’ without thinking) and those assumed only to ‘think’ (as if thinking could ever be merely so).”¹ The division between theory and practice is grounded in the methodologies that have historically characterized many if not all scholarly fields, wherein the scholar is defined as one who studies—and therefore does not participate in—a given practice in a domain like theatre, dance, ritual, or everyday life. The distance that separates scholar from subject has been seen as enabling objectivity and has historically been accepted as a key standard for academic rigor. Before embodied technique can be accepted as an area of scholarly knowledge, the issue of objectivity and epistemic distance must be faced.

Over the past several decades, the division between theory and practice has continually been tested, in part through the development of new research methodologies—such as action research, participant observation, and qualitative research methods—that make possible a different relationship of the researcher to the object of research. However, none of these have gone so far as to suggest that those who are framed as research subjects, such as the makers of theatre and dance, or the practitioners of ritual, possess knowledge in the sense that scholars do. In theatre departments, “practice” refers to the making of theatre productions, if not with the respect to theatre as “industry,” then within the larger cultural domain known as “the arts.” Although scholars of theatre might concede that theatre practitioners possess a different kind of knowledge, the nature of this knowledge, and its relationship to scholarly knowledge, has never been thoroughly analyzed. Indeed, theatrical production has always had an uneasy relationship

¹ Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 1.

with theatre studies, as the scholarly field that studies it, even when the two approaches to theatre are housed in the same academic programs and departments.² According to Marvin Carlson, the tension between theatre studies and theatre practice in university departments in the US grew more pointed in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was widely felt that “both theatre research and theatre production should become more professional, more specialized, more ‘serious.’”³ This has led, among other things, to an increased division between MFA and PhD tracks in graduate education, which I discuss further below.

Other academic departments and fields have their own definitions of “practice” and their own versions of the tension between theory and practice. In religious studies, practice may refer to pedagogical approaches that involve doing or performing rituals in addition to reading about them or observing them in ethnographic fieldwork. Such approaches have been of interest to many since the 1960s, but remain on the fringes of acceptable methodology.⁴ For example, the practice of yoga could raise eyebrows when introduced in a classroom setting, whereas the historical or sociological study of yoga would not. One teacher recalls being asked by the head of Religious Studies at his university to stop teaching *āsana* in a course called “Yoga in Theory and Practice,” because she was afraid it might “give evangelical Christians an argument for permitting prayer in university classes.”⁵ The course was later transferred to the Folklore Program, which apparently was more open to embodied pedagogies. In queer and gender studies, Dolan explains, practice usually refers not to artistic production or to ritual but to an activist

² For the early history of actor training in academia, see James McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory 1875-1925* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993). For related tensions in academic dance departments, see Susan Leigh Foster, “Worlding Dance—An Introduction,” in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

³ Marvin Carlson, “Inheriting the Wind: A Personal View of the Current Crisis in Theatre Higher Education in New York,” *Theatre Survey* 52.1 (2011): 119.

⁴ For a collection of essays describing a variety of practice-based pedagogies in religious and ritual studies, see Catherine Bell, *Teaching Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Kenneth Lieberman, “The Reflexivity of the Authenticity of *Hatha* Yoga,” in *Yoga in the Modern World*, eds. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 112.

engagement with related political movements. In business schools, practice may refer to an engagement with “real world” businesses, as opposed to a more theoretical approach to economics. Medicine and the sciences have their own differently structured but analogous divisions between theorists and practitioners.⁶ In some fields, there are differentiated doctorates, as in the PsyD (Doctor of Psychology) and ThD (Doctor of Theology), which are practical degrees distinct from the PhD in Psychology or Theology.

Alongside academic skepticism over the value of practice within academia, there is considerable mistrust of academia on the part of practitioners. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne observe that “teachers and practitioners of yoga in modern times have often been in the habit of expressing their distaste for academia, which they may view as elitist, disembodied, and irrelevant to the real task at hand,” or even “antithetical” to the practice of yoga.⁷ Ross Prior likewise encountered “strongly anti-academic sentiments” among acting teachers in England and Australia, while Dolan writes that “those who teach the practical business of theater and performance—acting, directing, playwriting, speech, voice, design, movement—are often simply hostile to theory.”⁸ Carlson attributes such hostility to an “anti-intellectual bias.”⁹ However, there are legitimate reasons why teachers of embodied practice might be skeptical of academic theories about their work. As Dolan points out, the value of academic support for fields like critical race studies and women’s studies must be considered in light of “what the costs have been of institutionalizing knowledge that began on the street, in the vernacular, and came kicking

⁶ For the administrative and cultural split between scientists who theorize high-energy physics and those who actually run high-energy physics experiments, see Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999), 16.

⁷ Singleton and Byrne, Introduction to *Yoga in the Modern World*, 3.

⁸ Ross W. Prior, *Teaching Actors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 176; Dolan, *Geographies of Learning*, 2.

⁹ Carlson, “Inheriting the Wind,” 121.

and screaming into the academy.”¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s indictment of academic research as complicit with colonialism suggests a larger historical context for such mistrust.¹¹

Implicit in the tension between theory and practice is the idea that “practice” is not epistemological in nature. It is assumed that “knowing” is a matter of “thinking” rather than “doing.” This assumption remains in place despite the work of sociologists of knowledge who, ever since Bourdieu’s *The Logic of Practice*, have argued that “practice” has its own logic and that academic knowledge production is in itself a practice.¹² I hope that I have taken these arguments a step further in this dissertation, by showing how an epistemological impulse can be at the heart of the most deeply embodied practices, from physical culture to performing arts to everyday life. This does not mean that all practices constitute research, even if all practices are structured by knowledge. A research practice, in my terms, is one aimed towards a specifically epistemological goal: not merely to produce or transmit knowledge but to discover new knowledge. Thus, research in technique has an ongoing, mutually sustaining relationship with education and training. Not everyone who practices, learns, or teaches postural yoga or acting technique is a researcher, just as not everyone who thinks about or teaches history or mathematics can be said to conduct research in those fields. However, when research in a field like postural yoga or psychophysical acting does take place, it is no less an epistemological endeavor than research in other fields.

To illustrate this point, I have worked through a series of examples of research projects undertaken with little or no support from academia. In some cases, “research” and related terms are already in circulation among artists and practitioners outside academia, as in Grotowski’s

¹⁰ Dolan, *Geographies of Knowledge*, 30.

¹¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999). I discussed Smith’s critique of research in Chapter 1.

¹² See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990).

theatre “laboratory” and later “research” on the actor’s craft, the dance organization Movement Research in New York City, or the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore, India. In none of these cases does the term “research” imply academic support or the use of academic models of knowledge production.¹³ It should therefore be clear at this point that academia does not have a monopoly on either the idea or the practice of research. Research in embodied technique has long taken place outside of academia and does not need academic support to proceed. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to ask whether the epistemological alignment between embodied research projects and those of academia—the fact that both proceed through sustained investigation to discover new knowledge in clearly framed areas—might provide the basis of a new framework for embodied research within academia and a new solidarity between researchers in these areas. If there is indeed a strong alignment between the epistemological impulse at work in projects like those I have described and the mission of academia as a social institution, then might academia offer an appropriate home for such projects? More concretely: How would academia stand to benefit from an engagement with embodied research, and vice versa?

