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CYBORG THEATRE:
CORPOREAL/TECHNOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS IN MULTIMEDIA

by

JENNIFER PARKER-STARBUCK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2003

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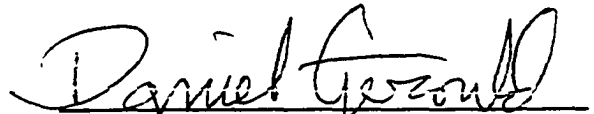
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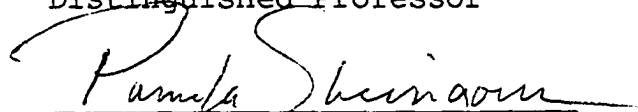
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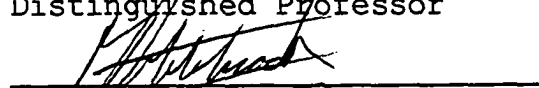
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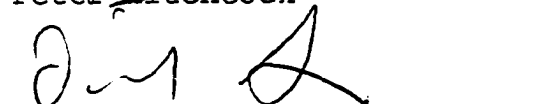

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Abstract

CYBORG THEATRE:
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by

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck

Adviser: Professor Daniel Gerould

This dissertation conceptualizes a “cyborg theatre” as a theoretical construct to explore how the integration of live bodies and technology on stage can challenge notions of ability, identity, globalization, and of performance itself. The cyborg theatre, through the issues of presence that it raises, simultaneously challenges and furthers questions of the borders of performance. It uses existing and emerging technology not purely as a frame or aesthetic scenic backdrop for projected images, but as a mutually dependent component of a larger complex of social, political, and theatrical systems existing between the live and the technological.

Society’s embracing of new technologies is increasingly reflected on the stage, where live action is commonly intertwined with video, slides, and computer techniques. This dissertation addresses a need to theorize and analyze this intersection, especially as the concept of the “posthuman” emerges as a theoretical

construct in literature. I use the cyborg as a central metaphor because it uniquely integrates technology with the living organism. I draw upon recent cyborg and posthuman theory as my theoretical methodology. To explore specific ways in which the body and technology unite in performance, I have set up a matrix of permutations that range from the “low-tech” to a fully integrated cyborgean performance. In order to facilitate these ideas, I have designed a grid that charts three applications of technology on one side against three conceptions of the body. These conceptions are based on the terms abject, object, and subject: this dissertation develops these terms in relation to the live body on stage. When the sides are combined, a model emerges that addresses important issues of ability, identity, and control that frame an embodied technology. While all permutations I discuss are aspects of the total cyborg theatre form, each coupling draws out a unique aspect in its development. Each of the artists I discuss—Cathy Weis, the Wooster Group, and George Coates—is representative of different qualities that highlight potentials or questions raised by the convergences of the body and technology. I conclude by examining how this model could be used to explore further work in multimedia theatre.

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you all gave me strength and encouragement over the years. Thanks to my early editor, and great friend, Joe, who was there from the starting phases of this project. Thanks also to Dr. Jerry Dickey, my mentor and friend at the University of Arizona and the reason I came to CUNY. A debt of gratitude goes out to the artists who inspired this study—George Coates, The Wooster Group, and Cathy Weis, who I feel lucky to consider a friend. Most of all, to Josh Abrams, without whom this dissertation would not have been done—your belief in my ability and love inspired me to keep working even when it all seemed too much. I could never have done it without all your support and hard work. Finally, this is for Zeena, my wonderful and patient girl who has lived her whole life in academia, waiting. I did it for you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO CYBORG THEATRE

The relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This [chapter] is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction.

—Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"¹

Visual representations of cyborgs are [thus] not only utopian or dystopian prophesies, but are rather reflections of a contemporary state of being.

—Jennifer González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies"²

If technology and the body are two major throughlines of the twentieth century, then the two will necessarily bump and weave, intersect, attract, and repel each other at many points. If each line has a historical and theoretical trajectory and fulfills a desire in a quest for imagination, then it is inevitable that the codes of one begin to imprint on the other, and vice versa. As conditions around these throughlines change and the boundaries of each are crossed, the lines take on a new configuration. While they are still distinguishable as themselves, they also become a new entity. The current condition is the post-human: the new entity is the cyborg.

In the early twenty-first century, mergings of the body and technology are ubiquitous. A position of neutrality seems impossible, as I take pleasure in live global

¹ Donna J. Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150. Originally published as "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the 1980s," in *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65-107.

² Jennifer González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research" *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 267.

Internet connections or instant ATM transactions, or as I react in horror to the tragedy of the World Trade Center attack, or question the ethics and responsibilities in the current debate in the news over the first human embryo clone.³ A “cyborg consciousness” has seeped into the early twenty-first century, and its realities are reflected back through culture. This study explores one such reflection—that of the live body in conjunction with the mediatized image on stage. I call this form of performance “cyborg theatre.”

A foundational assumption of this study is that the condition of Western society in the early twenty-first century is now what Katherine Hayles calls the “post-human,” signifying it is no longer possible to imagine daily operations that are not surrounded by, immersed in, and/or intersecting with technology. Just as the idea of the body has evolved from the “natural” to the “constructed,” so too has technology evolved from “tool” to “systems,” including artificial intelligence. The body as cultural construct is no longer a mere biological given, but a contested site for inscribed meanings and readings of identity, class, gender, race, and state control. The sophistication with which technologies have extended beyond the idea of “tool” has led to machines that think, create, and function as replicas of the human system. The post-human is, to Hayles, a “point of view” that “configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines.”⁴

The configuration of “being” begins with a shift in thinking about the relationship between humans and machines, which I refer to, following Haraway and González, as a

³ This news broke 26 November 2001. Since that time, there have been reports of human clones.

⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22-3.

“cyborg consciousness.” (This consciousness implies a fluctuation between “being” and “becoming,” which I will explore in more depth in later chapters.) Although the term cyborg dates to the 1960s, (as I will outline below) Donna Haraway’s 1985 “Cyborg Manifesto” provides a turning point, a shift in theoretical consciousness that re-figures the masculinist, militaristic tropes associated with the cyborg into a site with potential to “transform the despised metaphors of both organic and technological vision to foreground specific positioning, multiple mediation, partial perspective, and therefore a possible allegory for antiracist, feminist, scientific, and political knowledge.”⁵ As a feminist, a biologist, and a science historian, Haraway’s interest is in “odd boundary creatures—simians, cyborgs, and women—all of which have had a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives.”⁶ Haraway’s deconstruction of binaries, nature/culture to live/technological, from a political, socialist-feminist perspective provided new models and metaphors that are the basis of cyborg theory today. *The Gendered Cyborg: a Reader* (2000) reflects Haraway’s influence on critical theory and cultural studies and credits her with having “provided a gender analysis of technoscience and representation that has captured imaginations.”⁷ Although this dissertation does not focus exclusively on gender analysis, Haraway’s thinking is at the basis of my critique.

“Technological theatre,” “live media,” “interactive performance,” and/or “mixed-

⁵ Donna Haraway, “The Actors Are Cyborg, Nature is Coyote, and the Geography is Elsewhere: Postscript to ‘Cyborgs at Large,’” *Technoculture*, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 21.

⁶ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 2.

⁷ Gill Kirkup, “Introduction to Part One,” *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, eds. Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward, Fiona Hovenden (London: Routledge, 2000), xiv.

media performance”—the proliferation of terms defining various forms of live action interwoven with video, slides, and computer techniques is indicative of a need to theorize and analyze these multiple intersections in greater depth. The cyborg theatre differentiates itself from other labels in that it encompasses a matrix of permutations that range from the “low-tech” to a complex and integrated cyborgian performance. I am interested in such questions as the following: how has technology moved closer and closer to the body, what is its impact upon the body, and how do the two finally merge through the cyborg, destabilizing such binaries as body/technology, global/local, or able/disabled.

The cyborg—“cybernetic organism”—has been understood mainly through human-technological hybrids long featured in science-fiction and metaphorized by Haraway as a political ontology.⁸ However, as the 1995 *Cyborg Handbook* makes clear, “There is no one kind of cyborg.”⁹ To introduce the concept, authors Chris Hables Gray, Heidi Figueroa-Sarriera, and Steven Mentor include a taxonomy of the cyborg to demonstrate its potential and evasiveness. They break the cyborg into four main categories:

Cyborg technologies can be *restorative*, in that they restore lost functions and replace lost organs and limbs; they can be *normalizing*, in that they restore some creature to indistinguishable normality; they can be ambiguously *reconfiguring*.

⁸ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. As Peter Hitchcock notes in his essay “The Grotesque of the Body Electric,” there are differences in the versions of her essay. See Peter Hitchcock, “The Grotesque of the Body Electric,” *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*, ed. Michael Bell and Michael Gardiner (London: Sage Press, 1998), 83.

⁹ Chris Hables Gray, Steven Mentor, Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera. “Cyborgology: Constructing the Knowledge of Cybernetic Organisms,” in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2.

creating posthuman creatures equal to but different from humans . . . and they can be *enhancing*, the aim of most military and industrial research . . . the latter category seeks to construct everything from factories controlled by a handful of “worker-pilots” and infantrymen in mind-controlled exoskeletons.”¹⁰

This spectrum of possibilities extends outward into the medical, social, imaginative, and military tropes that make up the cyborg’s ontology. The actual term was coined in 1960 by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, to discuss human-machine interfaces that could advance space travel. One of their first experiments into cyborg technology was a white rat with a drug-dispensing osmotic pump implanted in its tail. The idea of the cyborg since its inception by Kline and Clynes has expanded and been applied to military enhancement tools, people wearing prosthetic devices, and a variety of fictional creations. From Frankenstein’s monster to the Bionic Woman to *Star Trek*’s Borg, the realm of the fictive has taken literal cyborg constructions into the imaginative, provoking fear as well as attraction. The distinctions Gray, Figueroa-Sarriera, and Mentor make above expose the large scope of the word cyborg. In fact, the idea of prosthetic replacement limbs or even devices of augmentation such as eyeglasses could be considered cyborgian.¹¹

Although I will draw upon such literal constructions of the cyborg occasionally within

¹⁰ Ibid., 3. The final category, *enhancing*, while vaguely described by the editors, could also refer to military devices such as night-vision goggles and other more practical bodily enhancing technical equipment. The editors have also assigned the prefixes, mega, semi, multi, omni, neo, proto, ultra, hyper, retro, and meta to begin stimulate possible future readings of cyborgs.

¹¹ For that matter, the body is “always already” augmented—food and water are necessary for survival—I see this understanding of augmentation as that which has allowed more complex augmentations to evolve. The augmentation I am concerned with in this study is that of the evolution of the tool into literal, imaginative, and political extensions of the body.

my study, I will primarily situate this work within conceptions of the fictive cyborg. The fictive cyborg has provocative powers that evoked this response from Manfred Clynes during an interview for the *Cyborg Handbook*:

At first I was amused and then I was horrified because it was a total distortion. It gradually seemed to become more and more distorted. This recent film with this Terminator, with Schwarzenegger playing this thing—dehumanized the concept completely. This is a travesty of the real scientific concept that we had. It is not even a caricature. It's worse, creating a monster out of something that wasn't a monster. A monsterification of something that is a human enlargement of function.¹²

While Clynes, a scientist with a materialist perspective, does not fear an actual biological cyborg such as the white rat with the pump, his horror that a monster was created “out of something that wasn't a monster,” reflects the challenges that the fictive cyborg can pose. However, the fictive asks questions and can display the potentials of both fascination and fear that the cyborg provides. Isn't technology created as an extension of its creator? Do the creators of the technologies bear any responsibility for their creation? The creation of new technologies has been driven by a strong humanist element which felt that the body could co-exist with technology as long as the body, preferably the male body, remained in control. Clynes's horror overlooks the fact that the cyborg has historical and theoretical precursors in fiction. The scientifically “hopeful” cyborg envisaged by Clynes and Kline is the inverse of the many cyborg forerunners in thought and fiction.

While Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) created a monster that is often

¹² Chris Hables Gray, “Interview with Manfred Clynes,” in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 47.

considered the first cyborgian forerunner, several other early texts also speculate on the creation of life through “unnatural” means. E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*, (1815/16), and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s novel *Tomorrow’s Eve*, or *L’Eve future* (written between 1877 and 1879) both explore the idea of the automaton; and the brothers Josef and Karel Čapek coin the word “robot,” from the Czech “robota,” meaning “strenuous work,” in their 1923 play *R.U.R.*, which stands for Rossum’s Universal Robots.¹³ I mention these pre and early twentieth-century texts not only to throw into motion the two twisting threads of body and technology that traverse the twentieth century, but also to reflect on the fictional scientific/technological trajectory that has repeated itself in many late twentieth century narratives, culminating in the “evolution” of an actual scientific cloning of a human embryo in November 2001. I frame this study in the twentieth and twenty-first century at a point where the status of technology and the body have risen to equal valence. However, the Industrial Revolution set into motion a deeper questioning of the body’s relationship to developing technologies and some of the fictional representations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throw light upon issues emerging from the cyborg. The body-technology integration is a complex and often vexed trajectory with historical and theoretical precedents. Haraway’s claims in her manifesto that the cyborg has no origin story, in the sense that it cannot be identified in a “‘Western,’ humanist sense” as having “original unity . . . represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate.”¹⁴ Her metaphoric cyborg eschews its

¹³ For a thorough history and discussion of *R.U.R.*, see Harold B. Segel, *Pinocchio’s Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automaton, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 297.

¹⁴ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 151.

origin story in an attempt to override division and create a utopic, feminist, political front. As a concept, however, the cyborg does have historical forerunners; and its utopic feminist possibilities are coupled with the dystopic masculinist appropriations of its representation.

Prior to Haraway, typical cyborg and pre-cyborg creation tropes fell into one of two categories—first, the mechanical female created by a male for amusement, companionship, or to wield power over, and second, the male created by a male for experimentation, work, or superior strength. In both cases, the outcome is usually the monstrous and the creation rebels against its maker. The cyborg's predecessors—into which I place automata, androids, robots and the like—are a part of its pre-history that trace technological influences on the performance of gender, identity, and the production of technology. In Hoffmann's *Sandmann*, (the basis for *Coppelia*), the protagonist, Nathaniel, falls in love with the automaton Olympia, a vision of beauty who will listen endlessly to his ramblings and rarely speak. In this doll he sees a reflection of himself—a Narcissian tale whereby his ego is boosted by her very lack of identity. She is created by the mad scientist Coppélius in a narrative of control of man over technology. However, technology and woman are conflated, and when Nathaniel cannot control the love for Olympia, his descent into madness symbolizes the dangers of both technology and women out of control. The technology here is simple, she is referred to as a puppet and an automaton, her inner workings are clock-like. However, as science and technology progress, so do the stakes.

Tomorrow's Eve is also a creation of an ideal, a mechanical woman named Hadaly. Created by the semi-fictional inventor "Thomas Edison," in a fascinating written

juxtaposition of reality and fiction, Hadaly is created for the Lord Ewald in the image of his desired, Miss Alicia Cleary, a stunning beauty who is disappointingly haughty and vapid. Edison replies, “the present gorgeous little fool will no longer be a woman, but an angel; no longer a mistress but a lover; no longer reality, but the ideal!”¹⁵ The phonograph and telephone had recently been invented and in this novel, as Daniel Gerould has written, “science is mythologized.”¹⁶ A romanticized view of technology arose in the last third of the nineteenth century amidst an explosion of such inventions as electric light, color photography, the steam turbine engine, celluloid film, and the microphone. Daily life became more and more impacted by these technologies whose inventors were seen as prophets of a new age. Technology was a tool to be appropriated by man and in this novel, once again, it is represented as woman. Hadaly is made of artificial flesh and is even infused with a “soul.” As a form of control over women, technology not only replaces traits thought undesirable but replaces the bio-women altogether. The fictional Edison explains his process:

The techniques of reproduction, of identification have been rendered more precise and perfect, so that the resources available to man for new ventures of this sort are now different—oh, completely different—than they used to be. Henceforth, we shall be able to realize—that is, to *make real*—potent phantoms, mysterious presences of a mixed nature, such as pioneers in the field could never have

¹⁵ Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow’s Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 54. First English translation 1982 by Adams.

¹⁶ Daniel Gerould, Review of *Tomorrow’s Eve*, in *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 11 (1984): 321.

conceived.¹⁷

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's prescient words reverberate, in the present, as neurological implants assist immobile limbs, and as the first human embryo is cloned. Villiers's "mixed nature" is now a given.

By the 1920s mechanization fed the gnawing anxiety of an increasingly industrialized society. The horrors of WWI and the growth of assembly-line production permeated literature, drama, and film. The work of the brothers Čapek surpassed the mythologized view of science and began to outline the utopic and dystopic potentials of technology in their play *R.U.R.* The robots in this play are a fantastical form of Artificial Intelligence, they are complete with a brain, lungs, inner organs—all mechanical. The robots learn quickly and work hard and as newer models are created they become more like humans except for their inability to reproduce themselves. At first only lacking a "soul," (which translates here as love and feeling) they are finally transformed to a point where they can feel emotions. The robot Radius explains that "we were machines, sir. But terror and pain have turned us into souls. There is something struggling with us . . . we feel what we did not use to feel. We hear voices. Teach us to have children so that we may love them."¹⁸ The robots finally rebel *en masse* and kill off all but one human, but the play ends on a biblical note as the two robots who have achieved love are sent off by the remaining human as "Adam and Eve" to find a way to procreate and continue the "species," while the human finds salvation in knowing the robots have achieved a human

¹⁷ De l'Isle-Adam, 61.

¹⁸ Josef and Karel Čapek. *R.U.R. and The Insect Play*, trans. P. Selver (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 95.

status.¹⁹

The Čapeks warn that man's meddling with science and technology will offend nature. The birth rate is declining as robot production is increasing:

Dr. Gall: You see, it's because the robots are being manufactured. There's a surplus of labour supplies. So people are becoming superfluous, unnecessary so to speak. Man is really a survival. But that he should begin to die out after a paltry thirty years of competition—that's the awful part of it. You might almost think . . . that nature was offended at the manufacture of the robots.²⁰

Man struggles to stay in control of the technology, but in *R.U.R.* it is impossible.

Workers' movements such as the early nineteenth-century Luddites and early twentieth-century American labor unions had a skeptical view of the machine. *R.U.R.* explores this skepticism and fear by imagining a world in which the technology of production is also that which threatens to literally replace the human, as the assembly line replaced the artisan model of production.

Issues of technology and nationalism are intertwined throughout *R.U.R.* as suggestions are made to control the robots: turn them into National Robots each with an identity and race so they will turn to hatred and war against each other; sell them the secret of their origin; appeal to their sense of humanity; and/or electrocute them. Coming after WWI, the vision of *R.U.R.* is bleak. Humanity has been decimated, and only a small ray of hope remains. The robot as "other" without a soul serves as a post-war reflection

¹⁹ Although there is no need within the purview of this dissertation to explicate this further, the concept of humans being superseded by their own creation has been a popular trope in science-fiction and film since *R.U.R.* See such notable examples as the films *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the *Planet of the Apes* series, and the *Terminator* series.

²⁰ Čapek, 48.

on the dehumanization of others, inherent in nationalism and brought to the fore by the destruction of the war.

In America, the New Playwrights Theatre, led by Michael Gold, in collaboration with John Howard Lawson, Em Jo Basshe, Francis Faragoh, and John Dos Passos, sought (as stated in a fund-raising flyer) to find the need “for a theatre which could interpret and portray mass-movements, machine-age conflicts, social turmoil.”²¹ Paul Sifton’s play, *The Belt*, represents the political conflicts reflected within this group and this time. It holds up the “ultimate” machine of the time—the car—and its maker Henry Ford, as corrupting lives through a capitalistic system of production and dehumanization through the use of the assembly line. Like *R.U.R.*, *The Belt* exemplifies how a critique of the system (capitalism) can be confused with its agents. As Ira Levine wrote of Sifton’s play:

Although the play used machine-age techniques *aesthetically*, it expressed *thematically* a negative attitude towards mechanization. . . . He dramatized in graphic terms the deleterious impact of the process of mass production on the lives of American workers. But so stark was this portrayal that it obscured the political thesis that it was not mechanization per se, but rather the capitalist exploitation of it, which was responsible for the servitude of the workers. Despite its bold, original theatricality, then, *The Belt* failed to convey a lucid revolutionary message.²²

However, as a dramatic example of the growing concern over technology in society, the

²¹ New Playwrights Theatre File. Billy Rose Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, MWEZ n.c. 25. 366 #18.