I believe that embodied technique should be reframed as a basic and indispensable area of knowledge, alongside the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. At a time when the purview and mandate of academia is rapidly shrinking, it may seem utopian to call for such a radical expansion in scope. Current debates over the value and role of academia in society—in particular the humanities and “soft” sciences—indicate that public opinion is moving towards a narrower, more instrumental view of both education and research. As Jill Dolan writes: “Academics, especially those who teach at public institutions, are more and more under attack and less and less understood as people who labor in institutions whose goal is essentially to produce and

¹³ Grotowski’s Objective Drama research at the University of California is an exception that proves this rule. This was a rare and short-lived moment in which academia explicitly supported research in embodied technique.

distribute varieties of old and new knowledge.”¹⁴ Her point is echoed in countless essays and editorials in the *New York Times*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and elsewhere.¹⁵ Indeed, it is rapidly becoming clear that not only the case for academia but the case for knowledge itself must be made anew. If knowledge is not to be reduced to information, education to vocational training, and research to product development, then a new epistemological framework must be developed. This framework must argue for the importance of epistemological work without falling into the pitfalls of positivism and colonialism that have been so rightly critiqued within academia over the past several decades.¹⁶ While such a broad thesis is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I have attempted here to develop an analysis of embodied technique that takes the epistemological impulse as a valuable resource in itself. In the context of current debates over the value of academia, my argument for embodied technique as knowledge is closely tied to an implicit argument for knowledge production more generally.

Christopher Newfield sums up recent debates over the fate of academia in a series of pointed questions: “What of the public university’s traditional and distinctive mission of broad cultural and human development? What about research on fundamental scientific questions with no visible commercial potential? What about the pursuit of complex sociocultural knowledge to help a polarized world?”¹⁷ In my view, such questions ought to be applied not only to public universities but across academia, and not only to scientific research but to research in the

¹⁴ Dolan, *Geographies of Learning*, 11.

¹⁵ See, for example, James Cersonsky, “The Neoliberal Plan for Higher Education,” *In These Times* (September 26, 2012), online only: <inthesetimes.com/article/13900>, accessed 5/25/13; Michael S. Roth, “Learning as Freedom,” *New York Times* (September 5, 2012); Paul Seabright, “How to Defend Universities,” *Times Literary Supplement* (March 7, 2012); Gary Gutting, “What is College For?” *New York Times* (December 14, 2011); Anthony Grafton, “Our Universities: Why Are They Failing?” *New York Review of Books* (November 24, 2011); Christopher Newfield, “Public Education for the Public Good,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 28, 2011); Gregory A. Petsko, “A Faustian Bargain: Open Letter to George M. Philip, President of the State University of New York,” *Genome Biology* 11:138 (2010).

¹⁶ For more on the critique of knowledge in the context of the “culture wars,” see the introduction to E. Ann Kaplan and George Levine, eds., *The Politics of Research* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1-18.

¹⁷ Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 10.

humanities and in embodied technique. Newfield calls for “a new framework for higher education’s nonmarket purposes” and for a revitalization of those academic values that “depend on the university acting like a noncapitalist domain, and imagining postcapitalist alternatives.”¹⁸ This is what I have tried to do for embodied practice in physical culture, performing arts, and everyday life: to offer a new framework for its nonmarket purposes, one that also links it to the epistemological mission of academia. In this way, my project is aligned with previous movements that rallied academic recognition and support for feminist and indigenous knowledge. Despite its historical links to empire, I believe that academia remains a crucial site for sustaining and extending knowledge outside the instrumentality of the present cultural moment. Institutionally, academia is not opposed to capitalism or state power: It is funded by a combination of private tuition, public subsidies, and corporate investment. However, the prioritization of knowledge makes academia a crucial counterweight to both state and market.

Placing embodied technique next to the sciences and humanities, as a major sector of humanity’s inherited knowledge base, could have major implications not only for higher education but also for the entire educational pathway, beginning with early childhood physical education and education in the arts. How might academia go about supporting education and research in embodied technique? What would be the benefits to academia of offering such support? And what would be the benefits to embodied practitioners of placing themselves within an academic context? Since none of the projects discussed in previous chapters were supported by academia, might we not conclude that such research has no need of academic support? Is the argument for embodied research in academia simply a plea for new sources of funding? On the contrary, I believe that academia can offer more than financial support to embodied researchers. The university is the only social institution that explicitly stands for the depth dimension of

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

knowledge, for specialization as a potential in any field of knowledge, and for its particular varieties of epistemological rigor. It is in this capacity that academia can legitimately champion areas of subaltern or subjugated knowledges: not by virtue of their historical disempowerment alone, but by asserting their epistemological depth. Unlike the Indian state that supported Krishnamacharya, the Soviet regimes that supported Stanislavski and Grotowski, the capitalist marketplace that currently supports yoga and martial arts worldwide, or the medical industry that has begun to support some kinds of somatic bodywork, academia—ideally—values knowledge for its depth rather than its use value. It prioritizes the discovery of what is genuinely unknown over the mass production of what works. By engaging with academia and confronting its particular demands, I believe that researchers in embodied technique might find both a new independence from the social institutions that have housed their work in the past and a new way of understanding what it is that they do.

Practice as Research

Attempts to house embodied and artistic practice within academia are currently unfolding in many countries under the banner of “Practice as Research” and its cognates. These programs and projects offer a useful starting point from which to consider the questions posed in the previous section, in more concrete terms. “Practice as Research” (PaR) is one of a handful of phrases that are currently circulating within academia in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere, and through which tensions between theory and practice are being played out. Other phrases in this family include Practice-based Research, Practice-led Research, Research through Practice, Performance as Research, and Arts-based or Artistic Research. Each

of these has its own genealogy and connotations, which are too numerous and geographically specific to examine here. Nevertheless, a review of the literature shows that they have much in common, with many of the same issues at play. According to Heike Roms:

In contrast to the incorporation of vocational training in American universities and the continuing (if slowly dissolving) separation between the practice of art and its study in the European tradition, the British model ... with its attempted integration and mutual interrogation of practice and theory within research and pedagogy, may have created a situation of persistent anxiety, but it has arguably also produced an ongoing problematization of the position of performance practice within the academy that has proven highly productive... [T]his problematization has been concentrated around the notion of practice-as-research.¹⁹

The British paradigm of PaR offers a useful starting point for a discussion of how and to what extent embodied research of the kind I have described might legitimately find a home within academia. While responding to British examples, my goal here is to propose a new way of thinking about this issue, with emphasis on possibilities for transforming academia in the US. However, much of what I say may also be relevant to other countries and other variants of the practice/research mix.

In England, practice-based masters and doctoral degrees in theatre, dance, and other arts are now common. However, on a theoretical level, the discussion surrounding PaR has not yet

¹⁹ Heike Roms, "The Practice Turn: Performance and the British Academy," in *Contesting Performance: Global Sites of Research*, eds. Jon McKenzie, Heike Roms, and C. J. W.-L. Wee (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 58-59. This essay offers a useful overview of the emergence of PaR in the UK and some of its consequences.

convincingly engaged with established standards of academic rigor nor established a credible epistemological framework of its own. Contemporary discussions of PaR usually describe it as a recent trend developing within academia, in which hybrid artist-scholars or scholar-practitioners synthesize and combine academic research with artistic or creative practice. This assumption sets PaR afloat, without historical reference points, and has led to a vibrant and kaleidoscopic but often incoherent debate over the meaning and value of PaR. In contrast, I have argued that embodied research is a major historical area of research and knowledge production. The examples I have given, spanning roughly the past century, indicate the depth and breadth of this field, while the theoretical argument developed throughout proposes a coherent framework for research in embodied technique. Although there are many similarities between PaR as an emerging academic field and embodied research as a historical phenomenon, there are also many substantial differences. A comparative examination may help make my proposal for embodied research in academia more concrete and simultaneously offer challenges to the ways in which PaR has been theorized up to this point.