²² Ira A. Levine, *Left-Wing Dramatic Theory in the American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 55.

play serves as a precursor to other applications of the machine's use on stage as a conflicting political tool. As Gerald Rabkin points out, "the drama of the New Playwrights . . . presented apocalyptic visions of social protest based on the chaos the authors feared capitalism might breed; in the context of the prosperous twenties their visions were necessarily prophetic."²³ In *The Belt*, the machine holds a problematic position for this political group of writers/producers. While some of them, most notably Gold, wanted to continue to glorify the machine as the Futurists and Soviet experimenters had, others were less sympathetic to the machine-age and instead promoted its loss of humanity. Whether used thematically or as scenic physical apparatus, the use of a machine on stage imparts a commentary on the technological dialogue it embodies. Its very presence is implicitly political.

In Fritz Lang's 1925 film, *Metropolis* and Paul Sifton's 1927 play *The Belt*, as well as in the use of cinema on stage by Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Piscator, and the experiments of the Bauhaus and Fluxus, technology plays a thematic role, and whether through fear or euphoria, each example reflects and reproduces its cultural and historical moment. Technology has been a part of performance from the early *deus ex machina* saviors to Roman *Naumachia* spectacles, from the technical wizardry of melodrama to a glorification of the machine by the Futurists. As I explored in my analysis of *R.U.R.*, many people in the early twentieth century were wary of technology's advances and theatre created a space to express a skeptical view of the machine. Over the rest of the twentieth century, this view began to be more widely accepted and has been transformed over the course of the twentieth century into an obsession for the spectacle, as seen

²³ Gerald Rabkin, *Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties* (New York: Haskell House, 1973), 81.

especially with musicals such as *Phantom of the Opera* and *Miss Saigon* in the 1980s. As we have moved into what Frederic Jameson calls “Late Capitalism,” machines have become so ubiquitous that the presence of simple computerization and mechanization on stage no longer implies a strong political content.

New media technologies, advanced computer interfaces, the turn to digital, and Internet technologies have helped to fuel the pace of a global economy and have given rise to an increasing mediatized consciousness, especially in what is considered the “first world” over the past two decades. In an historic sense, developing technologies, whether conveyer belts or burgeoning virtual reality forms, contribute to debates over representations of the live body. A rejection of all things technological has served as one strategy for “Poor Theatre” practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski, but for others, the inclusion of technology in the creation of performance serves to raise larger issues of identity, power, capitalism, and the actual technology itself. I return here to Jennifer González’s assertion that “Visual representations of cyborgs are [thus] not only utopian or dystopian prophesies, but are rather reflections of a contemporary state of being.”²⁴ The cyborg emerges, in theory and in theatre, as a means of addressing issues of the disappearing, augmented, and controlled body in society. These are the concerns addressed by this study.

Anne Balsamo’s examination of existing constructions of the gendered cyborg backs up my assertion that historical representations of the cyborg usually reproduce heterosexist gender distinctions. She finds that, “female-gendered cyborgs inhabit traditional feminine roles—as object of man’s desire and his helpmate in distress. In this

²⁴ González, “Envisioning Cyborg Bodies.” 267.

way, female cyborgs are as much stereotypically endowed with feminine traits as male cyborgs are with masculine traits. Cyborg images reproduce cultural gender stereotypes."²⁵ Her work extends beyond filmic cyborg representations to female body-building, cosmetic surgery, and virtual bodies because "the cinematic imaging of cyborgs might suggest new visions of unstable identity, but often do so by upholding gender stereotypes. To this end, we need to search for cyborg images which work to disrupt stable oppositions."²⁶ In the examples I have cited thus far, as well as in many late twentieth-century representations of the cyborg, Balsamo's assertion is correct. While I believe there have been several disruptive attempts in recent film and television, Balsamo may be correct in searching within alternate, non-commercially driven forms.²⁷ However, she also adds that, "female cyborg images do more to challenge the opposition between human and machine than do male cyborgs because femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology than is masculinity."²⁸ This unfortunate

²⁵ Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, eds., Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kath Woodward, Fiona Hovenden (London: Routledge, 2000), 151. This essay is an updated version of thoughts found in her earlier book, see Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," 156.

²⁷ As I have discussed in "Slipping Through Nets: The Performance of Gendered Cyborgs," (a paper presentation given at ATHE August 2-5, 2001, Chicago, IL) examples from the series *The Bionic Woman* (1975), *Star Trek: Voyager* (Specifically the Seven of Nine character), and the 2001 series *Dark Angel*, all attempt to disrupt gender, racial, and body stereotypes. I believe that they do not fully succeed but I am interested in how the moments of instability within each contributes to my project. I appreciate the critiques of Balsamo, Mary Ann Doane, Vivian Sobchak and others who find in the gendered cyborg a reification of the disempowered, heterosexual female, created by men. However, I add to these critiques transitional gendered cyborgs that begin to disrupt the masculinist hegemony, carving out feminized, technological spaces for alternate models to come.

²⁸ Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," 151.

truth has rapidly been challenged with an onslaught of women writing and working in technology. This infusion has begun to shift the representation of the female cyborg to accommodate concerns posed by both Haraway and Balsamo.

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.²⁹

Donna Haraway's wry comment provides me with a springboard for the cyborg theatre. I envision the cyborg theatre as a show place for post-industrial cyborgs that breach boundaries and defy their militaristic origins; they are, in Haraway's words, figures for explorations of "globalization . . . labor systems, sexual configurations, circuits of disease and well-being, banking wizardry . . . religious visions, virtual realities."³⁰ However, as Peter Hitchcock writes in response to Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a political ontology, "it is irony that saves the formulation from crude technological determinism."³¹ For Hitchcock, and I think rightly so, the cyborg also functions as a "symptom" and he reads Haraway's manifesto as also proposing the cyborg "as a heuristic device: it is a way to learn about the forms of politics possible at the end of the twentieth century."³² In this dissertation, I propose to conceptualize the cyborg through theatre—the cyborg as a theoretical construct to explore how the integration of live bodies and technology on

²⁹ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 151.

³⁰ Haraway, "The Actors Are Cyborg," 21.

³¹ Hitchcock, "The Grotesque of the Body Electric," 83.

³² *Ibid.*

stage can challenge notions of ability, identity, globalization, and of performance itself. I propose the cyborg too as a heuristic device, but of a way to learn about forms of a politicized subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

The cyborg's metaphoric "boundary blurring" is capable of erasing the demarcation between the purely organic or the purely technological, allowing a flow between the two. However, despite advances that can be considered "cyborgian" in both prosthetics and computer intelligence (each of which necessitates some form of flow between the organic and the non-organic), these technological applications are often viewed by humanists with trepidation because of their invasive potential. Cyborgian couplings proposed to eliminate difference can suggest troubling and complicated prospects, as Jennifer González points out by the use of her term "e-race-sure."³³ It is important to consider by and for whom the boundaries are blurred, and I ultimately agree with González in her assertion that:

The image of the cyborg has historically recurred at moments of radical social and cultural change . . . imaginary representations of cyborgs take over when traditional bodies fail. In other words, when the current ontological model of human being does not fit a new paradigm, a hybrid model of existence is required to encompass a new, complex and contradictory lived experience.³⁴

If this "hybrid model of existence" falls within the province of the posthuman, then

³³ González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies," 277. González's term is a response to her experience of finding race a fraught issue in the literature of the cyborg. She writes, "Some see cyborgs and cyberspace as a convenient site for the erasure of questions of racial identity." (277) Although this dissertation will not directly address racial theory, I hope to remain sensitive to her concerns.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

instead of representing a cold disembodiment, the cyborg can emerge as a site to explore productive encounters (at least theoretical ones) between humans and machines.³⁵ One such instance can be seen through cinema. In the second installation of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, *The Two Towers* (2002) a remarkable cinematic cyborg was constructed—the Gollum—a blurring of digital film effects upon the performance of actor Andy Serkis. This “role” has provoked some debate over whether the actor Serkis should be nominated for an Academy Award. The confusion over the agency of the Gollum illuminates the questions that arise when these boundary blurrings occur. I contend that these questions asked of the cinematic cyborg become more critical when asked in a live theatrical context—for it is the live body that remains central to my discussion.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles writes, “My dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality.”³⁶ Hayles sees the posthuman condition as an opportunity to take positive steps against technology’s constant encroachment on the live. Whether the thoughts of technological-human couplings are ones to revel in without fear, or are instead to be approached with skepticism in the attempt to restore but reconfigure the human, the idea of what it means to be human is being tested through theories of “posthumanism.”³⁷

³⁵ I see the term “post” as a reference to the complex of questions that arise when contemplating liveness in the age of technology.

³⁶ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5.

³⁷ For a wide array of theory on presence and technology see: John Wood, ed., *The Virtual Embodied: Presence/Practice/Technology* (London: Routledge, 1998); Allucquère Roseanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the*

A ironic tone resonates in the prefix “post,” for despite many literal examples of prosthetic devices augmenting the human body, most of us are still committed to our “human-ness.” In their edition called *Posthuman Bodies*, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston distinguish the term: “The posthuman does not necessitate the obsolescence of the human; it does not represent an evolution or devolution of the human. Rather it participates in re-distributions of difference and identity . . . the posthuman does not reduce difference-from-others to difference-from-self, but rather emerges in the pattern of resonance and interference between the two.”³⁸ One such pattern of resonance between the self and others is found in the theatre. As Joshua Abrams has written, “performance provides a paradigmatic example of the intersubjective relation, modeling across the Benjaminian abyss of the orchestra pit . . . the fundamental inequity of the relationship between Other and self, and evoking the ethical call which arises through the (re) production of difference.”³⁹ The liveness of the theatrical space thus provides an obvious site for an exploration of the body within the ideas of posthumanism.

In my use of the term posthuman I am not disputing the validity of each of our individual bodily identities, but only suggesting that the currents of theory around this term cannot be overlooked and that the word posthuman is written as an ethical question in order to retain the sense of what has been called “human.” My larger concerns and

Mechanical Age (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Sue-Ellen Case, *The Domain-Matrix* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*.

³⁸ Halberstam and Livingston, “Introduction,” to *Posthuman Bodies*, 10.

³⁹ Joshua Abrams, “Did You See What I Saw? Did You Hear What I Heard?: Documenting Cie Felix Ruckert’s *Hautnah*” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Dance History Scholars, Towson, MD, 23 June 2001), 5.

argument are in part an attempt to re-think certain “screened” modes of representation in live performance, acting as sites of resistance against mythologized notions of able-bodied norms, technologies of global capital, and bodies as commodified objects. I would like to follow Matthew Causey’s call when he writes, “ethically and politically . . . the object of posthuman performance should be to configure a map of the terrain of identity in digital culture while challenging failed models of human subjectivity that threaten to return continually if different systems of subjectivity are not engaged.”⁴⁰

The cyborg theatre, through the issues of presence that it raises, simultaneously challenges and furthers questions of the borders of performance. The cyborg and the posthuman are critical concepts with which to address specific types of multimedia theatrical productions. Multimedia is a term that has been used to describe a wide array of technologies on stage, from any production that uses video monitors, to large-scale performances by directors such as Robert Wilson and Laurie Anderson, who have primarily used technology to augment the scenic and sonic elements of their productions. Multimedia productions themselves are “hybrid models” of theatre in which the cyborg theatre is but a strand exploring corporeal/technological mergings.

In *Art Journal* (Fall 2000), Hayles says, “In my view, a crucial cultural project at this historical juncture is to find *forms* adequate to express and construct the posthuman *without erasing embodiment* as the essential enabling ground for human existence”⁴¹ (my emphasis). My formulation of the cyborg theatre is a direct response to Hayles’s call; it is an exploration of new forms being created. As use of multimedia continues to become

⁴⁰ Matthew Causey, “Posthuman Performance: A Commentary,” *Crossings: eJournal of Art and Technology*, 1.2, 8 May 2002 <<http://crossings.tcd.ie/issues/1.2/Causey/>>.

⁴¹ N. Katherine Hayles, “Visualizing the Posthuman,” *Art Journal*, 59.3(Fall 2000): 51.

an increasingly valuable performance strategy, practitioners are more frequently interrogating the live body's relationship to technologies on stage. The "cyborg theatre" uses existing and emerging technology not purely as a frame or aesthetic scenic backdrop for projected images, but as a mutually dependent component of a larger complex of social, political, and theatrical systems existing between the live and the technological. Evolving within cyborg theatre are possibilities for integration between the body and technologies which carve out a place for bodies that have often been excluded from performance sites, such as the "disabled" body.⁴²

Although there is no dearth of literature about technology, the body, or even about the excluded bodies mentioned above, there is little that intersects with theatre studies. Michael Rush's *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*, has chapters titled "Media and Performance," and "Video Art."⁴³ Rush surveys major performance groups which use multimedia techniques but does not analyze their use of the technology. I contextualize my study within the rich and complex ideas on the body, spanning from Judith Butler's theories of performativity, to the more contemporary work on body image and disability by scholars such as Susan Bordo, Rosemarie Garland Thompson, Ann Cooper Albright, and Gail Weiss who strive to expand and interrogate the body and its boundaries.⁴⁴

⁴² I use the term disabled carefully, acknowledging its fraught implications in the field. I address this in more depth in my discussion of Cathy Weis in Chapter Two.

⁴³ Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

⁴⁴ For work specifically dealing with the body, its borders, and/or disability studies see: Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1998); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia, 1997); Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York:

The ideas of mediatization, developed in Philip Auslander's *Liveness* (1999), are debated in a cultural context that encompasses the stage. While "multimedia theatre" has been frequently used to describe this growing field of study, there have been many attempts to analyze the work more accurately. Auslander's *Liveness* has a small section on what he calls "mixed-media performances," which he defines as "events combining live and mediatized representations: live actors with film, video, or digital projections, for instance."⁴⁵ He draws upon the work of scene designer Robert Edmond Jones and director/film maker Sergei Eisenstein as forerunners of the form. He cites one example of called *Pôles*, by PPs Danse, a Montreal-based dance troupe, but basically dismisses the work: "Rather than a conversation among distinct media, the production presents the assimilation of varied materials to the cultural dominant."⁴⁶

Johannes Birringer's 1998 book *Media and Performance* introduces what he calls "interactivity," and while he presents a brief overview of several multimedia performances, he mainly gears his inquiry to dance forms.⁴⁷ Christopher Balme has spoken about "intermediality" (in the work of Canadian director Robert Lepage) as being different from multimedia theatre in that the mere presence of projection on stage would not necessarily imply an inter-medial relationship.⁴⁸ The need for continuing scholarship

Routledge, 1996); Susan Crutchfield and Marcy Epstein, eds., *Points of Contact*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Lennard Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), to name but a few.

⁴⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness* (London: Routledge, 1999), 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁷ Johannes Birringer, *Media and Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ Christopher Balme. "Intermediality: A New Paradigm for Theatre Studies." Paper

in this field is foregrounded by the increasing number of major conferences that focus on technology as a theme, or in which “technology” exists as some part of the call for papers.⁴⁹ In addition, the December 1999 *Theatre Journal* ran a special issue called “Theatre and Technology,” in which editor Susan Bennett commented that, “some theatre scholarship has started to explore and exploit the multidimensional capabilities that new technologies permit.”⁵⁰

To better define the confines and parameters of the cyborg theatre, I propose the model illustrated in Figure 1 to frame my study. [See Fig. 1] I acknowledge that the static nature of a flat, graphical representation does not adequately allow for a consideration/view of the dynamic nature of a system that is always in the process of becoming. However, I include these representations as a means to enhance my written depiction. Returning to the two throughlines—body and technology—in the twentieth century, I add three categories, abject, object, and subject, to better understand how the cyborg theatre originates. The model has two twisting threads, like a DNA strand, continuing a path around each other, finding points of contact periodically. Both thick threads are made up of three strands, the abject, object, and subject. (I am not intending

presented at City University of New York Graduate Center, 9 November 2000.

⁴⁹ For examples of the interest in technology, I note the recent conference, “Performative Sites: Intersecting Arts, Technology, and the Body” at Penn State, 24-28 October, 2000; a call for submissions for a Special Issue on Technology and Women for the fall/winter 2001 *Women’s Studies Quarterly*; a new on-line journal called “Body, Space, and Technology” edited by Sue Broadhurst and Barry Edwards, <<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/pfa>>; and the Sixth Performance Studies International Conference, called “Visceral & Virtual: Performance from Myth to Millennium,” at Arizona State University, March 2000, to name but a few areas in the field that are exploring technology.

⁵⁰ Susan Bennett, “Comment” *Theatre Journal* (Issue on Theatre and Technology), 51, no. 4 (December 1999): 358.

to limit these categories and I am sure other strands could be considered, but they fall outside this study). The cyborg theatre exists within a specific intersection of the body and technology, the point at which the throughlines split—into abstract conceptions of abject, object, and subject—to the point they are woven back together. While potentially a historical split, I do not intend it as a teleological analysis, but rather an ontology of the cyborg theatre—a process of becoming cyborg.

The idea of the subject has been contested throughout the twentieth century. Through writings in feminism, queer studies, and critical race theory, as well as political actions such as the civil rights movement, the body has been transformed from the universalized white, heterosexual, middle-class, male norm, to a fractured series of “other” subjects, seeking agency through their identifications. I develop the relationship between the categories of subject/object/abject through a post-psychoanalytic framework which has at its foundation the semiotic analysis of Julia Kristeva. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva draws on examples from literature and the social sciences to develop an understanding of the abject as a third term to destabilize the subject/object binary. Kristeva’s subject is the individual, the “I” that has agency in defining the “self,” which holds the object in opposition. Although both the object and abject are, according to Kristeva, defined through their distinction from the subject, she differentiates between object and abject: “If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning

collapses.”⁵¹ For Kristeva, this place where meaning collapses is within the poetics of language: she follows Freud and Lacan in developing a psychology of the self wherein the object and abject are not other “subjects” situated *outside* the individual, but rather tensions of, or *within*, the self. A confrontation with a corpse is perhaps the clearest example of the abject in the differentiation between seeing and signifying. Kristeva distinguishes between the two: “In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.”⁵² The abject then, is part of the individual, but that which is thrust aside and thrown away in order to exist within society.

Another possibility of the abject is the phantom limb, which Peter Hitchcock writes about in reference to Bakhtin’s amputated leg. Hitchcock references Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* to draw out the ethics of the subject-object relationship: “In the thrall of pain, Bakhtin realizes that pure identification with the Other is a fiction (no one can fully experience his pain), and that the aesthetic begins with an axiological understanding of the Other as separable, and formatively so, in the production of aesthetic meaning.”⁵³ Here, the phantom limb can be considered the abject, for the limb is and is not the body, cast off and desired simultaneously; it is not the other, nor the self, but the monstrous, grotesque, a liminal body between subject and object that begs to be

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3. Italics original.

⁵³ Hitchcock, “The Grotesque of the Body Electric,” 92. For Scarry’s work on pain, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

understood as separate/Other, but cannot be. My use of subject/object/abject borrows from Hitchcock and Kristeva's divisions but draws the terms out into societal settings. The abject then, in these examples, it is a part of the subject and therefore always in the process of becoming, it is not a state of being. Kristeva additionally looks to figures of killers, rapists, and traitors as abject: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."⁵⁴ By drawing it outside of the subject, I use the word to negotiate between Kristeva's use of the terms abject and abjection—the condition of being abject. I will correlate my use of the word abject to society's rejection of bodies, specifically bodies considered "disabled," neither traditional subjects nor objects. In the specific example that I discuss, Cathy Weis, her "disability" is Multiple Sclerosis, a disease that in its degenerative process models my definition of abject—simultaneously a condition of being and a process of becoming.