Baz Kershaw is a key figure in the PaR debates, having directed the Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) project at the university of Bristol (2001-2006) from which came the recent volume *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, a collection of essays with attached DVD that documents a wide range of PaR projects in the UK and elsewhere.²⁰ Kershaw also has two chapters in Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter's *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research*, the only volume to examine the more recent development of PaR in the United States; a chapter on PARIP in Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*; and a chapter on PaR in his and Helen Nicholson's

²⁰ Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw, and Angela Piccini, *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* (New York: Palgrave, 2009). For PARIP, see <www.bristol.ac.uk/parip>, accessed 12/13/12.

Research Methods in Theatre and Performance.²¹ Having done much to support the development of the field, Kershaw has thus far avoided putting forth a clear statement about what PaR should be, preferring to make room for multiple voices and perspectives in conversation. Other recent anthologies include Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt's *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, with perspectives from and about PaR in Australia, and a German collection that arose from a 2006 congress on dance in Germany.²² The predominance of essay collections and absence of monographs aptly illustrates the fragmentation that characterizes these discussions, from which nothing like a consensus has emerged regarding best practices in PaR or even what the category of PaR should or should not include. Moreover, the emphasis on interdisciplinarity in these works means that essays in the same volume may draw their examples and assumptions from fields as diverse as media studies, dance, theatre, performance art, visual art, design, engineering, architecture, poetry, painting, and music.²³

Until recently, the only single-author treatments of PaR focused on the visual arts and had little to say about the role of embodiment in the production of knowledge.²⁴ This has changed with the publication of Robin Nelson's *Practice as Research in the Arts*, which stands as the clearest articulation to date of PaR as an academic methodology.²⁵ Having supervised numerous PaR projects at Manchester Metropolitan University and London's Central School of Speech and Drama for over a decade, Nelson is well positioned to critique and clarify the

²¹ Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Hazel Smith and Roger T. Den, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

²² Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009); Sabine Gehm, Pirkko Husemann, and Katharina von Wilcke, eds., *Knowledge in Motion: Artistic and Scientific Research in Dance* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007; distributed in the US by Transaction Publishers).

²³ For an especially wide array of disciplinary perspectives, see Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* (Routledge: New York, 2011).

²⁴ See Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (London: Sage Publications, 2010); Shaun McNiff, *Art-Based Research* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998).

²⁵ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

development of PaR in the UK. His book also includes brief essays on how PaR operates in New Zealand, Australia, continental and Nordic Europe, South Africa, and the United States.²⁶ Drawing on many of the same sources I cited in Chapter 1—including Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, Francisco Varela, and Theodore Schatzki—Nelson attempts to propose a more rigorous epistemological framework for PaR.²⁷ Like me, Nelson argues for a third category of research alongside established qualitative and quantitative methodologies.²⁸ Also, like me, Nelson is concerned about a lack of epistemological rigor in practice-based projects and hopes to offer a more coherent methodology. One of his main arguments is that not all practices constitute research and that it is therefore incumbent upon the champions of PaR to explain exactly what kinds of practice do so, and how. I strongly agree. However, I find in Nelson’s model some of the same problems that exist in other, less thorough explications of PaR.

First, Nelson sees PaR as recent and interdisciplinary, whereas embodied research as I have described it is ancient and very often disciplinary in form. What I have called the epistemological impulse in embodied practice has existed for as long as humanity has searched for relatively reliable pathways through its own embodiment and has often led to the establishment of highly disciplined and regimented traditions of practice. Nelson acknowledges that the drive “to address a problem, find things out, establish new insights ... is apparent in the arts throughout history.” However, he does not explain the relationship between historical research of this kind and contemporary PaR. In fact, Nelson specifically deemphasizes the importance of a historical perspective on PaR, writing: “Though historical knowledge is not

²⁶ For a discussion of PaR in the US, see Shannon Rose Riley, “Why Performance as Research? A US Perspective,” in Nelson, *Practice as Research*. According to Riley, “there are only one or two established PhD programmes in theatre or performance framed up as practice-based programmes or as having a substantial and required practice component.” Riley offers several possible reasons why PaR has not taken off here as it has in the UK.

²⁷ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*. Specific references can be found in the index. Notably missing from Nelson’s study are Foucault and Mauss, whose work I discussed at length in Chapter 1.

²⁸ Brad Haseman, cited in *ibid.*, 56.

effaced, my notion of a practice review focuses on what other practitioners are achieving in synchronous time and space.”²⁹ As will become clear below, I consider a diachronic perspective essential in establishing the rigor of any research, including embodied research. Few champions of PaR emphasize this point.³⁰

In addition to favoring the synchronic over the diachronic, Nelson—like many others in the field—sees PaR as inherently interdisciplinary, rather than grounded in existing disciplines. Although he takes care to illuminate several ways in which rigor can be applied to such interdisciplinary projects, Nelson gives little attention to the kinds of narrowly focused research projects that can help to establish the validity of an emerging field. The rigor of PaR, Nelson argues, is “in syncretism, not in depth-mining.”³¹ Its conceptual framework “is more typically wide and interdisciplinary rather than narrow and specific.”³² As a corollary, Nelson suggests that the establishment of mastery or even competence in existing fields is often not relevant to the successful framing and completion of a PaR project. For Nelson, PaR is “open and interdisciplinary, and thus less dependent upon a specific body of knowledge requiring prior mastery.”³³ Accordingly, while some projects might require high levels of training—for example, in performance—many will not. Yet as I understand it, interdisciplinarity requires competency in at least one discipline as its starting point. To be interdisciplinary is to move from one discipline towards another—not to escape the requirement of competence in any discipline. If this is true in the humanities and social sciences, why should it not be true in the areas of knowledge discussed here? Nelson characterizes PaR as resembling the postmodern “rhizome”

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

³⁰ A rare exception is Arthur J. Sabatini, who writes of the need to “re-examine and historicize research by artists outside of academia and relate or adapt it to existing discourses and approaches to research . . . in the university.” Sabatini, “Approaching Knowledge, Research, Performance and the Arts,” in Riley and Hunter, *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research*, 118.

³¹ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 34.

³² Ibid., 102.

³³ Ibid., 34.

of Deleuze and Guattari, as opposed to a modernist “surface/depth” model.³⁴ I would argue, in contrast, that a sophisticated theory of knowledge must involve both horizontal and vertical movements, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. In fact, I find the overemphasis of interdisciplinarity quite dangerous, because it easily plays into the arguments of those who want to reduce support for sustained pedagogy and research across academia today. As I argued above, the case for knowledge itself must presently be made, and this case must involve the recognition of epistemological depth as well as breadth.

Another problem is that Nelson situates PaR within the context of interdisciplinary arts, a domain that includes “dancing, music- or theatre-making, writing, painting, sculpting, filming.”³⁵ As a result, he sees performing arts as presenting a specific problem for academia because of their alleged ephemerality. Drawing on Phelan’s “ontology of disappearance,” which I critiqued in Chapter 1, Nelson considers theatre and performance to be uniquely difficult to document and assess. He writes: “Numerous instabilities in the diversity and ephemerality of performing arts practices pose particular challenges to ideas of fixed, measurable, and recordable ‘knowledge.’”³⁶ My notion of embodied research, on the contrary, places live performance alongside an entirely different set of sibling practices: martial arts, yoga, sports, somatic bodywork, and ritual, as well as gender and other categories of identity. In this context, the absence of a material product is hardly anomalous and requires no special explanation. Placing theatre and dance alongside martial arts and gender allows us to recognize the stability of practice insofar as it is structured by technique. On the other hand, many contemporary ideas about “art” and art-making work directly against the epistemological demands of research. By grounding his vision of PaR in the arts rather than embodiment, Nelson puts himself at the mercy

³⁴ Ibid., 54.