Over the course of the twentieth century, as universalization has been contested by local identity politics, the dismantling of the "liberal humanist subject" has ultimately shifted the previously marginalized towards the center. The cyber subject marks a further shift: the agency of the various subject bodies is threatened by no body at all. Understandably, it is with a degree of wariness that the cyborg is understood. Hayles explains:

The deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject in cybernetics . . . sought to understand human being as a set of informational processes. Because information had lost its body, this construction implied that embodiment is not essential to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

human being. . . . Indeed, one could argue that the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to both the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman. Identified with the rational mind, the liberal subject possessed a body but was not usually represented as being a body.⁵⁵

Haraway's feminist cyborg metaphor and Hayles's posthuman seek to reclaim the body, but from within an already technological age. Although technology necessarily has always reflected ideas of human subjectivity, current new media technologies have now begun to assume more agency in shaping the meanings of subjectivity. When what has previously been considered solely a tool or prosthetic extension of the body is integrated *into* concepts of the human subject, a "subject technology" emerges. This subject technology, when coupled with the three conceptions of the body, comprises the cyborg theatre. The cyborg theatre, however, is built on historical and creative ground—the surrounding categories continue to thrive and breathe life into the cyborg. [See Fig. 2] On stage, for example, an abject body-abject technology coupling exists in a puppet, a forerunner that continues as a viable colleague of cyborg theatre. Each of the artists I discuss within the system of cyborg theatre—Cathy Weis, The Wooster Group, and George Coates—represents different potentials or questions raised by the convergences of the body and subject technology.⁵⁶ The cyborg theatre addresses important issues of ability, identity, and control that frame an "embodied technology."⁵⁷ While all

⁵⁵ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 4.

⁵⁶ The three artists that comprise the basis of this study are representatives of specific types of cyborgian intersections. I have chosen them because they effectively model the parameters of my construction of the cyborg theatre. I will introduce several other examples in my conclusion.

⁵⁷ I use the term embodiment following Katherine Hayles, who writes, "In contrast to the

permutations I will discuss are aspects of the total cyborg theatre form, each coupling highlights a unique aspect in its development. Before I outline these mergings, I introduce the terms of my study.

I begin with a breakdown of the technology categories. It is important to acknowledge the readings of sex and gender as technologies as put forth by Michel Foucault and Teresa de Lauretis respectively.⁵⁸ Both argue that bodily constructions are the effect of social technologies, from pedagogy and medicine to cinema and fiction. In the work of these two authors the historical understanding of bodies is always inflected by technology. I take as a premise a societal “mediatized consciousness” for this study; I assume that technology is always present on a fundamental and irrevocable level in contemporary Western society and culture. For the purpose of this project I am defining technology more literally, not simply as what de Lauretis terms “technique, empirical know-how, ‘hands-on’ expertise, practical or applied knowledge;” rather I draw upon a more material understanding of technology.⁵⁹ My first category then, *object technology*, ranges from an absence of applied technology, as in street or environmental theatre, to technology which is used simply as a tool (in the mechanics of the theatre; for example, a winch or revolve, an electronic device that functions to make something move).⁶⁰ I do

body, embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment embodiment is the specific instantiation generated from the noise of difference.” Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 196.

⁵⁸ See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

⁵⁹ De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 29, n. 25.

⁶⁰ Here, too, I use Kristeva’s terms in a more literal and external sense than she generally

not imply that a stripping of all lights, sound, and set is necessary to be considered object technology, but rather posit that it is how the technology is applied that determines its classification. The object technology is invisible, a complex series of pulleys and ropes may be used but the viewer only sees the curtain opening. *Object technology* is that actual physical apparatus, such as a video monitor or a screen, onto which ideas are inscribed; where the medium becomes the meaning, or, as Marshall McLuhan would say, the message. The screen or monitor on stage attempts to enhance, or strengthen, the meaning of the live; for example, the scrim onto which Robert Wilson projects saturated hues of color to evoke the mood of the moment. Though this technology is a filter for meaning, the weight remains on the live. If the technology fails, or is removed, the performance would be altered, but not as drastically as in the case of *subject technology*, in which the technology itself produces meaning. This often takes the form of digital technologies; for example, digitally produced actor-figures who can interact with human actors. However, technology as simple as a live video feed can also become subject. Subject technology carries its own weight on stage. The artists of this study may at first glance seem to be using a form of object technology—both the Wooster Group and Cathy Weis use video monitors that do convey a message. However, when analyzed further, it is in their use of the technology as subject on stage that the cyborg form emerges.

In designating the three categories my intention is to allow for multiple readings. Figure 2 outlines some of the many possibilities of these mergings. These assignments suggest, rather than define, various couplings between the body and technology. Although I focus this study only on the intersection between the subject technology and

does. Her example of the corpse as “the utmost of abjection.” forms the basis of my definition of the object. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

the three conceptions of the body, the examples I suggest place the cyborg theatre within a matrix of mediated performance. I use the subject technology in combination with the live bodies on stage because the cyborg in my conception of it seeks to achieve a balance between the two in order to emerge as a productive space for current explorations of contemporary subjectivity.

In the September, 2001 *Theatre Topics*, David Saltz attempts to define parameters for “Live Media.” He differentiates between “interactive media technology” and “linear” media through three criteria—“interactive media” must have: 1. Random access, or instantaneous movement as found in digital technologies, 2. An arbitrary link between trigger and output, as found in computers which work on a binary system, and 3. Media manipulation, or programs within the computer to “think” through some of the arbitrary movement on stage. While Saltz’s argument is useful for digitally-based, computer-driven types of multimedia performance, it fails to recognize that other technological apparatuses can ask the same questions and explore the same theoretical terrain as those that are more generously funded. Saltz’s criticism of “linear” media devolves into a dismissal:

Consider the impact of injecting linear media into a live theatrical performance. . . . The medium forces the live actor to conform rigorously to it. Such a performance combines the worst of both theatre and media: it lends the live performance a canned quality without endowing it with any of film or video’s advantages . . . It is no wonder that extensive use of linear media has never become more than an occasional gimmick in the theatre.⁶¹

⁶¹ David Saltz, “Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre,” *Theatre Topics*, 11, no. 2 (September 2001): 109.

Two cases in this study, Cathy Weis, and the Wooster Group make use of “linear media” that is neither gimmick nor canned. For these artists, technology is an integral component in the complex exploration of the body. Their technology is not a source of conformity, but itself a subject on their stages. The assignment of subject to technology is still in a nascent phase. Proliferating new media techniques on stage will necessarily result in a range of outcomes from simplistic to compelling, but those practitioners attempting to use technologies, whether interactive or linear, to question the intersection between the body and technology are on new ground. The experimentation is daring and the results are sometimes dazzling.

On the other axis of the cyborg performance model is the body. I acknowledge that there are multiple conceptions of “the body,” and clearly this is an area of great theoretical dispute. From the “liberal humanist subject” to a constructed identity, the body is as much an idea as a fleshy entity. I will not trace the many discursive paths the body has followed: the medical body, the controlled body, the philosophic body, the gendered body, or even the cyberized body, but allow these ideas to emerge from the larger categories of abject, object, subject. The bodily categories I define are not intended to promote any one conception of the body, nor will they cover every possible body. I look at a few major threads of bodily discourse and analyze the emergence of the cyborg on stage. I will only briefly outline this framework here and explore these categories in greater depth in the chapters to follow.

My categories of the body are structured in a similar fashion to those as technology—abject, object and subject. The *abject body* is read as void of productive meaning—to build on Judith Butler, a body that *doesn't* matter. This can range from a

dis-embodied absence of the live, for example, in a puppet body, to the “disabled” live whose subjectivity is often overlooked. Although this body swells with a meaning, this meaning is abjected, thrown away. This body is not yet accepted by society. I am interested in examining how to release the “abject” body from its culturally mis-constructed categorization through construction of the cyborg.⁶²

The next example is the *object body*, onto which ideas are inscribed. It is a filter for certain historically mediated constructions of the body. This body is objectified, a *tabula rasa* for the meaning imposed upon it. This may be Foucault’s disciplined body, the body objectified by the gaze, or the racialized body.⁶³ The cyborg offers a resistant site for re-placing these objectified bodies.

The final category is the *subject body*, which is fully embodied as a live presence that blends cultural and organic notions of the body. I turn here to Ann Cooper Albright, who astutely observes, “Cultural identity is not necessarily synonymous with somatic identity. Yet neither is a somatic identity any more ‘real’ or essential than a social one simply because it is anchored in the body. Rather, the two are interconnected in the process of living that we call experience.”⁶⁴ This body speaks for itself, but in multiple ways. Recognizing that this conception is perhaps too idealized, I hold it up as a generally non-troubled bodily image which, when merged with technology, can expose

⁶² On abjection see also: Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Sexual Subversion: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

⁶³ While for Foucault, the disciplined body is a “subject,” in the sense of a subject of the state, I consider this body as being subject-ed, thereby turning object, rather than a possessor of agency, which distinguishes my subject body categorization.

⁶⁴ Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, 12.

structures of control that underlie the concept of subjectivity.

The cyborg theatre is realized as a bodied, live space; it is ultimately the live body that is at the center of this study. The cyborg theatre is a space to explore the blurring of boundaries, to rehearse societal border anxieties. The live bodies facilitating these performances begin as my subject. Although some may hold abject or object societal classifications, these live bodies are what compel me to write about the stage rather than film. In the posthuman condition we all have a cyborg consciousness. However, despite a constant bombardment of mediatized images, the human figure is still more compelling to look at. The question of presence—what do we look at and why?—is taken up in a number of works ranging from Philip Auslander's *Liveness* to John Emigh's work on neuroscience.⁶⁵ If our eyes turn to a huge screen during a rock concert, is it the lure of mediatized images, or it is simply, as I tend to believe, to see the figures at a closer range? The body provides the fascination. Live forms may be in competition or exist side by side with mediatized ones, but there remains a desire to "see it live," as evidenced by the amount of money fans will pay to see a performer live in concert. As technology meets the live body, what happens to an audience's perception of both? What are the potentials to be found in this merging? How can it suggest possibilities for difference, for disability? What are the issues of economic control that drive the use and appropriation of new media? These are some of the larger questions I address as I construct the cyborg theatre form.

The chapters of this dissertation propose examples of the cyborg theatre that

⁶⁵ Auslander, *Liveness*. John Emigh, "Minding Demons: Archetypes, Neuroscience, and Cultured Devils." *Teaching Performance Studies*, ed. Nathan Stucky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, in press). Originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research, November 1998.

illustrate the way liminal space between technology and the live can serve bodies disabled, or dis-identified, and also expose the dangers brought on by blurring boundaries between the live and global technology. Each chapter will weave the abject, object, and subject body with subject technology, defining each term within the framework of the artist examples. The chapters are broken down as follows:

What is the value of the body?

My second chapter will begin by combining the “abject” body and “subject” technology as a way of creating new possibilities for bodily imagining, thereby highlighting these potentials of the cyborg theatre. This chapter focuses on the work of dancer/multimedia artist Cathy Weis. Weis’s work provides a living example of a stubbornly “abject” body, but one which, when conjoined with technology, is no longer at odds with ideals or norms, but brazenly creates them anew.

Weis, a New York based dancer, choreographer, and video-artist has been creating technological performance for the past ten years. Laid up by a foot injury in the 70s, she began to experiment with video. In 1989 she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis; as the disease has progressed, Weis has not stopped performing; instead, with and through video, she creates new spaces for herself on stage. Her work ranges from what she calls “low tech” to recent experiments with global Internet performance. Although the cyborg is most literally exemplified in the low tech work, its metaphoric implications are vast in the Internet pieces.

Weis’s cyborg in performance is a rehearsal for a new paradigm of bodily practices that makes visible—in an attempt to make acceptable—the differing strengths bodies can possess. I position Weis’s work within the broader framework of disability

studies to show how her physicality is linked to the technology, creating a practical space—through incorporation—that might otherwise be unoccupied by artists like herself.⁶⁶ Weis's cyborg theatre displays potentials of the "abject body" through its integration with technology and opens doors for a necessary examination of technology's potentials in the creation of an embodied techno-enhanced posthumanism, which recognizes bodies mis-recognized as abject.

Where is the tech (no) body?

My third chapter analyzes work that intersects the "object body" with "subject technology." A frequent complaint about technology on stage is that it competes with the live body with which it shares the space, often overshadowing the human presence. This chapter analyzes the Wooster Group's intricate and astute use of technology in combination with "object" bodies, to draw out issues of identity in a media-driven age.

One reviewer of their production of *House/Lights* wrote, "The Wooster Group is about an art of the body itself, as well as the mind."⁶⁷ This may seem a curious phrase applied to a group that is often acclaimed for its postmodern deconstruction of texts and its reliance on the technological. However, it is precisely at the various intersections of the body and technology that the Wooster Group's critical practice is most potent. I will focus this discussion on their productions of *The Emperor Jones* (1993), *House/Lights* (1998), and *To You, The Birdie!* (2002) in order to trace how their work with technology

⁶⁶ Though this is definitely not an in-corporate-ion, which would shift the point of this critique and point directly to a space that is not occupied by artists like herself. Despite limited funding resources, Weis continues to develop her techniques through technologies she finds available. She has just completed a piece that premiered at Dance Theatre Workshop in New York City in November 2002.

⁶⁷ Mark Zimmerman, "Some Sort of Awakening," *Performing Arts Journal* 20, no. 2 (May 1998): 40-41.

has matured.⁶⁸ Using techniques from TV and video production, the Wooster Group upsets the idea of the “liberal humanist subject.” The Wooster Group’s use of technology exemplifies a shift from a conception of “whole” to the fragmented and back again but in a reconfigured form. I analyze the Wooster Group’s techniques of working with video, including techniques of fragmentation and multiple imaging, to understand where the body, the character, and the actor stand in relation to the technological images.

Who is in Control?

The final category, the subject-subject coupling, merges technology and the live in the most visually seamless way. This chapter’s focus is the work of George Coates, whose unique blending of the live and the technological creates a spectacularly cyborgian *mise-en-scène*. The boundary-blurring is in this case aided by the use of 3-D glasses worn by the viewer. However, from this intersection there arise complicated issues. The spectacle is dazzling, which has the potential to overwhelm the structures of control that operate behind it. How the technology is controlled, negotiated, and subverted in this merging are the questions I will be investigating.

Coates, a director from San Francisco, has been creating original, largely hi-tech work since 1976. The non-live “others/images” on his stage vary: computer-generated figures interact with live actors, opera singers, dancers, musicians. Actors are immersed in a computer-generated environment, this experience being completed by the audience, who often watch through 3-D glasses. Coates calls this look “Live Max 4-D,” which integrates live actors and 3-D computer images. The form has been developed through a collaboration called SMARTS, Science Meets the Arts Society, which he developed in

⁶⁸ My discussion of these pieces is based upon my having seen each production both live and on video.

1989 to foster new relationships between the arts and the nearby Silicon Valley computer industry. The content of much of his work rises directly from the technology he uses; his process begins with the appropriation of an emerging technology, developed for some unrelated purpose, (read: military, or corporate), around which he builds a piece. The unrelated possibilities of the given technologies are melded into one beautiful and dizzying production, recalling Jameson's notions of schizophrenic intensities within the postmodern. Jameson explains that his non-clinical use of the term schizophrenia, "when it becomes generalized as a cultural style, ceases to entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia and becomes available for more joyous intensities, for precisely that euphoria which we saw displacing the older affects of anxiety and alienation."⁶⁹ I argue that by troubling the original intended uses of specific technologies and by re-positioning the live body in relationship to it, Coates perpetuates a cyborgian embodiment with potential to critique the relation between bodies and technology in the contemporary. By relying on ideas of subjectivity developed through psychoanalysis and phenomenology, I triangulate the intersections between the body and technology on stage and the audience to ask crucial questions of the nature of the work itself.

Is the work able to subvert the social and corporate structures of power from which it arises? How do these mergings affect the live body in relation to class, race, and gender? I am interested in examining the economic forces behind the appropriation of technology and the potential issues of responsibility that arise from this merging. I examine how Coates uses audience's involvement with technology as another merging

⁶⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991), 29.

from which to define cyborg theatre.

Certainly, technology has multiple potentials in its application to the various conceptions of the body I outline in this dissertation. The cyborg has the potential to fill a space too often vacated by anxiety of the technological future, of difference, of identity, of control. The posthuman has now arrived in ways beyond the fictitious, and through performance new means can be produced and trouble historically mediated constructs of the body, creating a new liminal space of possibilities.

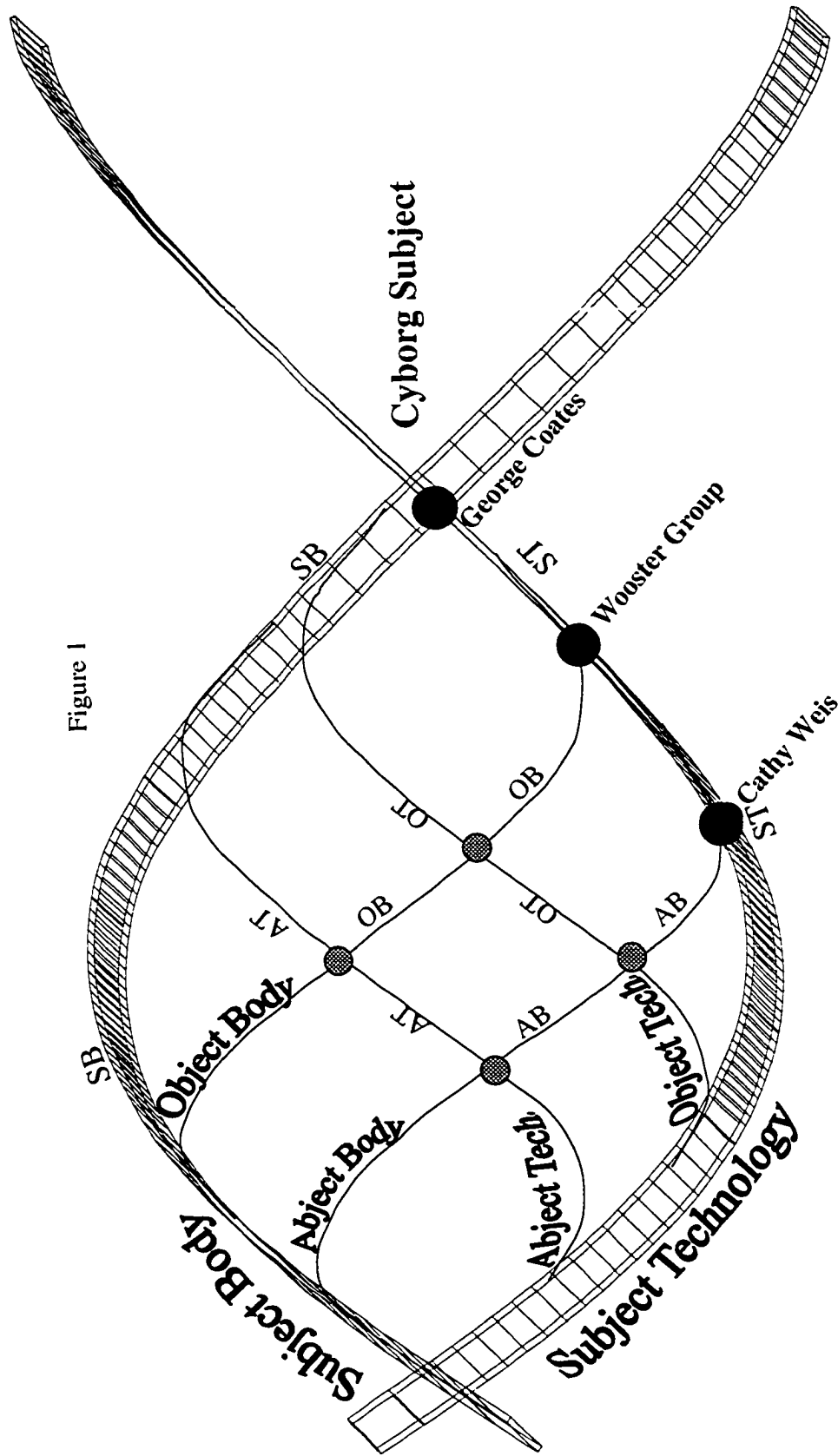


Figure 1

FIGURE 2

		BODY		
		SUBJECT	OBJECT	ABJECT
T E C H N O L O G Y	S U B J E C T	GEORGE COATES	THE WOOSTER GROUP	CATHY WEIS
	O B J E C T	JOSEF SVOBODA	BIO- MECHANICS	ROBERT WILSON
	A B J E C T	NATURALISM	CRAIG UBER- MARIONETTE	PUPPETS

CHAPTER TWO

SHIFTING STRENGTHS: THE CYBORG THEATRE OF CATHY WEIS

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects,” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject.

—Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*¹

“I used to have a body,” says the glowing face-within-a-television-monitor in front of a small audience at Dixon Place in NY. Just prior to this, audience members have been instructed to move “her” from out in the audience to where she can see: “Be careful, don’t drop me,” and “ouch, that pinched,” “over there, more to the left,” she directs, in a soft southern drawl. “He’s beautiful” she sighs, of performer Scott Heron, who is trying in frustration to complete his dance. Heron finally storms off, leaving the embodied television center stage where “she” happily begins her story, “I used to have a body. Once, I was a dancer. I could run and jump and kick my legs high like the best of them.”

—From Cathy Weis’s *Monitor Lizards*

The live face in the monitor is dancer/choreographer Cathy Weis who then physically enters the space to interact with her now pre-recorded self in the piece “Dummy,” one third of her 1999 *Monitor Lizards*.² Weis’s interrogations of the many mediatized intersections between the body and technology exemplify the cyborg at work in the most literal of senses that I will discuss—her body and technology conjoin in performance allowing for a freedom of movement no longer possible with her body alone. Weis, who lives with Multiple Sclerosis, creates technologically-enhanced and supported

¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

² The piece was originally called *Lizard Monitors* when it was presented at Dixon Place, NYC on various evenings between 9-24 April 1999. Weis has since changed the name to

movement that she also extends to international performers and audiences through her innovative work with the Internet as a performance site.³ In Weis's work, technology functions in conjunction with her body and her work reconfigures conceptions of the "dis/abled"⁴ body within the theoretical idea of the "posthuman," which is discussed more fully in my Introduction. As theorist Katherine Hayles has described, the term posthuman is an expansive condition that forces a re-conceptualization of the notion of what it means to be human, with consideration of the body's relationship to new technologies. Posthuman is not literally "after human," or the end of humanity, but, as Hayles explains, "it signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice."⁵ This chapter will focus on one facet of what has, to cite the Butler epigraph, been excluded or abjected from this "conception of human" that Hayles mentions and will address how it is reconfigured as cyborg in performance. Cathy

Monitor Lizards and this change is reflected in her press material.

³ I published various ideas in this chapter in a *Theatre Journal* performance review of Cathy Weis, December 1999, and in the anthology, *Bodies in Commotion*, eds. Carrie Sandhal and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).

⁴ Although I will use the general configuration, *disability*, I am tempted to use Ann Cooper Albright's new coining *dis/ability*, which she uses to "exaggerate the intellectual precipice implied by this word." Her discussion of terminology echoes many people writing in disability studies and I instead will use it carefully, acknowledging the varying word choices within the field. See Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 58-59.

⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 286.

Weis's body could be considered disabled, or abject—excluded from traditional privileging of the able-bodied, yet, through her technological performance strategies, her body disrupts “ableist” notions of what is considered “disabled.”

Weis's performing body is augmented by technology both literally, as she relies increasingly upon a leg brace, and visually, as she blurs the borders of the live body with technological images. To assign to her the designation of abject is somewhat problematic, as I argue that neither her work, nor her body *is* in fact abject, only that through her use of technology Weis is able to resist certain societal notions of what “normal,” “ideal,” or “abled” mean. The word human itself is embedded with constructions of what Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the “normate . . . the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.”⁶ In this chapter I specifically engage the technological aspect of the posthuman that encompasses fusions between humans and machines as a means of escaping the normative/abnormal binary of historical thought regarding disability. I explore cyborgian convergences as creations of alternative bodily presences, ones that ultimately have the ability to put the flesh back into the technologically-abled body. I will divide Weis's work into two sections: her work with live video projection in a multimedia dance format, and her use of the Internet as a medium to merge global performance. In the performances *Monitor Lizards* and *Show Me* (which includes the Internet performance section “Not So Fast Kid”) the term abject is also divided: from an externally applied conception of societal

⁶ Rosemarie Garland Thomson. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8

positionality that Weis's body merges with technology to resist, to her personal re-
 abjection of the societally abject within her work. Before outlining these concepts in
 greater depth, I will first trace the term abject and clarify my own usage of the term.

The Abject Body

The term abject can be traced back to the fifteenth century from the Latin *abjectus*, deriving from the past participle of *abjicere*, which means to cast away. The Oxford English Dictionary defines abject as a participle and adjective meaning "Cast off, cast out, rejected . . . brought low in position, condition . . . low in regard or estimation, degraded." It is also taken as a verb meaning, "to cast off . . . generally, though not always, as inferior, unworthy, or vile, and hence passing into the idea of casting down, degrading."⁷ While the word abject continues to reflect its dictionary definition—a low state or condition—abject and abjection have also gained prominence in contemporary theoretical framings, primarily through the work of the French feminist Julia Kristeva, who, in her project of refiguring the psychoanalytic conceptions of subject formation (primarily in the works of Freud and Lacan) attempts to position the maternal in a place of centrality within the discussion. Her exploration of these terms in the 1980 *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* is the starting point for any analysis of the term. I will begin with Kristeva and briefly explore the term abject's recent usage in the materialist feminism(s) of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz. This then becomes a point of departure for the study of body image in the work of Gail Weiss. I trace abject/ion's recent lineage as a foundation for my own usage of the terms as lenses through which

⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, prepared by J.A. Simpson & E.S.C. Weiner, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 26-27.

types of bodies are dis-abled.

Kristeva's work, following but altering Lacanian subject formation, begins with a reformulation of Lacan's "imaginary" mirror stage, in which the child processes its specular image and begins to form a sense of self as separate from others. Kristeva pre-inscribes the Lacanian "symbolic," (differentiated from Lacan's "Real" pre-mirror stage, in which the self is yet to be clearly differentiated from the objects/others around it; the symbolic is the linguistic realm by which the individual relates to the world) with her term "semiotic," (whereby she attempts to resist the primacy of phallogocentrism by first engaging with the maternal impulses and drives that create language prior to its regulation in the symbolic) and rests upon a poetic language as the means by which this order is disrupted. The result of her attempt to disrupt Lacan's phallogocentrism is a poetic language of pre-symbolic maternal drives that, for Kristeva, reinvests the maternal body while subverting the paternal. Judith Butler, in problematizing Kristeva's reading of Lacan, describes the nature of poetic language: "While the Symbolic is predicated upon the rejection of the mother, the semiotic, through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play, and repetition, re-presents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech."⁸ The language of Proust, Cèline, Borges, Artaud, and Joyce provide Kristeva with examples of this poetic speech, although her own elliptical writing style seems to stand as the best example of these ideas. In defining the abject, Kristeva's language exemplifies her project, as she attempts to explain the quality of abjection as, "a massive and sudden

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 82. Although I use Butler's discussion of Kristeva's "abject" to further my analysis, her critique of Kristeva's engagement with Lacan, although lending insight to my analysis, falls outside of this study. See pages 79-91 for her detailed critique.

emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing.”⁹ The object is not “me” or “that” yet its presence is haunting and powerful enough to disrupt the “I” that is the subject.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Kristeva positions the object as what is not the subject “I” or object “other,” but what is thrust aside by the “I” in order to exist in the world. Kristeva’s object is a continuous tension between the subject and other, which, as I see it, is Kristeva’s attempt to disrupt the fixity of Lacan’s repression of the imaginary, by which the child has to refuse the maternal connection in favor of the Symbolic phallus.

Kristeva explains the object as that which “confronts us . . . with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.”¹⁰ So even while the child will eventually mature into a being who can differentiate her or himself from others in the realm of the Symbolic, the object is always a reminder of the struggle to be fully an “I.”

In her attempt to foreground the maternal, female body from within the masculinist tropes of psychoanalysis Kristeva structures her argument within language, as Lacan has done, but in her *Essay on Abjection* she also allows the material body to

⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13, emphasis in original. I note that Kristeva splits existing as ex-isting, perhaps to doubly emphasize the ex-, the “out” of the word as a reference to exit-ing the womb.

surface. For instance, as I mentioned in chapter one, she describes the corpse, as opposed to a wound, or a signifier of death such as a flat encephalograph, as example of the abject:

Corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver . . . the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.¹¹

As with the initial separation from the maternal, the corpse is an object from which one can never fully part, and yet both the corpse and the maternal must be repeatedly rejected, pushed aside, in order to maintain the boundaries of life. Kristeva sees the abject and the condition of abjection as what conflicts with identity, as that which prevents us from ever fully reconciling the self/other split, as that which defies the rules and most importantly for this study, “what does not respect borders.”¹² Kristeva here pulls back from the construction of the subject from within psychoanalytic perspectives and begins to extend the argument to a societal sphere, going on to say that “the traitor, the liar, the criminal”¹³ are all abject, which marks the outcast in society as that which we must push away in order to maintain integrity as social subjects.

As I discuss in Chapter One, I develop my interpretation of the abject out of

¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Ibid.

Kristeva's usage as a term that further nuances the subject-object divide within a psychoanalytic framework of subjectivity. From her preliminary definition—as a condition arising from within the subject—Kristeva extends the term to the outcast in society, the abject bodies that must be pushed away to maintain a societal sense of system and order.¹⁴ In transforming the abject from an internal to an externally applied condition I negotiate between Kristeva's term abject and that of abjection, or the condition of being abject. Kristeva's definition of abject is as a component of the process of becoming a subject and therefore a fluid or processual state. The abject body as I define it is also not solely a fixed state of being. For Cathy Weis, her disease, Multiple Sclerosis, is degenerative and thereby, like my use of the term abject, simultaneously a condition of being as well as a process of becoming. I place the abject into the larger framework of a societal rejection of bodies, specifically bodies considered "disabled," neither traditional subjects nor objects.

Kristeva's essay on abjection has been of interest to a number of other theorists of the body, who continue her triangulation between the subject—object—abject as a means of discussing identity formation. For example, Elizabeth Grosz, whose project I outline in the following chapter, uses the abject to clarify the emergence of an "obedient, law-

¹⁴ Ibid. Kristeva differentiates between types of crime and morality in a rather fine, and ambiguous, line: "Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject . . . He [sic] who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady." I cite this quotation to point to Kristeva's attempt to extend her term on a societal level, but also to recognize the fluidity of the concept and terms she uses. I acknowledge that this may also be a translation consideration.

abiding, social body,”¹⁵ and her concern is to discuss the cultural value of, for her, the various abjected fluids and their relationship to the permeability of the body and their cultural significance. For her, the abject is “what of the body falls away from it while remaining irreducible to the subject/object and inside/outside oppositions.”¹⁶ Through an extensive analysis of the variety of bodily fluids, Grosz explores the abject from within the body, where through the expulsion of the “unclean” the social, proper and individual body is maintained.

Judith Butler’s project re-frames the psychoanalytic structure of Lacan and Kristeva to focus on how the idea of “sex” is constituted within the materiality of the body. For Butler, this sexual materiality is correlative with Lacan and Kristeva’s Symbolic, however for Butler it is a heterosexual matrix where sex is a normalizing, regulating function. Her project is to rethink the ways that sex and gender are instead a *materializing* process, which like Kristeva’s semiotic, never fully reach completion but attempt to destabilize the symbolic norm. “The symbolic ought to be rethought as a series of normativizing injunctions that secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability.”¹⁷

For Butler, like Grosz, although there is an emphasis upon the social and cultural construction of identity formation, the focus remains upon the materiality of the bodies. Butler takes issue with the idea that the human is merely “constructed” from ideas and

¹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). 192.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 15-16.

language, and in *Bodies That Matter*, she clearly responds to multiple critiques of construction, (and as a response to critiques of her *Gender Trouble*) stating that, “the limits of constructivism are exposed at those boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as ‘bodies.’”¹⁸ Her “bodies that matter” are these very abjected bodies and yet the process of materialization, she argues, is currently the process which excludes and which must be rethought and disrupted.

Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Hence, it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and less ‘human,’ the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the ‘human’ as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation.¹⁹

While Butler’s abjected bodies are specific bodies that fall outside of a “heterosexual matrix,” hers included, she balances her theory between the material body and the ideas that do construct our identity, reminding us that “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.”²⁰ Her refusal to disavow the overall idea of construction is crucial in making a political point about ever-present

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

societal structures of control that reiterate these supposed “norms.” She pointedly comments that:

What will and will not be included within the boundaries of ‘sex’ will be set by a more or less tacit operation of exclusion. If we call into question the fixity of the structuralist law that divides and bounds the ‘sexes’ by virtue of their dyadic differentiation within the heterosexual matrix, it will be from the exterior regions of that boundary . . . and it will constitute the disruptive return of the excluded from within the very logic of the heterosexual symbolic.²¹

Although for Butler, the bodies that matter are largely bodies placed in opposition to heterosexual ones, many other bodies also remain outside the subject-norm.²² It is from Butler’s understanding of the abject that I will begin to develop my own usage. Butler develops an inductive analysis that begins with the abject lesbian, gay, and transsexual bodies. She attempts to write from a position that critiques contemporary thought, policy, and action that reify the “norm,” while also acknowledging that her own criticism has the problematic potential of reconstructing these very norms. Recognizing these same issues, it is from this position that I apply the term abject to bodies that have been excluded from the able-bodied norm, and abjection to the process and condition of being abjected from this norm. I want to complicate this notion a bit further through somewhat of a reversal, which is exemplified in the work on body image of Gail Weiss.

In her book *Body Images*, Gail Weiss differentiates between abjection and abject.

²¹ Ibid., 11-12.

²² This is in part because Butler takes psychoanalysis as the starting point of her analysis which is based on sex and sexual norms. To her credit she strives to address “raced” as

writing that, “abjection refers to a process of expulsion, whereby that which has been designated as abject (this can include other people, food, vermin, body fluids, rodents and an infinite number of phenomena) is rejected and, at the same time, the rejection itself is disavowed.”²³ Although Weiss uses the term mainly to describe an internal abject for the anorexic body, it is her work on the anorexic body image that I find most useful in formulating how the abject can apply to the work on disability. Weiss confirms an internal psychoanalytic structure whereby the (healthy) subject finds a sense of stability and coherence through contradiction. Within the Symbolic, the subject has an ability to recognize the other as well as deal with the constant reiteration of its origins through the abject. The “ideal” then develops out of a fluidity, an ability to integrate against multiple others, and live with the abject, which all serve to stabilize and cohere the self. Weiss relates these contradictions to the idea of one’s own body image and says that, “multiple body images themselves offer points of resistance to the development of too strong an identification with a singularly alienating specular (or even cultural) image. That is, these multiple body images serve to destabilize the hegemony of any particular body image ideal, and are precisely what allow us to maintain a sense of corporeal fluidity.”²⁴ Her findings for the anorexic body are precisely the opposite. The anorexic, she asserts, has a lack of destabilization, it is a body *too* coherent. The anorexic has no ability to juggle multiple body images and, as Weiss describes, “this lack of fluidity and/or

well as “sexed” bodies. See *Bodies that Matter* for a more in-depth analysis.

²³ Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 186.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

multiplicity, indeed the hegemonic nature of this particular body image, offers no way to live the corporeal contradictions."²⁵

If Weiss's understanding of the anorexic body image can be applied on a societal level, then the "healthy norm, the ideal" (body of bodies) is maintained through the confrontation with multiple points of resistance, while its opposite, the ill, disabled, abjected other is unable to make these fluid connections and confrontations with others. However, like Butler, I want to resist the construction of the symbolic norm. I want to try to subvert it through this discussion of the abject body. At the risk of being perhaps overly generic, I add that am doing so intentionally to make a finer point.²⁶ For me, the "societal norm" which holds in abjection and thrusts aside that which Butler describes as "'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life . . . densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject" is in fact like Weiss's anorexic.²⁷ This supposed norm is often incapable of granting full societal subjectivity to historically underrepresented groups such as homosexuals, people of color, women, and the disabled to name a few, because this norm, like the anorexic, is *too* coherent and unable to assimilate a fluidity of multiple images.²⁸ On the other hand, Weiss's "norm" is the basis

²⁵ Ibid., 102.

²⁶ I am basing my claim primarily upon media, political, and theoretical representations of historically underrepresented groups. I am not basing my assertions on specific sociological studies, solely on my observations. For a historical analysis of the idea of "normalcy" and how disability has been figured in opposition to this term, see Lennard Davis's essay "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9-28.

²⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 3.

²⁸ I use the issues of representation here deliberately as one mode of reading bodies

for my discussion of performer Cathy Weis, who might be labeled “disabled,” yet her work exemplifies the “healthy norm,” of confronting and communicating with multiple images and others in a fluid exchange of resonances. Through her multimedia performance Weis (as differentiated from Weiss) redefines counterproductive societal definitions of disability and abjection and through her Internet work with multiple “other” bodies, Weis repositions the idea of the abject through the use of distance and globalization.

Cathy Weis

Issues of agency and control are crucial to address the construction of a politicized posthuman model. The questions of who controls the technology and in what context it is used are the determining factors that differentiate between negative examples of cyborg creations—for example, *Star Trek: Voyager*'s Borg, a cyborg with a collective consciousness that erases individuality—and the more metaphoric model Cathy Weis creates on stage. Weis refuses to let her body ever fully disappear behind the technology she uses, and instead choreographs the ways in which her physical presence extends into the live space. The cyborg, though it continues to reside largely in science-fiction scenarios, film, and cartoons, is well-applied in Weis's work, producing an expansive model of a diverse society in which there is no “norm.” As theorist Lennard Davis writes, “the application of the idea of a norm to the human body creates the idea of deviance or a

considered “disabled.” The idea of invisibility as underrepresentation forms the basis of this particular argument. However, I do not equate all visibility with equal representation, and will explore Peggy Phelan's questioning of these terms in relation to my discussion in Chapter Five.

‘deviant’ body.”²⁹ Certainly the body itself, flesh and weight, must be made manifest beyond metaphor, but perhaps through an integration of the flesh with technology an attempt can be made to, as Davis suggests “reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal.”³⁰ To destabilize the problematic binary of normal/abnormal that Davis’s transposition reinforces I introduce the cyborg theatre as a third possibility. When difference is embraced with as much acceptance as new technologies, the cyborg might have outlived its usefulness. For the moment, however, the cyborg can stand in as a site of resistance to illuminate and illustrate the strengths of differences.

One site for the possibility of resistance is performance. In the work of Cathy Weis, the live claims technology as its “present absence.” Weis’s version of cyborg theatre interrogates increasing absences. For example, in the piece *A String of Lies*, which she created shortly after her diagnosis with MS, she projected a juxtaposition of her upper body onto the moving legs of dancer Jennifer Miller, which allowed her to, as she said, “finally do a ballet piece again.”³¹ Though professing a lack of awareness of the implications at the time, she later realized that the impaired mobility of her legs needn’t stop her from dancing—she simply moved her body into the frame of video to create a new way to continue working. Weis never lets her body (or those bodies she choreographs) disappear completely behind her innovative uses of technology; instead technology merges with the live figure, projecting fractured, composite, and humorous

²⁹ Lennard J. Davis, ed. *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

³¹ Cathy Weis, interview by author, New York, NY, 1 June 2000.

images of this union. By creating a mosaic of bodies and body parts, Weis re-figures traditional ways of seeing bodies, especially those Western society is trained (not) to see in/by mediatized representation.³² Her work subtly comments on the media's obsession with an impossible ideal—a body too perfect, too thin, too fit to encompass the many actual varieties. Her work seems to seek a means of resistance to the hegemony of the supposed norm, and opens spaces for bodies that, although quite present, are either overlooked or oppressed to the point of invisibility.

For the past fifteen years, Cathy Weis, a dancer and choreographer, has been creating multimedia performance. She began her career as a teen-age soloist with the Louisville Ballet and went on to Bennington College as a modern dance major. She has toured as a member of a bluegrass band, done street theatre in San Francisco, and was once a self-proclaimed “disco queen.” Weis began working with video in the 1970s after spending a period working with other mediums, such as stained glass, while recovering from a foot injury. After returning to dance, and suffering recurring injuries, she was diagnosed in 1989 with MS, a disease that has progressively diminished the strength of her right side. Rather than give up dancing, Weis turned to a combination of video and performance in order to develop new sites for her own dance-work. Her experiments have won her a BESSIE Award in choreography and creation in 1996 and granted her a research fellowship at Bennington College from 1996-98, a period that allowed her to continue her work on LIPS, Live Internet Performance Structure, a technological

³² I frame my argument within Western society and on modes of seeing that are promoted in Western media because this is my own personal perspective. This is not to say that the same argument couldn't be applied from other perspectives, only that I locate myself within a Western tradition.

framework between performers in both Bennington and Prague, Czech Republic that has been ongoing and has inspired several other simultaneous international performance/Internet events. I will discuss Weis's most recent Internet collaboration entitled "Not So Fast, Kid," which was featured in the 2001 *Show Me* at The Kitchen in New York City.

It is through accretion that Weis has developed her work—she doesn't see her work with technology as a result of her having MS; it was an interest she had developed prior to her diagnosis. However, she does credit it as a way back in to performance. She will freely discuss having MS, although she hesitates at the word disability. She explains, "Over the years I've begun to feel that every time that word comes up, it has an attitude—'disability'—it is a weak and victimized position. People who have had to really deal with physical problems and challenges understand that it is a shifting of strengths." To try to relate to the able-bodied, she said she tends to use the example of age:

As you get older, everybody loses things, and everybody understands the word loss . . . for people with physical disabilities the changes happen either more quickly or more dramatically . . . so I understand why that's a category, disability, but there's something about the word . . . you have to really make a lot of choices and priorities and take a lot of responsibility for your life and there are strengths that happen. Disability only looks at what you are losing, and not how you shift the balance for yourself. It only looks at what you've lost.³³

This is somewhat of an evolution for Weis, who admits to going through a very dark

³³ Weis, interview, 1 June 2000.

period and whose work has emerged more powerful for having done so. Despite Weis's initial discomfort with the terminology, she does not let her "disability" disappear behind the images she creates. Her body is quite visible in her performance and her project is to work with movement on all types of bodies. "Technology with imagination is a way of expanding voices so other people can listen to them . . . it is important to break boundaries so things don't stay the way they are."³⁴

"Monitor Lizards"

In "Dummy," the example from the epigraph of this chapter, Weis appears on stage to talk to her projected self. This technique is an outgrowth of the 1998 *Gravity Twins*, in which Weis's face-in-the-box is also passed from the audience while dancers Jennifer Miller and Annie Iobst perform. In a *Village Voice* article about this piece, aptly titled, "*Embodying the Invisible*," Deborah Jowitt describes: "Weis, the supposed spectator, is the actual choreographer in charge; yet her dancers are controlling her disembodied image . . . others 'dance' her."³⁵ Weis often elects to integrate her disability, rather than making it a focal point of her work. Unless asked directly, her MS is only mentioned in passing and seems merely one of the many historical details that make up a life.³⁶ This absence, however, is no erasure. Her work speaks for itself; the presence of MS ghosts her work as she investigates alternate ways of envisioning bodies on stage. The rest of "Dummy" is a duet between Weis and a *döppelgänger* manikin. Their

³⁴ Cathy Weis, telephone conversation with author, 10 June 2001.

³⁵ Deborah Jowitt, "Embodying the Invisible," *The Village Voice*, 18-24 February 1998.

³⁶ As I will mention later in the chapter, Weis now frequently wears a brace on her leg in performance, marking her MS visibly. When I first saw her perform however, she resisted the brace, preferring to appear without it.

interactions form a narrative of bodily disappearance and cyborgian rebirth. So, once center stage, the still-in-the-box Weis begins her story, “I used to have a body. Once, I was a dancer. I could run and jump and kick my legs high like the best of them.”

Weis’s use of technology asks questions and seeks to find answers about her own changing body. She eventually emerges from backstage, introducing her “self” as opposed to her “head” who she says, “focused on choreographed skills.” “I know it is not easy without a body,” the corporeal Weis says gently as she brings out a similarly dressed, two-foot-tall foam puppet body that attaches nicely to the monitor head. Weis’s use of humor and movement transform the frightening Frankenstein tale into a powerful metaphor of visibility and presence, a cyborgian story to live with. Weis’s newly formed cyber-alter ego seems to seek a friend when it expresses that “some people have a problem with sentient media . . . [it was] only a matter of time before we started interacting back.” These are prescient words amidst a societal debate over cloning and genetic engineering.³⁷ Although the puppet’s head is Weis’s mediated own, and we are aware that the control and creation is also Weis, she/it begins to take on a life of her/its own. The live Weis and her mediatized-puppet-double do a little duet dance number, exchange witty repartee and the piece is over. The cyborg in this performance is both a literal and a metaphoric manifestation, asking what it means to *have* a body, and what it means to lose physical control of your own body.

Jennifer González writes that “imaginary representations of cyborgs take over

³⁷ See Ray Kurzweil. *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin, 1999) for a thought-provoking examination of future human-machine interfaces.

when traditional bodies fail. In other words, when the current ontological model of human being does not fit a new paradigm, a hybrid model of existence is required to encompass a new, complex and contradictory lived experience."³⁸ Weis's cyborgian performance is a rehearsal for a new paradigm of bodily practices that makes visible—in an attempt to make understandable—the differing strengths bodies can possess. Weis refuses to be excluded on the basis of her inability to conform to traditional dance/movement forms, and prefers an inclusive stance: "All movement is interesting—it's how you deal with it. On crutches, in a wheelchair, or wearing a brace, this movement is as interesting as a ballet dancer's if it has its own voice."³⁹ In her attempt to make a larger variety of movement visible she seeks out performers with strengths she wants to work with, regardless of race, gender, or ability. The differences from her own body are important to represent a heterogeneous and expansive space within which to work. In addition, as a choreographer, there are many ideas she visualizes but cannot enact. Here too she depends upon technologies—video and drawings—to give her dancers ways to see what she wants. Her awareness of the distance between choreography, writing dancing, and dancing is similar to that of the dancer with the broken hip in Peggy Phelan's "Immobile Legs." "As my feet tapped away under my chair and my fingers typed on the keys, I began to feel that the lack of direction in my feet might be cured by the mapping my fingers were making on the keyboard. I was

³⁸ Jennifer González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research," in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 270.

³⁹ Weis, telephone conversation, 10 June 2001.

transferring the hesitation in my feet to the plotting of my calmer hands.”⁴⁰ Both Weis and this dancer desire to use technology as a means of “mapping” something no longer able to be done by their own bodies. Weis credits her interest in video as having given her the strength to emerge from the trauma of the diagnosis. Phelan’s dancer goes on, “Lost in a time that seemed to have no order (once the past becomes present it is hard to know where to step), I lost the rhythm of my own limbs’ utterance. Computing was an attempt to put that loss in my hands and head, to transfer the grief in my feet that formed the root of my own illness.”⁴¹ Like Weis’s movements which are in need their own voice, Phelan’s dancer also searched for this resonance. It is through shifting their strengths from “pure” corporeality to the complex dance between embodiment and technology that both of these dancers are able to dance through trauma.

It is in the third piece of *Monitor Lizards*, “Fly Me to the Moon,” that Weis most successfully integrates technology and the body. In this piece, an evocative technological foray aided by a narrative of love, loss, and the human body, Weis physically manipulates the camera, creating expansive depths within the small space around her. She begins by physically entering the live space while also in the eye of a camera, an effect which sends her image back and forth in a mirror-image cascading endlessly behind her. The flat wall suddenly seems to open up as the images reach backward as far as the eye can see. The melancholy mood of the piece is aided by grainy video, haunting sounds, and the sparse, compelling text. Dancer Scott Heron enters and speaks about Weis’s character through a

⁴⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 46.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

standing microphone, “Helen has left me and gone back to 1930.” This thematic absence is contradicted by an extreme close-up of Weis’s face directly behind him as he alternates between speaking and breaking into a twisted, contorted dance that resonates a sense of pain and nostalgia. Heron’s “able” body communicates loss through his movements, while the conceptually absent character Weis plays is made most present through the close-up projections, creating a complicated juxtaposition of the ideas of absence and presence. Weis also physically wheels the camera around on stage, controlling what is being captured and where it is projected. Her technological manipulations grant her an agency necessary for the disabled body on stage, an agency that resonates in the work of theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson:

I intend to counter the accepted notions of physical disability as an absolute, inferior state and a personal misfortune. Instead, I show that disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do.⁴²

Weis’s configurations of the body and technology propose alternate subjectivities—ones that do not attempt to be understood as the equivalent of able-bodies norms, but instead pose a challenge—to expand our cultural understandings of the body. Finally Weis enters, dancing live in the space as well as being projected on a large screen behind her.

⁴² Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 6.

Heron looks on as Weis dances through the space with a large cartoonish drawing of a lover, either an image of her present with a new lover or perhaps his nostalgic view of the past. Weis's slippage between the present and past allows us to imagine a future less marked by "cultural rules" about what bodies should be or do. Through her choreography and direction, Weis re-inscribes both her character and her own physical body with empowering constructions of presence.

LIPS, "*Show Me*" and "*Not So Fast, Kid*":

Performing Bodies in the Age of Global Technologies

In an article in the *Village Voice* in early November 2001, scholar and theorist Una Chaudhuri wrote, "Someone remarked recently that 'terrorism is the downside of globalization.' I dream of a theater that asks what (on earth!) the upside of globalization is. Which means that I dream of a theater based on the principle of reciprocity, of making sure that we understand as much about those parts of the world as they are expected to understand—even accept—about us."⁴³ This section is perhaps a response of sorts to Chaudhuri's call through an analysis of the Internet work of Weis, who has for years been exploring the use of the Internet as a tool for connecting communities of performers across the globe. The work being done by Weis serves as a modality of reciprocity, of shared connectivity between bodies and communities at a distance. In this time of global linkage, and instant messaging, the idea of distance has the power to abject, in Kristeva's sense, the physical body. The ability to restore physicality to those out of reach, and cast far off is what Weis is attracted to in her work. The appropriation and development of the

⁴³ Una Chaudhuri, "The Birds are on Fire." *The Village Voice*, 6 November 2001, 65.

Internet as a performance tool, (from its original development for militaristic purposes), serves to re-place the global within local bodies in a performance site, while at the same time serving as what Jon McKenzie in his recent book *Perform or Else*, might call a “minor history”—functioning as a challenge to technological fetishism, globalized capitalism, and cultural imperialism.⁴⁴

As Constance Penley and Andrew Ross rightly point out in their edited volume *Technoculture*, “cultural technologies are far from neutral . . . they are the result of social processes and power relations. Like all technologies, they are ultimately developed in the interests of industrial and corporate profits and seldom in the name of greater community participation or creative autonomy.”⁴⁵ Although their book was published in 1991, the issues they raise about global technology and the role of community activism have often been obscured by a “techno-fanaticism” or inattention to the actual bodies at stake in technological practices. Weis attempts to use Internet technologies in performance as a cultural bridge, sometimes an unsteady and shaking one, but one that attempts to create community and reinvests global bodies with the materiality abjected in technological practices such as Internet usage.

Weis’s Live Internet Performance Structure, LIPS, is a natural extension of her earlier work with framing and distance, absence and presence. Where technology was an extension and augmentation of her performing body in the earlier work, the Internet

⁴⁴ Although corporate video conferencing can be read in a similar way, I distinguish between the use within a corporate structure as a means of productivity and the use within a performance structure.

⁴⁵ Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xii.

experiments allow her to utilize bodies from around the world. These collaborations with international artists challenge ways of understanding distance and visibility. The actual body need not be physically present for it to have a performing agency. Through the technology Weis is able to construct a narrative that echoes the absent presence of her disabled body in her earlier work.

Weis not only challenges the viewer's response to how bodies interact over distance, but she challenges the bodies of her dancers as well. She explains that as a dancer and choreographer, she is aware of the proprioceptive and spatial awareness a body has in space on stage and by choreographing live and mediatized bodies together in one piece she upsets the familiarity the dancers have with their bodily presence in a live space. The dancers are, of course, aware of the project and can rehearse ideas, but it becomes a structured improvisation of sorts when live before the audience, due to the uncertainty of the technological link, which may or may not last throughout the performance. These fragile connections are perhaps the intention: they remind both viewer and performer of the instability of assumptions of the tenuousness of bodily presence. This work is a reminder that there is always room for questions.

Weis's Live Internet Performance Structure is a new direction in performance that allows culturally, ideologically resistant work to emerge through the intersection and integration of the live and the technological on stage. LIPS may best be understood through the literal image of the acronym—two separate entities making up a whole: two simultaneous performance events linked and made one through a live Internet feed. Presently, a LIPS performance is based upon two artists or groups of artists working from different sites but with the same technical “language”—the set-up, mixer, screen, and

monitors. Each performance space typically has several layers: a live audience watching live performers who “partner” remote performers, who are also performing live in their space across the world. The remote performers are projected into the other space onto a large screen.

Weis sees these projects as long-distance connections—she has collaborated with performers in Prague, Budapest, and Macedonia.⁴⁶ The performers in each space are choreographed to interrelate within the performance Weis designs, which varies in its narrative and improvisational content. The work has a fluidity that is based on the instability of the Internet link as well as the act of live bodies performing with projected ones. Additionally, the live bodies are also projected onto the already projected ones, creating a third performance frame. Both sides are witnessed by audiences in the live space, but much of the mixing of images is not seen by the other audience. The frames created by the screens give an awareness of dis-location and distance, especially as they reference ways of relating to television or film, but the live body in the mix and the ways the frames are used to bring global communities together create an expanded stage rich with connections.

Weis’s original impulse to use the Internet, aside from an ongoing fascination

⁴⁶ In an interview with Weis on 20 December 2002, she explained to me that her decision to work with performers in each of these sites was motivated by personal connections. Once interested in the location she went about forging alliances with other artists and working with the governments to obtain funding and equipment for these projects, a process that varied greatly with the economic situation of each site. She explained to me during this interview that, “through the Soros center, Prague gets a lot of state-of-the-art equipment, more than [New York City performance space] the Kitchen even. In Macedonia however, it was hellish. I learned a lot about the country. No one in the country could guarantee anything, people save and save is suddenly their money is not worth anything.”

with technology in performance, was to be able to create community and share imagination across different cultural sites. Margaret Morse describes the exchange value of virtually everything from bodies to objects to money in her book *Virtualities*, and writes, “whether business or entertainment, in order to support a culture based on more than just the economic exchange-value of data, information that has been *disengaged* from the context of the subjects, time and place in which it is enunciated must be *reengaged* with personality and the imagination.”⁴⁷ By using the Internet as a performance tool, Weis attempts a reengagement with the body made absent through technology—perhaps as a reaction to her own slowly declining body—by actively reinserting these virtual global bodies into a local space, by not letting them slip out of sight.

Weis’s attempts to construct community through technology falls within an ongoing discussion of liveness vs. mediatization. Philip Auslander, in his book *Liveness*, draws distinctions between the audiences of live and mediatized performance that Weis’s work upsets. He writes :

Whereas mediatized performance can provide the occasion for a satisfactory experience of community *within* the audience, live performance inevitably yields a sense of the failure to achieve community between the audience and the performer. By reasserting the unbridgeable distinction between audience and performer, live performance foregrounds its own fractious nature and the unlikelihood of community in a way that mediatized representations, which never

⁴⁷ Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5.

hold out the promise of unity, do not.⁴⁸

Auslander's distinction seems to reify an audience-performer binary that the integrated cyborg theatre destabilizes.⁴⁹ I maintain that Weis's work is live performance, and that its integration with technology creates several bridges that create and facilitate a sense of community. In the cultural Internet collaborations, the mediatized or remote performers from Macedonia become an audience of sorts for the live performers in New York, while at the same time being performers for the live New York audience.

Another method for re-engagement is derived from the use of the Internet as a live connection to the remote performers, since its potential loss would thereby render the performance unfulfilled. For the Prague *LIPS* piece (simply called *LIPS*), Weis choreographed certain elements into the dance—her own defense against potential technological glitches, but mostly created an open structure for the dancers to interact with the live images that were coming through the mixer and the projected onto a screen. The audience walks in and sees the heads of Weis and Mischa Bielicky (the artist in Prague) on screens—they then see Cathy's body live in the space but are left to ponder where Mischa is. He begins to explain the process as the dancers lift the heads (recycling the technique from *Monitor Lizards*) and do a dance with them. There are bodies in two sites, some are live and others mediatized, only connected by a tenuous link that may or may not last through the performance. The use of an unreliable form of technology reinscribes the liveness in the space, as unpredictability is a mark of both live performance

⁴⁸ Philip Auslander, *Liveness* (London: Routledge, 1999), 57.

⁴⁹ I do not necessarily agree with Auslander's assertion that the live theatre cannot create community. See, for example, the work of Augusto Boal as rebuttal to Auslander's

and technology, yet it is here found within the technology. Live dance performance is also marked by the body moving through time in a fixed space. Weis however, creates a shared temporal moment that lingers in a liminal space created by fragments.

The work is “becoming,” which I take from Ann Cooper Albright’s gloss on Judith Butler, in *Choreographing Difference*: “Not only is the present indicative of the verb ‘to be’ destabilized into a continuous process of becoming, but the very notion of a ‘one’ who can become anything at all is rendered a logical impossibility.”⁵⁰ Cooper-Albright writes toward an understanding of performance as unrepeatable, therefore undermining its stability. I bring this up to highlight issues of both transformation and documentation as well as the potentials of the liveness of the body in relation to the technology on stage. In the second piece I discuss, Weis structured more of a linear narrative and although there was an audience in Macedonia most nights, because it was three in the morning there its presence was never projected to the live New York audience. However, the piece itself interrogates general notions of presence which can be applied to audience as well as performer.

The audiences become points of contact in this web, *witnesses* to a piece of the performance rather than objective reporters of it as a whole. Weis maintains documentation through video of both sides, but no “whole” can ever be constructed from these dis-locations. I use the term witness following Cooper-Albright, who draws upon discourses of ethics and trauma when she says, “To witness something implies a responsiveness, the response/ability of the viewer toward the performer . . . What I call

statement.

witnessing is much more interactive [than the consuming gaze], a kind of perceiving (with one's whole body) that is committed to a process of mutual dialogue."⁵¹ An interactive approach is possible when I witness Weis's work—through the re-examination of my own viewing responses to mediatized frames as well as an examination of the cultural systems of interaction with tools like the Internet. When I click in on my computer I can go anywhere in the world, a position reinforced by Weis's global performance connections. However, as I sit in the dark, witnessing the performance, I become uncomfortably aware, that in seeing, I might also be seen. Cooper-Albright continues:

This act of witnessing, however, raises the stakes of audience engagement, sometimes making the audience member uncomfortable, sometimes provoking highly charged responses to the work. This is particularly true of dances that foreground issues of social, political, and sexual difference in ways that make the spectator aware of the performer's cultural identity as well as his or her own cultural positioning.⁵²

In Weis's work, the act of witnessing rather than simply viewing the performance is possible as a perhaps involuntary reaction to the density of levels on which the work "speaks." The multiple, mixed-up framing of both bodies and technology—bodies that are live, projected from the live, connected from remote locations, animated bodies; frames of video with live projections, frames that contain remote locations, frames in

⁵⁰ Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁵² *Ibid.*

which bodies live and animated interact in response to the live bodies—can be disorienting, amusing, breathtaking, and provocative. Weis’s bodily trauma—the experience of dealing with having MS—permeates her work. The work I have described represents a progression in Weis’s “writing trauma.” Through her piece *Show Me* she ultimately gives “voice” to her own body again through her work and in so doing allows for a resonance to echo through her work.

“Show Me” Trauma: “Not So Fast, Kid!”

Dominick LaCapra differentiates between the idea of writing about trauma, which he thinks of as an act of historiography, and the more intangible “writing trauma”:

Writing trauma would be one of those telling aftereffects in what I termed traumatic and post-traumatic writing . . . It involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and ‘giving voice’ to the past—processes of coming to terms with traumatic ‘experiences,’ limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combinations and hybridized forms.⁵³

For LaCapra, it is never fully possible to write trauma, because trauma itself cannot be localized or pinpointed in a fixed moment, but as a metaphor it serves as a distancing device and a means to work through it. Weis’s *Show Me*, as a whole, reflects the shifting within Weis from her initial resistance to the signs indicating that her body was changing, to a gradual listening to what these signs were telling her; from her personal traumatic experience during the onset of her diagnosis with MS, to her ability to turn this

⁵³ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History. Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 187.

experience out into the world and redefine the terms of her disability.

In January of 2001, Weis premiered her program *Show Me*, a work with four pieces all conceived and choreographed by Weis and presented at the Kitchen in New York City. The first half of the program was made up of three multimedia pieces, “Dunkin’ Booth” (a premiere), and two older pieces, “Face to Face,” and “A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad,” which was listed as a New York premiere that had had an earlier showing at Dixon Place in 1999.⁵⁴ The second half of the program was the premiere of “Not So Fast, Kid!,” Weis’s Internet collaboration with Phil Marden, based on a story told by Davor Petrovski, and using performers in both New York and Skopje, Macedonia. Weis’s use of a story from another culture, rather than her own personal story, addresses her own trauma as reflected through the listening to another. Cathy Caruth explains this process:

The inherent departure, within trauma, from the moment of its first occurrence, is also a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event: that the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another. The meaning of the trauma’s address beyond itself concerns, indeed, not only individual isolation but a wider historical isolation that, in our time, is communicated on the level of our cultures.⁵⁵

Weis projects her work outward into the Skopje community and builds “Not So Fast, Kid!” upon a familial structure. The piece integrates a live “family” in New York.