³⁵ Ibid., 62.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

of prevailing assumptions about ephemerality, uniqueness, and radical breaks from history in the making of art. Whether or not these assumptions are useful or true, they work against an understanding of the transmissible knowledge that structures all kinds of artistic and embodied practices. The term “art” itself carries very different connotations across the martial, healing, performing, literary, and visual arts.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, Nelson’s model does not sufficiently explain what kinds of outcomes might be expected to result from successful PaR projects, in terms of the production of new knowledge. Nelson’s proposed methodology for PaR is essentially a triangular relationship between three modes of knowledge: “know-that,” “know-how,” and “know-what.”³⁷ The first and second of these come from Gilbert Ryle, who distinguished between propositional knowledge “that” something is true and practical knowledge of “how” to do something. As I noted in Chapter 1, the concept of “know-how” is problematic insofar as it conflates knowledge, ability, and experience. Since neither ability nor experience are transmissible, I would not count “know-how” as a possible research outcome. “Know-that” is certainly a potential research outcome, but there is nothing new in this idea, since for Nelson this category is equivalent to “traditional ‘academic knowledge.’”³⁸ This leaves only “know-what” as a possible new type of research outcome. Strikingly, Nelson defines know-what along lines that suggest something very like my concept of technique.

Know-what, Nelson writes, “covers what can be gleaned through an informed reflexivity about the process of making and its modes of knowing. The key method used to develop know-what from know-how is that of critical reflection—pausing, standing back and thinking about what you are doing.” This process is “rigorous and iterative,” and it leads to a knowledge that

³⁷ The chart of this methodology can be found at *ibid.*, 37. There is an unfortunate typographical error in that two of the circles are labeled “know-what.” It seems clear that the circle on the bottom right should be labeled “know-that.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

consists in “knowing what ‘works,’ in teasing out the methods by which ‘what works’ is achieved and the compositional principles involved.”³⁹ Nelson does not offer a more thorough explanation of how know-what is produced, nor does he give explicit examples of it in contrast to know-how and know-that. If “know-what” is essentially technique as I have defined it, then there could be significant overlap and compatibility between my argument and Nelson’s. But whereas Nelson shows three “modes” of knowledge interacting equally, I would place technique at the top of the triangle—or in its center—to illustrate how experience, ability, and the archive can each inform the development of new technique. For Nelson, PaR is basically “a question of relation between different modes of knowing.”⁴⁰ For me, in contrast, the important point is that technique is knowledge. Given that premise, it is certainly plausible to imagine interdisciplinary projects involving technique. However, I worry that arguing for interdisciplinarity before establishing disciplinarity in this area amounts to putting the cart before the horse and could lead to less rigorous and more superficial projects and outcomes.

Nelson is very clear about the possible forms the material product of a PaR dissertation can take, including suggested proportions for written and audiovisual materials in a PaR dissertation.⁴¹ But no amount of detail regarding the format of the output can replace an epistemological theory of its content. What is an example of a substantive research outcome in PaR? I do not mean: What does it look like, how many pages, and what is the format of the DVD? I mean: What kind of transmissible knowledge does it contribute, and to which field? Early on, Nelson mentions Pina Bausch—unquestionably an innovator of embodied technique alongside Krishnamacharya, Stanislavski, and Grotowski—as an example of someone whose work constitutes practical or artistic research findings that are “paradigm-shifting.” He also

³⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁴¹ For example, see *ibid.*, 100-2.

rightly points out that “to set the bar for *new knowledge* at the level of the paradigm shift is to set it too high,” since such instances “are rare—and, indeed, often not recognized in their own time.”⁴² How then should we conceive of smaller, more modest contributions to practice along similar lines? What are the “substantial new insights” to which PaR projects ought, at a minimum, to give rise?⁴³ The underlying problem here is actually the same as that which I identified in Chapter 1: namely, the lack of a clear distinction between practice and the knowledge that structures it. Nelson insists that “the practice itself,” or “the work itself,” or “the artwork” can stand as part of the research outcome.⁴⁴ In contrast, I have argued that practice itself cannot be the outcome of research, because practice is neither repeatable nor transmissible. A live event cannot constitute a research outcome, because it is bounded in time and space. Rather, a live event or practice can discover, explore, demonstrate, clarify, reveal, illustrate, and incarnate technique. Technique, as knowledge, can be a research outcome of practice.

My concern, when reading the work of Nelson and other theorists of PaR, is that the concept of “research” may lose its meaning as a result of being too easily and broadly applied. Working alongside practitioners of yoga, dance, martial arts, and actor training, I have seen how the word research can be used name a particularly epistemological impulse in practice. In this sense, “research” in yoga or actor training names a type or dimension of those practices, which is distinguished from their health or psychological benefits, as well as from their use value in creating public works of art or entertainment, on the grounds that it is a search for knowledge. In current theories of PaR, including that of Nelson, this defining characteristic of research tends to be lost. Instead of naming an epistemological impulse already at work in many embodied practices, the word research comes to refer to an interdisciplinary relationship between embodied

⁴² Ibid., 27, italics original.

⁴³ Ibid., 47 and passim.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 83.

practice and theoretical knowledge. I call this the “weak” conception of PaR, or “Practice *and* Research.” In it, practice is invited to be in dialogue with more traditional forms of research, but how practice may itself constitute research in its own right is not adequately shown. A stronger conception of PaR—more like the notion of embodied research I have developed here—would argue on epistemological grounds that practice can itself be a research methodology, leading to the discovery of new knowledge in the form of new technique. The potential for interdisciplinary exchange between this and other kinds of knowledge would then be a worthy but secondary concern. Moreover, PaR would be seen less as an interaction of two previously existing communities—artists and academics—and more as a special kind of pursuit that is already at work in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to the arts and academia.

Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler exemplify the weak conception of PaR when they define it as the interaction of “two different communities presenting conflicting claims: the community of academic researchers working in contexts such as university departments, and the community of professional practitioners working in contexts such as the concert hall or the art gallery.”⁴⁵ According to Biggs and Büchler, the academic community values “the archiving and dissemination of outcomes,” while the creative practice community tends to value “the singularity of the event” and “the direct encounter with the artifact” through exhibition and performance.⁴⁶ Yet, as I have argued, some practitioners are deeply concerned with the dissemination of research outcomes far beyond the singularity of one event or practice. Moreover, such an interest in dissemination is not limited to fringe elements, but can be identified with the foundational moments of fields like yoga and acting. Far from being secondary to the production of singular events, the development and transmission of knowledge

⁴⁵ Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler, “Communities, Values, Conventions and Actions,” in Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson, *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, 83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

in the form of technique can be seen as the primary activity of many practitioners in physical culture and performing arts, the ground upon which the “singular event” can be realized and without which there can be no event at all. The weak conception of PaR pays no attention to those practitioners who hold values that Biggs and Büchler associate with academia and yet do not work in academic contexts or receive academic support. Again, the association of PaR with “the arts” is damaging insofar as it ignores the relationship that live performance has to other kinds of embodied practice outside the domain of “art.”