⁵⁴ This is the same piece mentioned in this chapter elsewhere. Weis lists in her *Show Me* program that it was then called *On Old Highway 42*.

⁵⁵ Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore:

another in Macedonia, also live, and a third, family of animated cartoon figures projected on a second screen in the performance space. In her program notes, Weis writes, "This piece is an attempt to connect with another culture. I went to Macedonia and asked artists there what story they would like to tell a New York Audience. It could be anything. A fable. A war story. Something from the newspaper. The only rule was it could be no longer than one hundred and fifty words. This is our attempt to tell that story." The story they picked is credited as having been written by David Petrovski. It goes like this:

I took off my shoe for the hundredth time, and checked to see if the little pebble was still there. Yes, it was. Every night, in the silence, my father, waiting for me to fall asleep, made an incantation to the little pebble so it would know how to prick me better. Today I have begun my 7, 608th life. My foot grew and tore apart the shoe. The little pebble fell out. From the bridge, I watched it falling into the river, disappearing in the unfeeling waters. In the East began the new day. The wind brought the Dawn and with her came the gypsies. I was thinking what to buy from the bazaar, sandals or moccasins. Finally, I decided it would be best for some time to walk barefoot.⁵⁶

The story might be a reflection of Weis's own experience with the nagging pain on her right side that grew greater and began to cause her to fall until she finally dealt with a diagnosis of MS. Weis's "pebble" cannot fall out, but as she continues to give voice to her own trauma through her work, her work is strengthened, and as she listens to other voices, she listens more closely to her own. She structures this story around three

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). 10-11.

families, who perform this tale—it is also a story that reflects the politics of the place, the fall of communism, freedom, and growth. Each “family,” the performers in the U.S., those in Macedonia, and one of projected animations, tells the story differently, and with different nuances. Weis has them each perform on their own and then integrates the performers in a cross-cultural, hybridized exchange: she herself dances with “Robert” from Macedonia, another performer dances with an animated character, Ishmael Houston-Jones, the “father” figure in New York dances with the “mother” figure from Macedonia. The tone of the piece varies from the comical, as animated eyes follow the live performer around the space, to the poignantly beautiful, as dancer Houston-Jones begins to dance a “solo” in the New York space. A camera is fixed upon him, projecting his image onto the screen where the audience views it simultaneously interacting with the mediated image from Macedonia. In front of the screen Houston-Jones is aware of the interactions behind him and how his movement contributes to this complex picture. The images blur together at times, leaving a ghostly sweep of one’s arm across the other’s face, colors and textures blending into a cyborgian promise of crossed boundaries. The performers, live, animated, and technologically-abled, all interact with each other, creating densely layered images that represent connections between people and countries.

Caruth re-tells the story of Tasso’s *Tancred*, which Freud has told in his analysis of trauma and its repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. *Tancred* accidentally kills his lover Clorinda and in his anguish, while wandering through a magic forest, he slashes at a tree, only to hear the pained voice of Clorinda, whose soul is now imprisoned in the

⁵⁶ *Show Me* program notes. Story by David Petrovski.

tree. "The voice of his beloved addresses him and, in this address, bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated."⁵⁷ Weis's body and those that accompany her on stage become the "voice" for the re-presenting of her own bodily trauma and through her continual attempts to literally work through this process, she also is able to listen to others. Caruth explains the Tancred story further:

We can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound.⁵⁸

Weis's own personal trauma, a literal, physical "wound," following Freud and Caruth "haunts" her work and cries out for a necessary re-telling. "It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available."⁵⁹ Weis's personal journey is marked with periods of denial and the inability to tell her story, but through her work her story tells itself, unwittingly, and in Weis's listening to the wounds of others, she in turn can be heard. In turn, a reciprocity occurs between communities and bodies that creates a space for healing.

Conclusions

Weis's work emerges from a type of engagement with technology that Penley and Ross call "protopolitical technoculture," which they go on to explain "covers the complex

⁵⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

psychosocial process by which people, either individually or in groups, make their own independent sense of the stories that are told within and about an advanced technological society.”⁶⁰ Penley and Ross describe this as a kind of activism, acknowledging that “activism today is no longer a case of putting bodies on the line; increasingly, it requires and involves bodies-with-cameras.”⁶¹ Weis is a pioneer with her video and Internet work, working against physical and financial odds she developed her work with small budgets and amateur equipment and her early work was rough around the edges, fragmented, tenuous. When asked why she doesn’t work with corporations and universities more to gain access to T-1 lines and much more advanced equipment she says that she is not adverse to the idea, but she has a commitment to her style. Her work is a resonant echo of her body; she frames the fragmentations and textures that this technology grants her. She is aware that technologies are changing rapidly, but says “I am interested in artists. With corporations, how can you communicate? It is like pulling teeth. Of course it will all change and then you’ll lose all the fracturing, all the beautiful stuff.”

Her interests are grounded in bodies, in the moments on stage in the present, but through her use of multimedia she also challenges the ways in which bodies are seen at both a global and a local level. Her work can be seen as a response to McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*, which in conclusion states: “The challenge: not only to recognize that one experiences history from the perspective of the present, but to plug into emergent forces in order to generate untimely perspectives on this very perspective, perspectives

⁶⁰ Penley and Ross, *Technoculture*, xv.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

that multiply and divide the present, rattling it to and fro."⁶² With determination Weis asks questions: boundaries of the body; technological frames; where the body begins and ends; how technology can augment the body; how to place the audience within technological frames; which frames to use; which bodies? Her interrogation is ongoing throughout her work.

Weis's hope is that the LIPS structure will join artists who can ultimately create their own culturally and artistically unique work as a connecting point through the Internet to each other. She develops a web of connections that have potentials for offshoots in many directions. If we accept Jon McKenzie's claim that the world is one large performance stratum, and within this, "the field of human-computer interaction is ground zero for the emergence of a new and powerful machine, the feedback and feedforward of world culture, transnational organization, and global information technology,"⁶³ then I would contend that human-computer interaction is also the site for asking, which worlds? How is the information distributed? And how do we define this "ground zero." I've read Una Chaudhuri's article from the *Village Voice* many times since September 2001. It remains what I think is the most lucid call for what we as theatre practitioners and theorists must ask of our craft. "The theater . . . might dedicate its remarkably flexible space—whether actual or virtual, indoor or outdoor, formal or otherwise—to putting us in touch with the big questions of living in a big world."⁶⁴ The

⁶² Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), 255.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁴ Chaudhuri, "The Birds are on Fire," 65.

human-computer interactions in the work of Cathy Weis have the potential to re-think the global on a local scale which might encourage the reciprocity Chaudhuri yearns for, and work toward a multidirectional exchange between globalized bodies and cultures.

The cyborg has the potential to fill a space too often vacated by fears of the unknown, whether the fears relate to the loss of the live presence on stage, or are fears of what is abject or different. Weis's cyborg theatre palliates an all-too-typical uneasiness of disabled bodies by uniting with technology to create a figure undiminished by the physical or psychological limitations placed on the living flesh. Her own physical limitations become evident when she, at the close of *Monitor Lizards*, puts a leg brace back on to greet her crowd. Her gradual acceptance of the brace after a period of self-consciousness peaked when she recently danced with it on in a piece by Scott Heron. "I wore this really tight sexy black dress and I had my brace on, I was in your face . . . it was kind of liberating to do this, to wear something sexy and have this brace on—and it was still sexy!" In the 2001 *Show Me*, Weis and Heron revive "Fly me to the Moon" (now called "A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad") and Weis wears her brace throughout the piece. This act strengthens the piece and reinforces the themes that seemed implicit in the original version I saw. Thomson makes the following point about literary representations of disability: "If disabled characters acted, as real people with disabilities often do, to counter their stigmatized status, the rhetorical potency of the stigma would be mitigated or lost."⁶⁵ Weis's embrace-ment of this feeling of sexuality empowers her image on stage. Watching her dance this revival I was taken by the beauty of her movement: her

⁶⁵ Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 12.

body sweeping through the image-saturated space re-configured negative tropes of the cyber-subject as body-less and troubled stereotypical representations of disability. Weis's physicality converges with technology on the stages she occupies, creating a practical space that might otherwise be unoccupied by artists with disabilities.

The cyborg theatre of Cathy Weis opens doors for a necessary examination of technology's potentials in the creation of an embodied techno-enhanced posthumanism that has the strength to speak out in the world. I want to return to Kristeva whose construction of abjection is predicated on the linguistic as she writes, "In abjection, revolt is completely within being. Within the being of language. Contrary to hysteria, which brings about, ignores, or seduces the symbolic but does not produce it, the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages."⁶⁶ In writing her own trauma through a bodily engagement with technology, Weis becomes a cyborg-subject, who has used her techno-body to produce alternate sites of understanding that re-define the terms of abjection.

⁶⁶ Kristeva, 45.

CHAPTER THREE

FRAMING THE FRAGMENTS: THE WOOSTER GROUP'S USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The relationship for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden.

—Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"¹

The cyborg theatre of the Wooster Group is comprised of multivalent lenses.

Called deconstructionist and postmodern in an attempt to describe their layered, collaged, pastiche, technological style, the Wooster Group's work can be seen as a parallel to the contemporary critical thought that the "human subject" is no longer a unified whole, but a fragmented complex of systems: body, mind, constructed identities, multiple, cyberized, cyborg. As this critical thought is explored through our lived, material bodies, an understanding of parts to a whole begins to take shape. The Wooster Group relies on the systems of performance—texts, technology, performers, audiences—to make a whole, but their work questions these systems and re-frames them as a different type of cyborg whole emerges. In this chapter I will posit that the system of performance created by the Wooster Group is cyborg. However, unlike the abject body that was the point of emergence for Weis's cyborg, the Wooster Group takes an object body as its starting point. Through this object body's merging with forms of technology, the Wooster Group's cyborg subject is formed.

Michael Vanden Heuvel's *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance* begins

¹ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of*

the investigation of many of the lenses of seeing I use in this chapter. Vanden Heuvel focuses primarily on the Wooster Group's use of alternative texts to create a form of theatre that interfaces what he defines as "drama" and "performance." I will refer to several of his lucid examples of textuality in this chapter as I add another text, that of technology, to the mix. Vanden Heuvel charts the Group's development as it relates to culture: "As the Group begins to recognize the need to move outside the domain of strictly personal and group relations and interactions, however, the works begin to engage conventional texts more representative of, and contextualized by, American culture."²

The Wooster Group productions I discuss in this chapter, *The Emperor Jones*, *House/Lights*, and *To You, the Birdie!*, exemplify Vanden Heuvel's theory but also begin to engage texts that illuminate contemporary issues of identity in an increasingly media-driven age. The Wooster Group productions upset the idea of the "liberal humanist subject" and replace it with a cyborg "body" that can claim no one identity, race, or gender. I will analyze the Wooster Group's techniques of working with video, including techniques of fragmentation and multiple imaging, to understand where the body, the character, and the actor stand in relation to the technological images.

The Object Body

In the work of the Wooster Group, the use of technology is paired with what I will call the "object body." If, as I have written, abject bodies are, to borrow from Judith Butler, *bodies* that don't [yet] matter, then the object bodies of this chapter can be read as bodies that don't [have] *matter*. By this I mean to shift the focus from the material

Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991), 151.

² Michael Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 103.

body that was the concern of chapter one to the ideas, the matters, which in this case make up the matter, the body itself. When the stress is displaced from *bodies* to *matter*, Michel Foucault's social bodies, or Elizabeth Grosz's differentiation between the "inside out" and the "outside in" (described below) can be invoked and an analysis of the construction of subjects through societal forces can be made.³ These are not new ideas certainly, but ones that are useful in describing how bodies can be thought of as sites for a layering on of societal ideas and ideals. My analysis of the *object* focused upon the material bodies at stake in the process of becoming subject. The analysis in this chapter shifts gears and twists the argument inside out—so that the *object* is thought of through the bodies-of-material that construct it. I must add, however, that clearly the bodies of the Wooster Group do in fact both matter, and have matter, and I will address the tension in the group's later work that is perceived as a shift occurs between bodies and matter.

The object body, as I define it, begins from Foucault, Grosz, and Butler's theories of constructing subjectivity. My definition of the object body comes out of their various formulations of the body as a conception, looked at from the "outside in," that is, constructed more through ideas than the materiality of the bodies themselves. Although I use these theories as a springboard, I develop a category for the object body that provides a matrix of possibilities for achieving a new subjectivity when combined with technology on stage. Foucault's theories of the effects of power upon social bodies have influenced a body of feminist theory based upon the constructedness of these social bodies. As Grosz describes it, "for Foucault the body is the field on which the play of powers, knowledges,

³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1994).

and resistances is worked out.”⁴ Foucault’s ideas about how power is dispersed through societal structures provide a key basis for this analysis because he exemplifies how, for example, the idea of discipline functions in historical periods to “subjectify” bodies, thereby resituating them as objects of a larger system. (For Foucault, the disciplined body is a “subject,” in the sense of a subject of the state.) Judith Butler explains that, “for Foucault, this conferral [into ‘being’] can take place only within and by an operation of power. This operation produces the subjects that it subjects: that is, it subjects them in and through the compulsory power relations effective as their formative principle.”⁵ Foucault’s “subjects” are often what I’ve discussed earlier as “abject” bodies. He discusses the insane, prisoners, and supposed sexual “deviants,” but, and this is where I shift from abject to object, not from individual and material sources. In *The Order of Things* he explains:

I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts, or themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive role in the history of the sciences. I should like to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them. In short, I tried to explore scientific discourse not from the

⁴ Ibid., 146.

⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 34.

point of view of the individuals who are speaking, not from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse.⁶

It is precisely, as Foucault states, these “rules that make up the discourse,” rather than the actual bodies themselves that form my conception of the object. I have used Butler’s definition of the abject as “not ‘yet’ subjects,” to delineate material bodies that are denied full societal agency. Butler overlays psychoanalysis on Foucault, describing the construction of the subject through the binary of the abject: “the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation.”⁷ Rather than use the abstract notions of this binary, I am designating the categories of abject and subject to the actual bodies on stage. What Butler describes as “outside” the subject, I will term the object—the conception of an abstract body onto which constructions and identities are layered.

Like Foucault, Butler has material bodies in mind. In *Bodies That Matter*, she responds to criticism that she has absented the actual body from her theories: following Foucault she says that “materiality will be rethought as the effect of power,” and in her list of what is at stake in this reformulation she includes, “a rethinking of the process by which a bodily norm is assumed, appropriated, taken on as not, strictly speaking, undergone by a subject, but rather that the subject, the speaking ‘I,’ is formed by virtue of

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1970), xiii-xiv.

⁷ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

having gone through such a process of assuming a sex.”⁸ This stage, the “process” suggests that this third term, object, can be used. The ideas applied to bodies, the fact that the materiality is abstracted in both Foucault and Butler, if not in life but in theory, allows me to replace her “subject” with the idea of “object” while it undergoes this transformation towards subjectivity. In introducing this third term I realize that I split Butler’s notion of the abject, as I explained in the last chapter, so as to be able to differentiate between the actual bodies and the ideas constituting them. Butler’s own words justify this differentiation: “To call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it; rather, it is to free it from its metaphysical lodgings in order to understand what political interests were secured in and by that metaphysical placing, and thereby to permit the term to occupy and to serve very different political aims.”⁹ The idea that my strategy in reframing Butler’s terms is actually a political one is something I will discuss through the Wooster Group’s work. Although the Group themselves may disagree, I see their strategies also as having political resonance. The object body is generally not the historical Western emoting, actorly body, however, as Butler goes on to explain, “To problematize the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of ‘matter’ can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter.”¹⁰ The Wooster Group’s object bodies, when coupled

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid.

with the visual technology on stage, create these new possibilities.

Despite efforts to politicize (female) bodies by shifting the discourse, as Butler does, towards an object-subject, there remains an uncertainty in accepting an even partially disembodied idea of the body. I suggest the cyborg theatre as an alternate model of reconstituting multiple subjectivities. The cyborg theatre is partially a response to calls such as Elizabeth Grosz's, in *Volatile Bodies*, when she attempts to encourage a model of analysis for an embodied feminist subjectivity. She outlines the different approaches to defining the bodies that have been examined in feminist theory and stresses the importance of including materiality into her own thinking. Grosz's overall project is to problematize ways in which the body has been discussed historically and theoretically from a masculinist point of view, attempting to then create or suggest a new feminist model. She uses the Möbius strip, an "inverted, three-dimensional figure eight"¹¹ to bring together theories that have looked at the body in two ways: first, from the inside out, "in which the body's psychical interior is established as such through the social inscription of bodily processes,"¹² where Grosz uses psychoanalytic, neurophysiological and phenomenological theories to explicate her construct, and second, from the outside in, where she relies on Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, and others who contribute to her definition that "the body is seen as a purely surface phenomenon, a complex, multifaceted surface folded back on itself, exhibiting a certain torsion but nevertheless a flat plane whose incision or inscription produces the (illusion or effects of) depth and

¹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

interiority.”¹³ Although Grosz critiques heavily the masculinist theories she outlines, she does find some theoretical overlaps between masculinist and feminist theories of the body (for example, in Deleuze and Guattari’s work she finds the Rhizome, assemblage, machine, desire, multiplicity, becoming, and the Body without Organs all productive in a feminist theory). She realized that the Möbius strip “is a model not well suited for representing modes of becoming, modes of transformation,”¹⁴ and suggests a theory of bodily flows as a useful model to ponder. While I will leave this project to others, I find her careful look at theories of the body a valuable asset in the development of the object body. This chapter thus draws out another facet of the complex conception of the body to add to the object bodies that I developed in my previous chapter, while exploring the siting of these object bodies as a space for the layering on of multiple lenses/texts.

For Grosz, to readdress the body as the center of subjectivity requires that bodies are looked at as both “a thing and a nonthing,” in that she does not want to focus solely on the body as a biological given, nor does she want to erase its materiality to construct ideas, thereby creating the dualism she is trying to avoid. She goes on to explain that the body is

an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. Human bodies, indeed all animate bodies . . . are objects necessarily different from other objects: they are materialities that are uncontainable in physicalist terms alone. If bodies are objects or things, they are

¹³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴ Ibid., 210.

like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency.¹⁵

In attempting to avoid hierarchical mind-body split tropes, Grosz describes an object-subject, inside-outside body that suggests an experienced, lived body. Within her description, I want to focus on the idea that the body is an object that can “take[s] itself and others as subjects.” To take yourself as subject means that there is room for transformation, for a processual experience to occur. It is this conception of the object body and its transformation that I am interested in. For Grosz and Butler, the goal is specifically a feminist one—an attempt to theorize the existing discourse, which they do admirably. My discussion of the Wooster Group, while it does not exclude the possibilities of a feminist subject, pairs the idea of the object body with technology to “take itself” as subject. The Wooster Group experiments with a cyborg form in which the bodies are subjugated to the layering of meaning. They create subjectivities that question identities through the mediatized lenses of race, multiplicity and fragmentation, and televisual and medical imaging.

The Wooster Bodies

Certainly Kate Valk, Willem Dafoe, and the other members of the Wooster Group could not be considered objects per se: however, I contend that the manner in which director LeCompte and the actors themselves use their bodies on stage seems a conscious effort to maintain a flatness, a neutrality that can then provide a conduit for texts, multiple characters, and images. Their “deadpan style”¹⁶ is frequently noted by critics

¹⁵ Ibid., xi.

¹⁶ Ben Brantley, “Racine’s Pale Queen, Struggling With Racket Sports,” *New York Times*, 19 February 2002, sec. E, p 1.5.

and while this style may be a signature of Wooster Group productions, it is also clearly the very quality that has contributed to the “stardom” of both main actors, Valk and Dafoe. In fact, in the recent production of *To You, the Birdie!* the group references this style by having another actor, Scott Shepherd, imitate the deadpan nasal quality of Dafoe during scenes that are lip-synched. Much of the scholarship on the Wooster Group has focused on their deconstructionist, postmodern techniques, as well as the controversies raised by their textual pastiches and use of controversial issues such as blackface and pornography. In this chapter I briefly address some of the responses to the Wooster Group’s work but focus largely on how the corporeal/technological intersections in specific productions comment on contemporary issues of a mediatized society.

Despite the fact that he refers to it as a “fractured history,”¹⁷ David Savran’s *Breaking the Rules*, is the most comprehensive history and analysis of The Wooster Group from their inception through the 1985 *L.S.D.* (. . . *Just the High Points* . . .). Savran considers their work to be deconstructive, and the book cleverly attempts to replicate some of this deconstruction through its own formula of a non-chronological, fragmented style combining histories, written oral history, theory, interviews, and anecdotes in one thorough volume. Although I will not attempt to rewrite their history here, I will let the following serve as a “high points” chronology of their work. Evolving out of LeCompte and Spalding Gray’s involvement with Richard Schechner’s Performance Group, the Wooster Group’s work began as two trilogy pieces that spanned from 1975 to 1987.¹⁸ During this period they also worked on the theatre piece *North*

¹⁷ David Savran, *Breaking the Rules: The Wooster Group* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1986), 5.

¹⁸ The trilogy was a series entitled *Three Places in Rhode Island*, which consisted of

Atlantic in 1984, and two dance pieces, *Hula* and *For the Good Times* in 1981 and 1983. As Savran discusses in detail, the Group became notorious during this time both for its deconstructions of well-known canonical texts such as Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and for their brazen appropriations of politically-charged images such as performers in blackface.

The Wooster Group's deconstruction of *The Crucible* is now well-documented and has placed them in a historically-charged debate regarding issues of textual authority. Their work with texts has evolved to incorporate greater portions of actual text in a more linear fashion. *Brace Up!* (1991) and *Fish Story* (1994) were based on Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and Eugene O'Neill's two expressionistic texts, *The Emperor Jones* (1993) and *The Hairy Ape* (1995) were done practically in their textual entirety.¹⁹ *House/Lights* (1999) makes a return to a collage of texts, the 1964 soft-core sex film *Olga's House of Shame*, and Gertrude Stein's 1938 *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*. Finally, *To You, The Birdie!* (2002) is a version, pared down but intact, of Racine's *Phèdre*. The Group's reliance on textual deconstruction—the juxtaposition of portions of seemingly disparate texts—through the years has become its primary style. Both Savran and Vanden Heuvel focus their analyses upon types of text used by the Wooster Group. Savran includes a list of their “raw materials,” at the time of his writing: “first, recordings of private interviews or public events . . . second, previously written dramatic material . . . third, prerecorded

Sakonnet Point (1975), *Rumstick Road* (1977), *Nayatt School* (1978), and *Point Judith (An epilogue)*, (1979). The second trilogy, called *The Road to Immortality*, consisted of *Route 1 & 9* (1981), *L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)* (1984), and *Frank Dell's The Temptation of St. Antony* (1987).

¹⁹ Although *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* were produced at approximately the same time, I will only discuss *The Emperor Jones* in this chapter. I feel much of the same criticism I outline could be applied to both and therefore would be redundant.

sound, music, film, and video . . . fourth, the performance space that is left from the last piece . . . finally, improvised action-texts: gesture, dance, and language."²⁰ Savran ultimately defines their technique as a "politicized deconstruction."²¹

Vanden Heuvel's project is to discuss the Wooster Group's "alternative texts" focusing not only on the disparate written texts but how LeCompte created a "fractal" style based on contemporary science; this technique, the "exposure of the text's nonlinearity," he explains, is "not simply destructive, but actually fruitful for several reasons. First, the breakdown of order or textuality allows the Group to expose and explore features of history, reading, and culture, and of textuality itself, that might otherwise be naturalized or suppressed by the neatly joined hierarchical discourses of the hegemonic text."²² In the discussions of text here, both scholars discuss but don't actively name the body as a text, nor is the use of technology analyzed fully. Philip Auslander has extended the discussion to include the Group's deconstruction techniques in terms of acting style and character. In *From Acting to Performance*, Auslander describes a "deconstruction of presence, which enables the performers to eschew charismatic projection, and thus discourages the spectator from endowing either representation or representor with authority, and encourages the spectator to focus instead on the process of representation itself and its collusion with authority."²³ Although I

²⁰ Savran, *Breaking the Rules*, 51.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²² Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance*, 100.

²³ Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1997), 66. Originally printed in *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

critique this idea later in this chapter, Auslander, like Vanden Heuvel and Savran, attempts to find, through the methods of deconstruction, pockets of resistance and politics in the Group's work. As their work has developed, they have consistently used Savran's third category—prerecorded sound, music, film, and video—but in their later productions they have grown increasingly dependent on the visual forms of technology, which speak to an increasingly globalized and mediatized society. As bodies become objects to be exchanged, commodified, and complicit within forms of technology in society, a parallel can be seen in the way these two texts—bodies and technology—operate within the Wooster Group's work. I will focus on how these two texts are teased out in performance and then interconnected to form a new theatrical entity, the cyborg.

In the three sections that follow, I will focus on specific Wooster Group productions that provide varying conceptions of the object body—racialized bodies, bodies confronting issues of identity, and bodies viewed through multiple lenses—which, when enmeshed with televisual and video techniques, become cyborgian. I analyze the Wooster Group's techniques of fragmentation and multiple imaging, to understand where the body, the character, and the actor stand in relation to the technological images. I begin with an analysis of the inscriptions of race on the body in *The Emperor Jones*, investigating the many complications of race that can be found in this production, from O'Neill's Irishness to Valk's playing the role in blackface. The issue of fragmented identity and the potential for subversion is brought out in *House/Lights*, focusing on how the use of Stein's text provided a landscape for a fractal stage. Finally, turning to the production of *To You, the Birdie!*, I explore the work of the Wooster Group through several other frames. Lisa Cartwright's *Screening the Body* exemplifies ways in which

screened, specifically medical cinema technologies have affected and controlled the way life is thought of culturally, and Margaret Morse's *Virtualities* offers intermedial spaces of cyberculture as means of understanding communities in a techno-driven world.

"The Emperor Jones": The Racialized/Sexualized Body

One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others: one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself.

—Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks"²⁴

"The mimicry involved in the depiction of Brutus Jones relies on a topsy-turvy hall of mirrors," writes Shannon Steen in an article that analyzes how Eugene O'Neill's conceptions of his own Irish heritage and whiteness were played out through the idea of blackness in his 1920 play *The Emperor Jones*.²⁵ The play, one of O'Neill's early attempts at expressionism, is a questioning of identity—that of Brutus Jones, a former Pullman Porter who has become the dictator of a small Caribbean Island—that is played out through racial frames of regression and desire.²⁶ Working backward, O'Neill takes Jones on a journey into the night where he struggles to escape from the natives who are preparing a coup and instead faces his own fears, beginning with his own immediate past and memory, (from the murder of a fellow Porter, to his life on the chain gang in prison)

²⁴ Eugene O'Neill, qtd in Shannon Steen "Racial Subjectivity and Whiteness in *The Emperor Jones*," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 3 (October 2000): 358. From Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks," *O'Neill and his Plays: Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. Oscar Cargile, N. Brillion Fagan, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 305.

²⁵ Steen, "Racial Subjectivity and Whiteness in *The Emperor Jones*," 356.

²⁶ Although O'Neill reputedly denied being influenced by German expressionists such as Georg Kaiser, see Mardi Valgemaie's *Accelerated Grimace: Expressionism in the American Drama of the 1920s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), and Ronald H. Wainscott's *Staging O'Neill: The Experimental Years, 1920-1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) for further discussion of the influence of Continental expressionism upon O'Neill.

which then evolves into episodes of a larger social history of slavery and African rituals. While Jones is hunted down by the native islanders for attempting to re-create the very world he was escaping from, he is haunted by the ghosts of a collective racial past—but all seen through the lens of an Irish-American writer.

The production at the Provincetown Players in 1920 is historically best known as being the first Broadway show to use a black actor in a leading role. Originally played by Charles Gilpin, the role went to Paul Robeson in a later production after O'Neill and Gilpin disputed over Gilpin's attempt to tone down O'Neill's racially problematic text. The text, written in heavy black dialect with an alternative Cockney accent for the white character Smithers, was peppered with racial slang that Gilpin felt was inappropriate. Although Robeson championed the opportunity to play a serious role, the play has continued to be criticized frequently for its racism. This historical production and the play's troubled racial legacy are well-documented: in selecting this play, the Wooster Group could not avoid the historical and cultural frames that accompany the text.²⁷ The object body here begins to take shape through the historical legacy of O'Neill's own relation to race and the use of race in his text. To this the Wooster Group adds their own residual strains of race politics—the controversy over their use of blackface in past performances. Out of these historical resonances emerges the Wooster Group's production, which complicates the pre-existing notions of race, and now also adds gender, by having Kate Valk perform the role of Jones in blackface. To these complex strata of bodily relationships to race and gender the Group adds technology—in this case

²⁷ See Steen's excellent notes for historical as well as contemporary references to the production and play. Also see: Waincott, Valgemae, and Michael Manheim, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

three large video monitors on the stage that become another surface to literally turn the ideas of race back around, creating a mirror reflecting back and forth in a seemingly endless loop, destabilizing any one fixed reading of race. The intricate frames through which this layering takes place begin with O'Neill's text and the original productions. Shannon Steen posits that "the actor imitates O'Neill's fantasy of blackness, which in turn is based on O'Neill's own feelings of exclusion and alienation produced by his ambiguously positioned Irishness. Brutus Jones, then, is an imitation of blackness that is itself really an imitation of whiteness."²⁸ Reading across contemporary discourses of blackness and whiteness, Steen clearly explains how for O'Neill, "the black body becomes a site on which the sense of alienation characteristic of modern experience is projected."²⁹ Steen's argument does not legitimize or justify O'Neill's now stereotypical depiction of Jones, but she does try to resituate it within a psychoanalytic trope of loss and melancholia by examining how O'Neill's outsider status as Irish led to his identification with black Americans. In the Wooster Group production, this status could be conferred upon Valk, as a woman in a man's (authorially created) world. By putting on the mask of blackface Valk can be read as "identifying" as male. What happens when the black body, the object of the exploration of alienation, is refigured as a white woman, acting as a man, in blackface? Do the politics of race change and/or get distanced from the original site through the use of video techniques in the production? Is it possible to read this gendered blackface as a commentary on mediatized bodies? The Wooster

2000).

²⁸ Steen, "Racial Subjectivity and Whiteness in *The Emperor Jones*," 356.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

Group production prompts these questions, even if it perhaps intentionally provides no such answers.

The Wooster Group's first notable experimentation with blackface was in *Route 1 & 9*, which juxtaposed a deconstruction of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and a reconstruction of a Pigmear Markham (a black entertainer who did a Vaudeville act in blackface) comedy routine.³⁰ David Savran spoke to Elizabeth LeCompte about the use of blackface in the production: "On a conscious level, it was a visual idea, an exercise in performance, a device to give the performance distance. Blackface offered a physical mask, as well as the throwaway vaudeville style and the 'non-acting' we had explored in porn films for Nayatt School."³¹ What began as an "exercise" resulted in the Group's loss of funding by New York State and critical concerns of their racism.³² Like O'Neill's attempt to somehow problematize his own Irishness, the Wooster Group, a small avant-garde company, may have at first uncritically used race as an analogue to their "outsider" status as a downtown experimental theatre company. In both cases, there may be a case of what cultural theorist Susan Gubar calls, "Racechanging," a term she suggests means "the traversing of race boundaries, racial imitation or impersonation, cross-racial mimicry or mutability, white posing as black or black posing as white, pan-racial mutuality."³³

³⁰ See Savran's account of *Route 1 & 9* for an in-depth analysis of the piece and the use of blackface.

³¹ Savran, *Breaking the Rules*, 26-27.

³² See Jon Erickson's "Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary American Performance: The Wooster Group, Holly Hughes, and Karen Finley," *Theatre Journal* 42.2 (May 1990): 225-236, for a critique of the Group's choices to use blackface.

³³ Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

Gubar relies on critical race theory, including Franz Fanon, but qualifies her own work:

That I have not followed a reversal of Fanon's formula to subtitle this project 'White Skin, Black Masks,' [Gubar's is subtitled *White Skin, Black Face*] means I want to draw attention to a blurring of boundaries involved in racial masquerades: When white people portray African-Americans, they embody (and displace) them. The phrase 'Black Face' is meant to invoke the history of burnt cork in minstrelsy on white subjectivity. Put simply, it is not nearly as easy to take off a black face as it is to remove a black mask.³⁴

The Wooster Group's use of blackface is a good example of the racial masquerade by an all white company. Their original use might be rationalized as a political stance as Auslander, Savran, and others have posited, but in *The Emperor Jones* the Wooster Group's use of blackface and its mediatized counterpart is at once a reference to their past troubles over this image as well as a complex albeit still somewhat problematic attempt to resituate the racial body within a mediatized consciousness.

The Wooster Group production opens with a reference to O'Neill's stage directions that the Emperor's palace room should be white-washed, with white floors. The stage is white and stark, backed by three evenly-spaced video monitors. As the lights come up on the stage a figure can be seen upstage of the floor; it is Kate Valk and she begins to speak through a microphone in a high female voice. Following O'Neill's directions, Valk, in a kerchief, seems to be in the palace of the Emperor playing an old black woman who is trying to deliver a message to Jones. Wearing blackface, her reading the lines of the black woman is unsettling at first, and the thick black dialect that

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.

O'Neill wrote jarring to hear. As the image starts to become familiar, a camera facing Valk suddenly clicks on and Valk's face is projected onto the video screen as she speaks—her blackface mask is suddenly projected in a negative image on the screen. This complicated opening image, Valk's on-stage face wearing the mask of make-up that will be Brutus Jones but screened in negative to play the old woman as reminder of her white femaleness under the mask, references O'Neill masking his own whiteness through the black character of Jones in the play. As we see the white face on the screen and hear Valk's feminine voice, a sense of the familiar is slowly replaced by the recognition that the mask of make-up is being reversed. In this initial, multi-layered image, the use of technology frames and then distances the underlying representations of woman and whiteness, creating a distancing device that also points to the use of signification rather than representation, perhaps an attempt to deflect charges of racism in the use of this mask. This technique also reflects a politicized reading of O'Neill, one in which his Irishness was a negative, or reverse blackness.³⁵ Although conflating race and gender is a problematic strategy, the addition of the screen pushes and pulls our expectations at once, distancing Valk from the blackface by reminding us of what is underneath, while simultaneously questioning the media's historical propensity to erase certain gendered and racialized representations on screens of television and film. The video's role as framing device pushes the object of representation, the white Valk, away through the camera's eye, just as her on-stage body now returns in full bravado and wearing a

³⁵ For a more detailed exploration of the complex relationship between Immigrants and African-Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Michael Rogin's *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Kabuki-inspired costume as Brutus Jones.

In the characterizations and actions of Jones and his white, Cockney counterpart Smithers, the Wooster Group begins a critique of technology and the body. Through most of the show, Smithers, played by Willem Dafoe, sits upstage and speaks his lines to Jones through a microphone. Concurrently, he attempts to mimic the pre-recorded video image of himself that is projected to the audience. As Smithers, he appears both as a live and a mediatized presence throughout the show with video sections broken up into three segments. In each one, Dafoe attempts to link-up his on-stage live character with the pre-recorded versions—the first was recorded when he was drunk (or pretending to be), another has a camera panning in on and out from him, and the third is his face in extreme close-up. In each section the video is overlaid with a “scratch tape” which distorted Dafoe’s image and gave a ghostly appearance.³⁶ The Wooster Group is notorious for eschewing any psychologically based acting style and scholarship about them is full of anecdotes of LeCompte’s methods to prevent the actors from “acting.” Philip Auslander has written about Dafoe’s use of glycerine tears in *L.S.D.* and says that “the technical processes of acting are demystified, as by the glycerine, but the central issue of mediation, of what intervenes between performer and audience, is raised but left intentionally unanswered.”³⁷ In *Emperor Jones*, the video becomes this mediating device between the performer Dafoe, and the spectator. The video here acts as a mask that mediates Dafoe’s/Smithers’s inner life. The pre-recorded acting track serves as one layer

³⁶ As discussed in an informal interview with the Wooster Group video designer Phillip Bussmann, who also assisted with access to archival videos at the Performing Garage, 30 August 1999.

³⁷ Philip Auslander, “Task and Vision: Willem Dafoe in *L.S.D.*,” in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Phillip Zarrilli (London: Routledge, 1995), 307.

of characterization that Dafoe builds on by imitating it live on stage. He may not be aiming for a realistic portrayal of a drunk on stage, but by possibly being drunk on video, or at least having a bottle to lift as he acts drunk on stage, his performance is layered upon a foundation of tape. However, Valk's performance as Jones is for the most part, unmediated by technology (after the initial image of her as the old woman), as if the technology has absented the white, female Valk, leaving only the mask of make-up between Valk and the audience.

Susan Gubar's reading of Man Ray's photograph, *Noire et Blanche* (*Black and White*, 1926) reveals a parallel relationship between male/female and black/white bodies as mediated through technology at approximately the same time period as the writing of O'Neill's play. In this photo, a white female with refined features and slicked-back black hair is resting her head on a table-top, while holding up a long thin black African mask. The woman's eyes are closed and as Gubar describes the image, "both are blind, the objects rather than the subjects of the gaze."³⁸ Gubar describes the woman's face as "'made-up' like a Japanese mask" (Valk's body is also performing another "other" by wearing a Japanese costume) and describes the way she holds up the mask as "less an act of ownership than an indication of bonding or camaraderie, a touching connection that links two fetishized objects of otherness, the beauty of blackness and of white femininity killed into art."³⁹ The Wooster Group's *Emperor Jones* merges these two objects into one through Valk—both white woman and black man—each still viewed, like the photographed woman and the mask she hold up, as objects. Appropriately, Man Ray's

³⁸ Gubar, *Racechanges*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

image is a part of a series in which he, the controller of the technological process, also reversed the image and printed the negative version as part of the series. In this negative image, the African mask turns white and the woman's face black. According to Gubar's reading, "the inanimate object gains animation while the presence of the living model is reduced to a ghostly absence"⁴⁰ Within the text of O'Neill's script, Jones's reinscription of white power structures on the island is his attempt to efface the magnitude of the black presence into a "ghostly absence" while his "whiteness" allows him to gain animation, or power. In the Wooster Group production, the object Valk/Jones is unable to gain animation/power through technology—for when the black/white image is reversed and the blackfaced Valk appears as a white woman on a screen, she has been stripped of both her initial gender and race as well as the maleness ascribed to her in performance, leaving only a "ghostly presence." This image reproduces the Man Ray negative image but leaves both objects stripped of their animation/power. I would suggest that, on an extrinsic level, the Man Ray photograph essentially does the same through *his* control of the photographic apparatus, which objectifies both images regardless of whether each is seen as black and white or its negative. The tech is "manned" in *Emperor Jones* by the omnipresence of Dafoe's Smithers, the only true white power on the island. Consequently, the object body of Valk/Jones, a white woman playing a black man, is problematically reinscribed while it disappears in this complex overdetermination of bodies.

As unsettling as these provocative images and ideas are as played out on stage, I believe Gubar is correct in stating that "racechanging imagery deploys sexual

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

iconography to create a host of provocative connections and tensions between conceptions of race and those of gender.”⁴¹ The Wooster Group, perhaps unintentionally, yet astutely, creates a tension between race, gender, and technology that points out the frequent boundary blurring between each. Steen returns to Judith Butler to illustrate how O’Neill’s writing blackness through Jones is akin to the construction of a drag performance motivated by desire, she writes, “Brutus Jones is not, nor does [s]he represent, a ‘real’ black body, but rather the projected fantasy of blackness onto the visually blank space of the stage.”⁴² Following the Wooster Group’s cross-gender casting I have switched gender of pronouns in this passage to demonstrate how gender and race fold back on each other to demonstrate the locus of power in O’Neill’s play and the Wooster Group’s construction of it. LeCompte and Valk may seem to walk a fine line between an uncritical, racist caricature, but their complex relationship to technology diffuses this racist charge. Their use of technology as a mask and a power structure go beyond a mere analysis of race and gender to address a twenty-first century relationship to technology’s role in these issues.