Many of the significant differences between my notion of embodied research and current discussions of PaR converge around the issue of documentation. Very often, the starting point for considering the documentation of PaR is a recognition of how recording technologies “fail” to capture the complexity of live events. After all, if the written word cannot “capture” live performance, then neither can film, tape recording, or digital video. Even the best documentary video cannot record smells, flavors, or the feeling of being in the room when something happens. As Nelson writes, “there are experiential aspects of many PaR performance projects which can only be thought-felt live in the here and now.”⁴⁷ For this reason, he explains, there is “an informal consensus in the UK” that “ephemeral practice in the context of PaR PhD must be experienced live by the examiners.”⁴⁸ Simon Jones takes this argument even further, asserting that PaR actively “flees textual practices” and “the known,” and is therefore “outside of judgment” entirely.⁴⁹ Such an avowedly “outrageous” conception of PaR depends upon the same idealization of performance as evanescent and uncapturable that I have previously critiqued. It is no wonder that conversations about PaR documentation run into difficulties, when PaR is

⁴⁷ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁹ Simon Jones, “The Courage of Complementarity: Practice-as-Research as a Paradigm Shift in Performance Studies,” in Allegue et al., *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, 30.

sometimes defined as that which cannot be documented. I agree, of course, that the fullness of live performance cannot be captured on DVD. However, this fact is not specific to artistic or theatrical performance—it is true of practice in general, as I argued in Chapter 1.

PaR theorists like Kershaw, Nelson, Biggs and Büchler, and Jones, no doubt feel they are taking the more radical stance by demanding that academia accommodate and support even those aspects of practice that are ephemeral, evanescent, undocumentable, and unknowable. I disagree. In my view, such proposals romanticize artistic practice and make light of academic standards. The bolder stance would be to demand of embodied practitioners that they produce stable, transmissible documents of the technique that structures their practice. This opens the door to a radical transformation of academia, not through the dismantling of its standards but through an extension of the logic of scholarly epistemology itself. Calling on academia to recognize and accept the ephemerality and transience of live performance is not an original move. After all, it is largely scholars who have described performance as uniquely ephemeral in the first place, leading at least one theorist to accuse performance studies of unconsciously privileging the perspective of the spectator—from which performance appears ephemeral—over the knowledge of the performer.⁵⁰ I propose instead that we call upon academics and practitioners alike to acknowledge the (relatively) stable, transmissible knowledge content of embodied practice, and to find ways of documenting and assessing this content. Rather than focusing on those aspects of practice which multimedia recordings fail to capture, let us instead ask how new multimedia and network technologies are making new territories of knowledge available for the first time to academic scrutiny through the long-established protocols of peer review and citation. In this respect, we might also do well to remember that academia itself only became possible through the development of “new” documentary technologies, beginning with the printed word. A

⁵⁰ Susan Melrose, cited in Heike Roms, “The Practice Turn: Performance and the British Academy,” 61.

consideration of the possibility of embodied research in academia could therefore benefit from a closer examination of the epistemological relationship between scholarship and the archive.

Scholarship and the Archive

The idea that scholarly knowledge is contained in written texts, while practical knowledge inheres in ephemeral events, is deeply misleading. Scholarship in every field (including the sciences, as Karin Knorr Cetina shows) is in large part tacit and embodied. Scholars and scientists do not have direct conscious access to all the knowledge they possess any more than do actors, dancers, or yoga teachers. They do, however, have recourse to an archive of relatively stable documents, and it is this that distinguishes academic knowledge from other kinds. To a large extent, academia is defined by the relationship between a community of knowledge and its archive, from cutting-edge research to the pedagogical processes that make each archive legible to successive generations. If scholarship were purely archival, and not grounded in embodied encounters, there would be no need for education: Students could simply read the texts of whichever field they wanted to comprehend. Books and articles “fail” to capture the pedagogical work of professors—the vocal nuances and context-dependent remarks of a lecturer as much as the more intimate event of a seminar—in the same way that they fail to capture dance, theatre, and ritual events. What distinguishes academic knowledge is not that it is textual—there is no such thing as purely textual knowledge—but rather its particular use of documentary technology to capture and disseminate not even “language” but just those particular aspects of language that can be recorded in written, printed, or digital words.

The scholarly archive is both synchronic and diachronic, and each of these is essential to its working. The synchronic dimension of the archive makes possible “blind” peer review: the evaluation of work by people who are specialists in the field but who do not have a personal investment in the success or failure of the author.⁵¹ The fact that my work can be assessed by someone far away who has never heard of me enables a particular kind of rigor in knowledge production, which we can call synchronic rigor. With the advent of computer networks, this dimension is growing exponentially. The diachronic dimension of the scholarly archive works in an analogous way, allowing comparative engagements to occur across time. The depth and rigor of diachronic engagement is necessarily limited by the unreliability of the archive, its gaps and errors, and by the limitations of archival materials themselves. Generally speaking, the further back in time we reach, the more fragmentary the evidence, the more difficult to ascertain its reliability, and the more complex the issues of translation and interpretation. Nevertheless, this dimension of the scholarly archive is also growing exponentially, and it makes possible what we can call diachronic rigor in the production of knowledge. Without such rigor, scholarship would be limited to a discussion among those who are currently living, engaging through oral tradition with the memory of what their teachers (and their teachers’ teachers) said. The diachronic dimension of the scholarly archive makes it possible to go back to the writing of earlier thinkers and wrestle with them in the present. However imperfect this engagement with historical thinkers may be—and it certainly fails to capture the “evanescent event” of each life—it adds a temporal dimension to academic knowledge that could not otherwise exist.

⁵¹ I acknowledge that neither of these criteria can be met perfectly, because they work against each other. Two specialists in the same area necessarily have some investment in each other’s careers—whether positive, as colleagues, or negative, as competitors—because knowledge and social power are interdependent. But if knowledge and power are not simply to be identified with each other, then we can say that there is value in having assessment take place across large geographic and social distances. Such “epistemic distance” is perhaps the defining feature of scholarly knowledge and might reasonably be understood as a non-positivist (because relative) “objectivity.”

The distinctive feature of academic fields of knowledge is the relationship of the research community to a relatively stable synchronic and diachronic archive. The stability of this archive across time and space can and has been questioned, but there can be no doubt that the circulation of documents—written words and also visual materials—is essential to academic knowledge production. In this sense, documentation is not secondary to knowledge production in academia. Rather, it is fundamental to academic epistemology. As far as academia is concerned, documentation is an epistemological issue. The “theory vs. practice” debates, and the discussions of PaR cited above, might thus be seen in a new light. Rather than thinking of performance and embodied practice as uniquely ephemeral—a special phenomenon that “flees” textuality or “evades” judgment—we should instead recognize the extraordinary power of writing and printing technologies to render some aspects of language stable over hundreds or even thousands of years. If the fragile relationship between written word and embodied knowledge has made possible all the fields of academic knowledge that exist today, what new fields might become conceivable in the wake of technologies that can capture light and sound waves as never before, making them available across time and space in unprecedented ways?

In contrast to the romantic view of performance as uniquely ephemeral, I assert that the ephemerality of performance is not a special case. It is academia, with its deep, ongoing, and defining relationship to the archive, that constitutes the special case. All of life is ephemeral. Not just performance but every moment of practice—as I argued in Chapter 1—exceeds our ability to “capture” or articulate it in words, images, or digital information. Scholarly knowledge, then, is a special kind of knowledge that to some (perhaps small) degree avoids the general ephemerality of life, and it does so through the painstaking construction, maintenance, and interpretation of a rich synchronic and diachronic archive. Academic fields are what they are because of their

relations to particular kinds of documentary technology. These fields do not exist prior to the question of documentation. Rather, the question of documentation is the basis for any academic field, insofar as it determines what will constitute the scholarly archive for that field. Until very recently in the history of human society, scholarly rigor has been limited to those fields that are founded on printed materials: words, drawings, “ephemera,” etc. Yoga, dance, and other embodied practices have been documented in writing for hundreds if not thousands of years, and in this sense have indeed been exchanged and assessed across synchronic and diachronic distance. However, the new media of the past century enable us to approach these fields of knowledge with a new rigor, making available many dimensions of practice that were previously inaccessible to scholarship. It has now become possible to develop a synchronic and diachronic archive that allows moving images and recorded sounds to travel far beyond their original context, where previously only paper documents and static images could go. It could even be argued that the growth of theatre, performance, and dance studies, as well as the development of current discussions about embodied knowledge in other fields, is substantially a result of the development of recording technologies over the past 150 years.⁵² It would then be quite backwards to conceive of performance as a special kind of phenomenon that escapes or eludes capture. Rather, scholarly notions of performance and embodied practice have emerged from the growth of multimedia technologies precisely because these technologies can so successfully record aspects of practice—like movement and rhythm—that otherwise could never be archived.

⁵² Mark Singleton argues in *Yoga Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 163-74) that the advent of photography enabled the physical culture movement. We might also chart, in this respect, the development of phonograph, photograph, film, and video alongside the rise of theatre and performance studies. Does the advent of such technologies make possible the question—fundamental to these disciplines—of how one performance of a script or score differs from another? Is the birth of performance studies related to the explosion of cheaper and more widespread recording technologies that make more instances of embodied practice accessible to scholarship?

Without a citable, synchronic and diachronic archive, there can be research but not scholarly research. Researchers like Krishnamacharya, Stanislavski, and Grotowski all operated within specific communities of knowledge. They were highly aware of a range of practices related to their own and extremely interested in the differences and similarities between them. In addition to drawing on personal encounters and apprenticeships, they were also well-read, making powerful use of the print and visual archive to move forward with their embodied research. But they did not have recourse to multimedia documentation of historical practices. There are grainy black and white films of Krishnamacharya performing a yoga sequence, and of Stanislavski directing *Tartuffe*—both in 1938—but nothing like the teaching and rehearsal videos that now abound. Those films can now be found online through a simple search on Google or YouTube. Yet I do not know of any scholarly publication that cites them. The film of Grotowski’s *Akropolis*, and that of Ryszard Cieslak leading physical training at Odin Teatret, are widely known in theatre studies, but even these have been cited only as complete works and not in specific detail. The films of the Grotowski/Richards Workcenter’s *Action* and *Downstairs Action*, discussed in Chapter 3, are now shown regularly by Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini, but as of this writing they are not available to purchase or watch except in their presence. We are clearly a long way from establishing a scholarly multimedia archive, but there are many signs that we are moving rapidly in that direction.

If scholarly rigor is defined by the relationship of the researcher to a synchronic and diachronic archive, then the place of embodied practice within academia depends upon the establishment of such an archive. Of course, we will never have audio or video footage that predates the development of those technologies. Instead, we can begin to develop the archive from the present moment onward. There are many substantive questions to be asked along the

way. What would a multimedia document look like, if its purpose were to make the embodied technique of a given practice available to interested parties across geographic and temporal distance? How would this differ from a documentary film intended for a general audience? How might one cite a multimedia document, not simply by giving the reference and time code but by including an excerpt, as is commonly done with verbal citations? I am not talking here only about written documents that cite multimedia documents. I also envision an archive of multimedia documents that actively cite one another. Such an archive would do more than simply make audio and video materials available to scholars for whom the required research outcome is a written essay or book. My question is how a scholar could produce a multimedia document of embodied practice that would cite and engage with other such documents, be submitted to rigorous peer review in that context, and then itself become available for citation. Nothing less can meet the established standards of academic knowledge production.

My argument is based on the supposition that yoga, martial arts, dance, acting, sports, therapy, ritual, and other such embodied practices have greater affinity with multimedia documentation than with purely textual media. This simply means that multimedia captures more of the relevant knowledge that informs such practices than does the written word. I am not suggesting that multimedia documents capture everything that happens in a practice or that such documents are the final word on these practices. I have already stated that it is impossible to capture or articulate all the technique that structures any practice. The question is: To what extent does multimedia documentation make new areas of knowledge available to the mechanisms of scholarly rigor? The extent to which new media can be used to create a scholarly archive for more tactile and proprioceptive technique, like somatic bodywork, remains to be seen. The point is that the founding of a scholarly field is, to a large extent, equivalent to the founding of its

archive. A single, unique, artistic event can never attain scholarly rigor, because it can never be assessed or cited by anyone who was not present at the time it occurred. Likewise, a teaching tradition that can only be handed down through personal contact can never claim scholarly rigor, because such rigor is based on assessment and citation that extends beyond interpersonal contact. This does not mean that such events and traditions cannot produce valuable, transmissible knowledge. It simply means that they cannot meet the scholarly standards of assessment and citation by a community of knowledge across synchronic and diachronic distances. The question of whether and how embodied research can find a home within the academy is therefore substantially a question of the extent to which it can be documented and archived. Again, documentation is not merely a secondary, logistical question, but an essential part of academic epistemology. Documentation—in the broadest sense—constitutes the difference between knowledge and scholarship.

Building the Archive

To conclude, I would like to take a more pragmatic approach, shifting focus from PaR as it exists in the UK to embodied research as I hope it could be developed in the US and elsewhere. How might academia in the US support such research? What shape might be taken by programs and research projects in embodied technique, when they are housed and supported by universities? What degrees should be awarded for such work? Nelson writes that he has “resisted the proposal ... to have a separate set of doctorates for the arts (D. Dance, D. Fine Arts, D. Theatre) etc. awarded according to different criteria for high achievement in an arts practice.”

Instead, he has “worked with others to secure the PhD award involving arts practices, and a model for PaR which maps on to established methodologies and criteria.”⁵³ When imagining advanced graduate programs in embodied research, I agree that they should be analogous to PhD programs. However, I see the reluctance to establish separate degrees as underestimating the epistemological depth of embodied technique—especially in the US, where a precedent for separate degrees has already been set at the masters level by the establishment of the MFA.

In my view, the distinction between MA and MFA degrees—like that between BA and BFA degrees at the undergraduate level—is warranted. Both MA and MFA degrees take far less time to accomplish than a doctoral degree: usually, two or three years. This is partly because both MA and MFA degrees are more oriented towards professional engagement in their respective industries. However, the areas in which these degrees signify competency are very different. The doctoral degree I envision would be founded on the areas of competency that are taught in MFA programs—such as dance, acting, and directing—but would open these up to longer-term and more purely epistemologically-oriented endeavors. Like the PhD, this degree would build upon competencies at the masters level and would culminate in the accomplishment of an original research project that contributes new knowledge to the field. Since it builds on the MFA rather than the MA, it would be logical to call this degree the Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA). Apart from the dramaturgy program at Yale, the DFA is currently awarded primarily as an honorary degree to highly renowned arts practitioners.⁵⁴ Arguably, these are practitioners who have made substantial contributions at the level of technique rather than individual artworks. It would make sense to award the same degree to those who have not only established competency in a field like contemporary ballet or psychophysical acting, but who have made a contribution to

⁵³ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 26.

⁵⁴ For a list of notable honorees, see the Wikipedia entry for “Doctor of Fine Arts,” accessed 4/15/13.

that field through the development of new technique. Doing so would allow us to value more explicitly those contributions that extend the technique of a given field but, as Nelson puts it, do not rise to the level of the paradigm shift.

I would like to see the development of DFA programs that place embodied research within the established frame of doctoral work, requiring—for example—the demonstration of competency in at least three areas of technique as a prerequisite for the accomplishment of a clearly defined research project at the edge of one of these or at their intersection. Such programs could culminate in a dissertation that used whatever media proved most suitable to document and disseminate new technique discovered there. Unlike existing practice-based PhD programs, those I envision would be assessed neither as traditional scholarly outputs (which must take the form of written texts) nor through the paradigm of performing arts (which demand public performances), but according to the criterion I have elaborated in this dissertation: the discovery of new technique. The key to a successful project would be to frame it narrowly enough to be able to make an original contribution to an existing field of knowledge. This suggests very different emphasis from the “open” interdisciplinarity associated with PaR—one that is more similar to the traditional narrowly focused design of a PhD thesis in other fields.

Nelson’s idea of a “practice review”—alongside or in lieu of a literature review—is exactly what is needed to established the epistemic context of such a project.⁵⁵ Although Nelson rejects a “more traditional model of research”—“progressive” and “incremental”—in which “the aim is to add another small stone to the cairn built up over the years,” he acknowledges that “[o]ther practitioners will undoubtedly be working in territory similar” to that of the doctoral researcher.⁵⁶ It is therefore “perfectly possible, and indeed necessary, in PaR to sketch the

⁵⁵ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 34-35.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

intellectual and practical context in which your work will be undertaken.” I find it unfortunate that Nelson’s idea of the practice review emphasizes synchronic over diachronic citations, and I can think of no reason why this should be so. Instead, I would adamantly require practice reviews for doctoral projects in embodied research to engage as fully as possible with the diachronic and synchronic archive for the relevant field. This would demand a review of related technique as it has been discovered and practiced in other contexts, with as great a geographical and historical scope as possible. Generally speaking—and as in other fields—the greater the synchronic and diachronic scope of the practices reviewed, the more likely the research is to make a genuinely new contribution to knowledge. Yet to make possible such a broad review of practice, we must begin now to imagine and assemble the contents of a scholarly archive of embodied technique. I mentioned, in the previous section, some of the audiovisual materials that could form the basis for such an archive. In the space that remains, I want to propose two specific kinds of research projects that would actively work to expand that archive. These are concrete opportunities for dissertations, as well as more advanced scholarly projects, in areas such as those I have discussed.

The first type of project is the production of scholarly editions of existing materials, rendering them accessible and standardizing their citation in the same way as editions of old and rare manuscripts. This is a crucial task in establishing a new field and would be very appropriate for researchers who wish to engage with the historical depth of the archive. The films of Krishnamacharya, Stanislavski, and Grotowski mentioned above would be fine starting points for building the archive of embodied technique. Leading the way in this direction, Paul Allain has recently produced a DVD of Grotowski and Cieslak’s *The Constant Prince*, with better quality video and English subtitles to allow more viewers to access the textual dimension of the

performance.⁵⁷ At present, there is nothing like a scholarly edition of Grotowski's films that could be reliably cited and cross-referenced by researchers working in related areas of technique. Such an archive would not only provide a much firmer basis for Grotowski scholarship, by allowing for more detailed citation of his works, but could also be the basis for new research projects in areas of technique close to those in which Grotowski worked. Avoiding unproductive debates over what is or is not "Grotowskian," the establishment of such an archive could help move the field of Grotowski studies toward comparative analysis and begin to establish a more coherent framework with which to describe the contributions to knowledge made by Grotowski, as well as how these relate to those of Thomas Richards, Rena Mirecka, Włodzimierz Staniewski, The Performance Group, Judson Dance Theatre, and others. Of course, the Grotowski archive can only ever be fragmentary because most of the work he led was not documented in any way. Nevertheless, a scholarly edition of existing audiovisual materials could significantly alter the way Grotowski's work is understood in the present day.

Several recent publications from Routledge Press have experimented with the inclusion of multimedia documents as part of book publications. Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge's *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice* (2004) includes a CD-ROM with a range of audiovideo materials: not just performance excerpts, but also documentary footage from Gardzienice's expeditions in the 1970s and more recent demonstrations of training and rehearsal technique.⁵⁸ The DVD-ROM packaged with Philip Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting* is an even more extensive multimedia resource, "featuring exercises, production documentation, interviews,

⁵⁷ *'The Constant Prince' of Jerzy Grotowski. Reconstruction* [Il Principe Costante di Jerzy Grotowski, Ricostruzione], ed. Ferruccio Marotti, Centro Teatro Ateneo (Rome: Università di Roma 'La Sapienza,' 2005), 48 minutes.

⁵⁸ Włodzimierz Staniewski with Alison Hodge, *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice* (New York: Routledge, 2004), with CD-ROM produced by Arts Archives.

and reflection.”⁵⁹ Both discs were created by Peter Hulton, whose Arts Archives at the University of Exeter stands as a valuable contribution to the scholarly multimedia archive of performance practice.⁶⁰ A pioneer of multimedia documentation—including training and research in performance technique as well as excerpts of public performance events—Hulton has criticized the notion that “performance is defined by disappearance.” He writes: “We need a portrait of presence, not a discourse of disappearance... Archives and documentations are not defined by their attempt to rescue things from oblivion, but are provocations rendered a-new into present reality each time someone encounters them.”⁶¹ This statement counters the romanticization of ephemerality critiqued above and is closely aligned with my position. Hulton also notes that DVDs may soon be outdated as storage media, just as CD-ROMs have been, and that multimedia archives are increasingly being implemented online. As I write, the appearance of the new Routledge Performance Archive online marks a significant move in this direction.⁶² Recently launched, it could eventually hold much more than could any archive of DVDs, be as easily searched and accessed as a textual database like JSTOR, and provide a stable reference point for the citation of important multimedia documents. A number of other projects along these lines are cited by Nelson.⁶³ For the researcher looking to achieve scholarly rigor by comparing contemporary and historical practices, such archival projects are essential.

⁵⁹ Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2009), with DVD-ROM created by Peter Hulton.

⁶⁰ Peter Hulton, Arts Archives, University of Exeter, <arts-archives.org>, accessed 12/20/12. The archive comprises about one hundred DVDs documenting the work of contemporary theatre practitioners, which can be purchased individually from Hulton. My attempts to have the New York Public Library purchase the entire archive came to no avail, in part because Hulton lacks the resources to mass produce the DVDs.

⁶¹ Peter Hulton, book review of Matthew Reason’s *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, published in *Studies in Theatre & Performance* 29.3 (2009): 341.

⁶² Routledge Performance Archive, <routledgeperformancearchive.com>, accessed 12/20/12.

⁶³ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 91-92. Another example is *Master Classes in the Michael Chekhov Technique*, produced as a DVD set and now available as streaming video from MICHA: The Michael Chekhov Association, <www.michaelchekhov.org>, accessed 12/20/12.

Scholarly multimedia editions documenting Suzuki Training or Viewpoints—for example—could allow us to move beyond the notion of “brands” or “styles” of acting and towards a recognition of acting technique as a field of knowledge. Even a casual viewing of already published works renders obsolete the notion that there are a certain number of coherent acting “Techniques,” or that all teachers of acting are really aiming for the same (inarticulable) thing—points I addressed at length in Chapter 3. In addition, we should consider the countless works of ethnographic documentation that stand as testaments to the knowledge of embodied technique that structures dance, song, and ritual worldwide. While I would not wish to collapse the distinction between theatre and ritual insofar as it may be culturally and historically grounded, there is every reason to examine theatrical performance documentation alongside “folk” and “ritual” documentation, as we lay groundwork for embodied technique as a scholarly field.⁶⁴ Indeed, the development of the multimedia archive should allow us to ask, and begin to answer, some of the questions that have been at the heart of this dissertation. What are the similarities and differences, at the level of technique, between Grotowski’s work with Cieslak and the current work of Thomas Richards; between the Haitian *yanvalou* as practiced by the Workcenter and in Haiti; between Zarrilli’s “bodymind” training and that of Suzuki or Barba; between these “actor training” pedagogies and the work of the Michael Chekhov Association; between Viewpoints training at SITI Company in New York City and at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado; or between yoga as practiced in various schools across the world?

The synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the archive provide a rigor that cannot be achieved without it. Academia works by juxtaposing the intimacy of the student-teacher

⁶⁴ Alan Lomax’s work on “cantometrics” and “choreometrics” is a precursor to this project, though unfortunately limited by structuralist and colonialist assumptions. A more nuanced discussion of a wider and deeper archive could perhaps lead us toward a more complex but equally comparative analysis of song and dance—something like a poststructuralist choreometrics. See Alan Lomax, *Folk Song Style and Culture* (Transaction Publishers, 1968).

relationship with more epistemically distanced, archival relationships. The archive does not replace embodied pedagogy but supplements it and extends it in ways that crucially define academic knowledge production. As teachers of acting, yoga, and martial arts often point out, an “untrained” person (someone trained only in the technique of everyday life) usually cannot learn much from a book or video. This is not because embodied technique is especially ephemeral or impossible to “capture” with recording technology. Rather, it is because specialized knowledge is too dense to be understood without specialized training. Most people also cannot learn much from an advanced math or science publication, or from the latest work of critical theory. That is why training programs are required, in addition to books, to sustain an epistemic field. A person who has trained for years in one school of practice can in fact learn a great deal from video documentation of another, including much that would be imperceptible to those without such training. Likewise, teachers of yoga, martial artists, acting, and dance can perceive in videos of each other’s work countless technical details that are unavailable to someone who is not a specialist in areas like alignment, balance, touch, and breath. There is no lack of knowledge in these specialized fields and disciplines of embodied technique. Only the synchronic and diachronic archive is lacking, if scholarly rigor is desired.

The publication of scholarly editions of existing multimedia documents could set the stage for the framing and realization of new embodied research projects. This is the second of my proposed routes forward in the implementation of embodied research within academia. If they are to attain scholarly rigor, such projects must be contextualized with reference to a synchronic and diachronic archive. This can surely include the vast archive of writing, but if the work itself unfolds through embodied practice, rather than through spectatorship and conversation, then it is likely that a multimedia document contextualized with respect to a

multimedia archive will be more relevant. For example, Staniewski's highly specialized knowledge of actor training and song-based theatrical montage is more in evidence in the multimedia CD of *Hidden Territories* than in the printed interviews that come along with it. It is therefore not enough to cite the written interviews. We must be able to cite the video fragments as well. We do not yet know what the documents of such projects might look like.⁶⁵ The DVD published with *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen* is extremely varied and offers a useful starting point for discussion, but there is no coherence to be found in either the form or the content of these videos. How best should such documents locate themselves with respect to the archive of existing works? How should they cite previously published multimedia documents and make themselves available, in turn, for citation? What is the difference between a documentary film, which attempts to make a given practice both interesting and comprehensible to a general audience, and a scholarly multimedia document, which lays out advances in knowledge at the edge of the field and need not interest a general audience? These questions remain to be answered.

Some artists and practitioners may complain that this approach does not recognize the basis of their work in direct presence and nontransmissible encounter. They are correct that the embodied researcher I envision is not freed from the academic requirement to produce a stable document, but is simply allowed to work in a different medium. For some, the need to produce a circulable document of any kind may pose an unacceptable burden. Personally, I do not find it stifling or limiting to conceive of the (embodied) researcher as one who organizes practice

⁶⁵ Some dissertations in the UK are currently framed this way. However, I do not know of any book-length publication that has come out of such projects. Moreover, it is not clear how such projects understand the areas of knowledge into which they intervene. What is being documented—practice itself, or knowledge that inheres in that practice? For three examples, and further discussion of these issues, see Adam J. Ledger, Simon K. Ellis, and Fiona Wright, “The Question of Documentation: Creative Strategies in Performance Research,” in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, eds. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 162-85.

around the goal of producing (multimedia) documents. I am eager to imagine, for example, how one might plan a multi-year project of workshops, classes, training sessions, rehearsals, informal showings, and performances, all framed from the start as a multimedia book project. The final research outcome of such a project could take a form like that of Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting*—a book with DVD—or its next generation online equivalent. Rather than stifling creativity, I wonder what new possibilities and freedoms for the practitioner could be opened up by framing ongoing embodied practice as research in this sense. I do not think that artists and practitioners should look to academia with a merely strategic eye on funding and material support. Instead, the entry of embodied research into academia should be seen as replacing one set of demands and constraints for another. The practitioner/researcher I envision would be freed of the requirement to produce public spectacles, as theatre artists must do, or marketable classes, as yoga teachers must do. The academy substitutes such demands with its own: to produce a stable and citable document that contributes new knowledge to the existing archive of a field. This epistemic requirement is not necessarily more or less difficult than the demands of artistic production or capitalist pedagogy—but it is quite different.

Beyond the politics of this or the next election cycle, research and education will determine what kind of world we live in. The availability and contents of education, from kindergarten through graduate school, profoundly influences the organization of society. In this sense, knowledge is politics in the long term. I have moved in this chapter from a broad vision of how and why embodied research might find a home for itself within academia—and how such support would differ from the state and market support that enabled the projects described in previous chapters—towards an increasingly concrete proposal for implementing an epistemologically rigorous version of embodied research or practice as research. In doing so, I

have shifted emphasis towards embodied technique in the performing arts, in order to engage with the work of Nelson and other pioneers of PaR. It is fairly easy to see how these ideas could be extended to the domain of physical culture. Collaborative endeavors between universities and the many independent organizations that already offer teacher training and credentials in yoga, martial arts, and somatic bodywork could foster the growth of a more historically aware and epistemologically rigorous—but no less thoroughly embodied or well-trained—research culture in these areas. Set apart from the marketplace, where “schools” of practice compete using the tactics of marketing, such an epistemologically-oriented context could create a space in which comparative analysis and expertise would hold more sway.

It is more difficult to apply the ideas offered here to research in everyday life, not because everyday is any less structured by technique, but because the ethics of experimentation become delicate and risky when the researcher’s own identity is at stake. What would research in gender look like in a university context? Certainly it could not follow the model of scientific or sociological research, with a disinterested researcher experimenting upon the gender of hapless research subjects. Rather, following the models of physical culture and performing arts discussed here, we might ask how those communities that are already experimenting with alternative gender technique could be supported by academia in exchange for the scholarly requirement to produce a disseminable document for the archive. In general, when I imagine embodied research finding a place in academia, I think less about traditional scholars expanding their methodologies in that direction, and more about people outside of academia, who are already conducting such research, being invited into the university and supported to continue their work. In exchange for producing documents that make new technique available to distant colleagues and future

generations, such researchers in everyday life would receive material support to conduct their investigations in peace.

To expand academia is also a stated goal for PaR, as Nelson explains: “The very positive aspect of PaR is that it allows a broader range of people to engage in scholarly activity once the possibility of knowing is recognized.”⁶⁶ However, it appears that PaR as developed in the UK has mostly opened the door to conceptual and experimental performing artists. My notion of embodied research would open the academic door to a much wider and more radically different range of practitioners. In return, such practitioners would be called upon to make contributions to society at large, not only through interpersonal contact, direct encounter, and singular events, but also through the development of a meaningful relationship with the synchronic and diachronic archive that grounds the rigor of academic knowledge production. This means the submission of one’s work to mechanisms of peer review across time and space, a price that some embodied practitioners might find unacceptable. In my view, however, the chance to reconcile academic standards of knowledge production with the expertise of embodied practitioners is too valuable to pass up. At a time when some are questioning the need for education and research in long-established areas of academia, like philosophy and classical studies, I call for an expansion of our epistemological commitment to include another vitally important but historically neglected area of transmissible knowledge: embodied technique.

⁶⁶ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts*, 114.

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