The final framing sequence replicates the opening video blackface reversal structure but is essentially a breakdown of gender divisions over racial ones. In the final scene of the play, Smithers and the Native Chief, Lem, discuss Jones’s death. Dafoe plays both characters, alternating between Smithers’s heavy Cockney dialect and Lem’s African chief’s voice. The “acting” is created through the voice in conjunction with the camera, which simply switches effortlessly from one prerecorded character to the other,

⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴² Steen, “Racial Subjectivity and Whiteness in *The Emperor Jones*,” 357.

flip-flopping between straightforward black and white imaging for Smithers to a negative image for Lem, Dafoe in a mediatized blackface. This exchange reverses the opening image but leaves holes of critical space for an analysis of how race and gender are implicated in technology. If, as one critical reviewer has commented, “technology itself functions as a kind of mask,”⁴³ then in *Emperor Jones*, the technology functions as a not so thinly veiled masc-uline power. The Wooster Group inscribes the bodies on stage with technology, race, and gender in *The Emperor Jones*, ultimately creating a loss of stability in any one category as each shifts and oscillates. The bodies are refracted through the lens of technology, which becomes the meta-inscription that evacuates the body of both race and (female) gender. Although the Group’s subsequent productions begin to revel more readily in the mergings of the body and technology, this one is reluctant, wary, and constructs rather than represents issues of race and gender in cautionary and careful ways.

One further mention of video usage in *Emperor Jones* is as an ironic commentary. To evoke the island Jones occupies, a beautiful shot of palm trees swaying in the wind is projected on one of the video screens. As a mere scenic device this contained, exoticized image could represent the falsity of Jones’s occupation, his attempt at Westernizing this island. However, Jones’s control of the island and the video technology is usurped when the video frame reveals yet another frame—the image is distanced, pulled away from the camera to reveal this as a photo in a picture book. Moments such as this serve as multiple levels of commentary—a *trompe l’oeil* scenic device pointing to the false premises of a colonial situation, but also an ironic comment from the perspective of white

⁴³ Zander Brietzke, Review of *The Emperor Jones*, by Eugene O’Neill, as performed by

“big brother” Smithers, always in control and looking over the island that Jones supposedly rules.

“House/Lights”: *Multiple, Sexual, Landscapes*

Because Stein’s theater compositions do not proceed from a single fixed viewpoint, they empower us as spectators to enter and to leave the field wherever we will, free to choose our vantage points and to endow the landscape with multiple meaning—or none at all beyond our experience of it.

—Jane Bowers, *Land/Scape/Theater*⁴⁴

The title of the Wooster Group’s 1999 *House/Lights*, reveals the two central “texts” around which the piece is built, the 1964 soft-core sex film *Olga’s House of Shame*, and Gertrude Stein’s 1938 *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*. This structural intertwining has been typical of the Wooster Group style, as seen for example in the multiple elements running through *Route 1 & 9*: a homemade porn film, Wilder’s *Our Town*, and the previously mentioned Pigmeat Markham blackface routine. Like *Route 1 & 9*, the structural elements that make up *House/Lights* are both film and dramatic text, but this particular text by Stein seems created for the Wooster Group style. Stein’s language-based work has a fragmented logic to it and the text is concerned with a Faustian bargain over electric light—it appears a perfect choice for the Group. The use of the visual technology is here also limited to the video monitors which serve as a site for framing and fragmentation of multiple and sexual identities, but in this playful exploration Stein’s textual style opens up a scientific and cyberized look at the merging of the live body and the technology.

the Wooster Group, New York, *Theatre Journal* 50.3 (October 1998): 384-385.

⁴⁴ Jane Bowers, “Gertrude Stein’s Theater Landscapes,” in *Land/Scape/Theater*, eds. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, University of Michigan Press, 2002), qtd. in “A Play to Be Performed” *Theater* 32.2 (2002): 20

Theorist Michael Vanden Heuvel links LeCompte/The Wooster Group's aesthetic with a relatively new (1975) scientific theory, Benoit Mandelbrot's "fractal geometry," which, as Vanden Heuvel describes, "made it possible to claim that discontinuity in nature remains constant over different scales; that is, that irregularity can itself be periodic, regular."⁴⁵ Basically, Mandelbrot created a means by which to measure what Euclidean geometry was unable to—the odd and irregular, the "shapes of chaos."⁴⁶ In the Wooster Group aesthetic then, a "fractal theatre" style is created in which they opt to "focus the spectator's vision on the rough texture and unstable jointure of both the performance and the reality it purposes to represent."⁴⁷ Writing after Vanden Heuvel, Bonnie Marranca, in her introduction to Stein's plays, *Last Operas and Plays*, reinforces Vanden Heuvel's idea about the Wooster Group but through Stein:

Her orientation reflected the new world of physics in its development of composition as a field of innumerable centers. If artists create worlds before science can find proof of them, surely looking back over the century it is now obvious that Stein's technique has affinities with what has come to be known as chaos theory. Many of its defining features describe her writing: the pattern of self-similarity, words acting as strange attractors, the importance of scale, deep structures of order within unpredictable systems. Stein is a master of what can be thought of as the 'fractal text,' which makes her theater an exciting guide to a

⁴⁵ Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance*, 99. Also see N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) for a description of Mandelbrot's theories.

⁴⁶ Vanden Heuvel, *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance*, 99.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

dramaturgy of chaotics.⁴⁸

The idea of a “fractal stage” seems useful in the description of *House/Lights* in particular: the rough textures and unstable jointures between the Stein text, which is performed live, and the *Olga* film, played out on the video cameras, are indeed chaotic and rely upon the spectator’s vision to complete the picture. The textual combination in *House/Lights* fragments any notion of characterization thereby representing the object body as a vessel for multiple identities, but ones constructed through the spectator rather than from within the actor’s persona. Marranca, in her understanding of Stein’s text called *Plays*, says “Stein’s landscape makes itself known to you according to your individual powers of perception: you complete the view.”⁴⁹ The spectator’s complicity is increased in the Wooster Group’s later work, and becomes an important component of the cyborg theatre from an ethical standpoint, as I will discuss in the next section.

The main threads of *House/Lights* intertwine Stein’s Faustian bargaining in exchange for electric light with Olga’s potentially lesbian underground jewel smuggling ring in ways that sometimes foreground the Stein text and sometimes foreground *Olga*. For the *Olga* sections the actors often closely mimic and re-enact the film’s actions—for example, in a deftly theatricalized version of an outdoor chase scene the live actors negotiate over see-sawing wooden platforms that also move forward and back. Kate Valk commented on the technological process

We have quite a long and developed relationship with television—we use the monitors as mirrors, or as sources of information that either illustrate what we’re

⁴⁸ Bonnie Marranca, Introduction to *Gertrude Stein: Last Operas and Plays*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, PAJ Books, 1949, 1995), xxvii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xi.

doing or disrupt what we're doing. But in this instance, we were using the monitors very directly as a way of channeling something: We had the performers watching the Olga film on TV and mimicking exactly what they saw gesturally and translating the logic of the camera—close-up, medium shot, long shot—into the theatrical space.⁵⁰

The spaces of the stage, like the text, are fluid sites, having no fixed location and constantly in motion. Johan Callens describes this complex set: “rotating see-saws, wheel bound swivel stools, moving monitors, and shifting tea tables . . . combined into an intricate, not quite runway machine, a technological mask or maddening object theatre, reducing the performers to cogs and wheels, as in Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936) or Lyubov Popova’s constructivist set for Meyerhold’s production of Crommelynck’s *Cocu Magnifique* (1922).”⁵¹ Stein calls her works “landscapes,” which link her to the art world she was a part of in Paris in the 1920s but also give a tableau-like sense to her plays—a style where the elements are in relation with one another but do not necessarily have any other connection.⁵² Jane Bowers modifies the term to “lang-scapes,” to emphasize the shaping of language in her plays and its material importance as an equal component of what is on the stage: “each utterance in a Stein play is meant to be responded to as we respond to space—as a totality, present in each instant but not connected to subsequent

⁵⁰ Bevy Rosten, “The Gesture of Logic,” *American Theatre* 15.2 (February 1998): 17.

⁵¹ Johan Callens. “From Dismemberment to Prosthetics: The Wooster Group’s *House/Lights*” *Homo Orthopedicus: Le corps et ses prothèses à l’époque (post)moderniste*. eds. Nathalie Roelens and Wanda Strauven. Collection “L’Ouverture Philosophique” (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001) 393-415. In this essay Callens does a stimulating close reading of all of the texts, literary and televisual, and their antecedents, that are found in *House/Lights*.

⁵² Stein, *Plays*, xlvi-lii

instants except by juxtaposition of echoing.”⁵³ The “land/langscapes” of the Wooster Group’s stage can be interpreted as commentary on another kind of space-shifting—cyberscapes. The Wooster Group’s fragmentation and manipulation of media techniques points to the multiple subjectivities made possible by Internet usage and the increasing cyborgian construction of live bodies interfacing with technology.

Feminist and technological theorist Sue-Ellen Case finds the spatiality of Stein’s texts a portal through which a cyber-lesbian can subversively approach electronic space, perhaps creating an encrypted space against the anti-homosexual Right and other Fundamentalist groups on line. Through Stein’s subversive grammatical formations, Case looks for a way out of traditional inscription. “In Stein’s script,” Case writes, “the spatial traditions of meaning inscribe not so much the problem of late capitalism as high heterosexism, which is laid, like land mines, within the linear prescriptions of grammatical conventions.”⁵⁴ Stein’s lesbianism and life with long time partner Alice B. Toklas is part of her historical landscape. Case, trying to examine ways to “perform lesbian at the end of print culture,” (the subtitle of her book) looks to the Cubist spatial strategy Stein uses in her texts as ways of disrupting modes of seeing on the Internet and other screened surfaces, in the way that Stein disrupted traditional grammatical construction. The Wooster Group enacts this subversion in the performance strategies I will discuss. Their reorganization of space, of texts, and their confusion of identities bring to performance what Case is seeking on-line. “Spatial reorganizations divert this drive to heterosexist coupling, helping to create an encrypted lesbian address. Along

⁵³ Bowers, 20.

⁵⁴ Sue-Ellen Case, *The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the end of Print Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 85.

with textual choreography, Stein's performance texts vociferously and repetitively circulate meaning in the system of representation while keeping its detonation unavailable."⁵⁵ The use of Stein's already fractured performance text, coupled with a more overt reading of lesbian sexual identity in *Olga*, all intermixed with and through screens of technology sets up a cyborg space for spectators to engage with freely, assuming and relating to whichever position, character, or amalgam of story they like.

Similar to the use of video on Dafoe's character in *Emperor Jones*, the *House/Lights* video often frames specific character intentions. After the long chase scene in the *Olga* section, Valk, playing one of the jewel smugglers, Elaine, is caught and tied up by Nick, *Olga*'s co-conspirator, played by Roy Faudree. He sits at a table in front of her for questioning and the spectators see a third plane in front of him, the monitor, on which the camera pans to a close up of his over-stuffed crotch. Later, the same angle shot is used as Elaine sits with *Olga* (who doubles as Mephistopheles and is played by Suzzy Roche) to indicate *Olga*'s desire for Elaine. In both cases within the *Olga* segments, the video stands in for the sexual thoughts the melodramatically evil villain characters are not speaking. In contrast, video in the Stein segments, as I outline below, interrogates various issues of the body's relationship to media: through multiple identities and through cyborgian relationships. The video in the Stein section is cleverly used to assist with the dense doubling within the different texts.

Stein's text is fragmented and a playful challenge in itself. In fact, Stein does not consistently delineate characters within her text: some lines are assigned to specific characters, while for others the speaker is ambiguous. The Wooster Group, although

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

constantly purporting to be “uninterested in interpretation”⁵⁶ uses video techniques to illuminate Stein’s elliptical text, sparking references to contemporary mediatization. The character Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is stung by a viper in the course of Stein’s text and Dr. Faustus sells his soul to save her. Perhaps she is hallucinating from the viper sting, perhaps it is a play on words, but Valk looks for herself, saying:

Look and see

Is she there

Is she there

Anywhere

Look and see

Is she there

Yes she is there

There is there

She is there⁵⁷

During this section Valk’s image is projected onto the monitor beside her. At first the screen acts as her double, making literal her two-named nature. As she continues to speak her physical gestures begin to respond to the textual content. For example, after saying “Look and see, is she there,” Valk ducks to the side as she says “Yes she is there.” Suddenly behind her on the screen is yet another image of herself, pre-recorded

⁵⁶ Rosten, “The Gesture of Logic,” 16.

⁵⁷ Gertrude Stein, *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*, in *Last Operas and Plays*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1949), 105. A strong case could be made for the doubled female character in both Stein’s text and the Wooster Group production as representative of a lesbian subjectivity, however, that is beyond the scope of this project.

and coming through in a yellowish tone. She repeats this gesture several times revealing the same image. The most deeply framed image then begins to take over the lines, speaking through a digitally imposed, larger-than-life set of lips that move rather slowly as the live Valk continues to speak the words. The multiple imaging of Valk is then expanded with the lines, "they two I two they two that makes six it should be seven they two I two they two five is heaven."⁵⁸ As she ducks to the side this time, six smaller versions of the prerecorded face encircle the central face for a humorous finale of multiple identities. This multiplication was evidently a product of improvisation with the video in rehearsal that is typical of the Wooster Group, but its comment on the location of identity in an increasingly fragmented and media-driven society seemed prescient.⁵⁹ Where was/were the character(s)? On what level could she/they communicate? The reliance on technology to communicate, as demonstrated by Valk's double character trapped within the video monitor, reproduces the simultaneous desire for and the wariness of technology of Stein's Faustus, (also played by Valk) who sells his soul for electric light. Sue-Ellen Case warns that, "while cyberspace promises to include everything within its screen, the hype of possibilities should not be wholly consumed without an eye to its exclusions."⁶⁰ We are immersed in technology and must not lose sight of our own representations within it.

The Wooster Group explores complex corporeal/technological intersections, whether intentional or not, in the spirit of play. One of the most intricate technical

⁵⁸ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁹ Phillip Bussmann, interviewed by author, New York, New York, 30 August 1999.

⁶⁰ Case, *The Domain-Matrix*, 4.

aspects in *House/Lights* is a sequence that explores the merging of the live body with the technology. Projected in the downstage center video monitor, a “water ballet” takes shape on screen. Although serving primarily as a humorous interlude in the production, it also represents an example by which to explore the cyborg metaphor more fully.

Following the scene previously described, the background that had revealed the multiple images of the hidden Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel was suddenly replaced by clips of elaborate dances from the film *The Ziegfeld Follies*. As Valk ducked, the clips shifted, as if taking her to several locales.⁶¹ In one instance, Esther Williams and scenes from her water ballets filled the screen, which then shifted to a screen of water, into which Valk, live, held her nose and sunk into from behind. As she sunk down, a video effect of her head being submerged was achieved on screen. The live action continued as other actors joined in, pretending to slowly swim through the dry space. On the screen however, films of underwater swimmers were successfully merged with the live action, creating an integration of the two mediums. This pastiche of texts is typical of the Wooster Group. Their production style, weaving together many strands of culture—from the main texts of *Faustus* and *Olga*, to a short segment of water ballet, from a segment from the movie *Young Frankenstein*, to a video puppet show—is now far less challenging a style than when they began. In a post-postmodern world of windows and multi-tasking, “texts” are incorporated rapidly and with ease. Seeing the gaps between the images, slowing down and understanding if there is a relation to each other and ourselves is perhaps a greater

⁶¹ In the interview with Phillip Bussmann, he explained to me that the technique was similar to the chroma key technique in which a blue screen behind an actor can be replaced on film by any other image. The technique he used was called a luminesce key and it basically achieved the same effect by using a black screen behind the actors. New York City, New York. 30 August 1999.

task.

Through the merging of the object body and technology, along with the accumulation of cultural detritus in their production landscape, the Wooster Group has developed a style of deconstruction that re-animates texts, bodies, and technology in a cyborg form, each component mutually dependent upon the other. Philip Auslander's description of *L.S.D.* seems fitting for the work they do:

The production makes no attempt to assess the truth value of any one documentation over any other, any mode of presentation over any other: the production is as much a symptom of information's self-consumption as an analysis of it. The Wooster Group's deconstruction of presence, however, makes its presentation self-conscious enough to resist the numbing effect of mediatization.⁶²

However, as their work seems to come to revolve more centrally around the charismatic performances of Dafoe and Valk, Auslander's argument based on their deconstruction of presence weakens. In almost all of the reviews for *Emperor Jones*, *House/Lights*, and the production of *To You, the Birdie!*, my next section (and it is telling that they even allowed the productions to be reviewed, something they have refused to do in the past), reviewers commented on Valk's performance. Michael Feingold's simple tribute to Valk's Brutus Jones is as follows, "who has not seen Kate Valk in this production has not seen a marvel."⁶³ The Wooster Group's legacy appears to be their imprint, their formula for the collision of a variety of elements at once: video, amplified sound, physical/gestural

⁶² Auslander, *From Acting to Performance*, 70.

⁶³ Michael Feingold, "Rites and Wrongs," A Review of *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O'Neill as performed by The Wooster Group, *The Village Voice*, 24 March 1998, 137.

movements and break out dances, a variety of texts all carefully and slowly improvised and rehearsed until the chaos forms an order while retaining interesting ruptures. Ben Brantley describes the form well in a review of *House/Lights*,

Live performance is juxtaposed with what emerges from an assortment of television screens that record, splinter and transform what is happening on stage until you're no longer sure which image has the greatest reality . . . It also never loses sight of the idea of the increasing uncertainty of identity in the modern age . . . The ways in which *House/Lights* carries out the confusion of flesh and technology, of self and the projected image, are often breathtaking.⁶⁴

Small companies around the New York City area have developed using a Wooster Group aesthetic, indeed some are created by former Wooster Group designers and interns.

Companies such as Collapsible Giraffe and Elevator Repair Service have developed a form, (or in some instances simply mimicked their predecessor) that is as comfortable mediating the body through various technologies as it is including a dance segment.

However, in many of the emerging "techno-theatre" groups, the element of the live does not reach the level the Wooster Group has been able to through their long collaboration not only of actors and director but of technical designers as well. This element allows the Group's work to be viewed, perhaps against their intention, from the critical perspective that seeks to understand the increasingly complex bodily configurations in a mediatized age.

⁶⁴ Ben Brantley, "A Case for Cubism and Deals With Devils," *New York Times*, 3 February 1999, sec E, p.1. 5.

“Phèdre”: Looking through Lenses

Placing a specimen on the instrument’s stage and closing one eye to peer through the viewfinder, the microscopist sees the body in a manner that effectively distances the observer from the subjective experience of the body imaged. Excised from the body, stained, blown up, resolved, pierced by a penetrating light, and perceived by a single squinting eye, the microscopic specimen is apparently stripped of its corporeality, its function, and its history even as it serves as a final proof of the health, pathology, or sexuality of the subject whose body it represents.

—Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body*⁶⁵

The arts of presentation and, particularly, video installation, are the privileged art forms for setting this mediated, built environment into play for purposes of reflection. Indeed, the underlying premise of the [video art] installation appears to be that the audiovisual experience supplemented kinesthetically can be a kind of learning not with the mind alone, but with the body itself.

—Margaret Morse, *Virtualities*⁶⁶

Using examples from the Group’s most recent production, *To You, The Birdie, I* conclude that the Group’s use of technology ultimately returns to the “art of the body,” rethinking the idea of subjectivity through a metaphoric film loop between the bodies and technologies on stage generating a cyborg performance model. In her discussion of video installation art, Margaret Morse asks:

Who is the subject of the experience? Performance, even where it has installation-like sets, differs from installation, because the artist occupies the position of the subject within the installation world. Interactive work differs in yet another way. Room is made for the visitor to play with the parameters of a posited world, thus taking on a virtual role of ‘artist/installer’ if not the role of

⁶⁵ Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine’s Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 83.

⁶⁶ Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 161.

artist as declarer and inventor of that world.”⁶⁷

While it is so that the “viewer/audience” attending the Wooster Group’s performances are not interactive in the sense of installation art, I find Morse’s ideas relevant in that the Wooster Group is clearly asking many of the same questions of subjectivity as installations do, only on the stage. The play of subject/object crucial in Morse’s analysis of video art installation is taken up in the performance structure of the Wooster Group as well.

The two epigraphs for this section are taken from theorists who question the role of subjectivity in a mediatized age. Lisa Cartwright’s *Screening the Body* exemplifies ways in which screened, specifically medical cinema technologies have affected and controlled the way life is thought of culturally, and Margaret Morse’s *Virtualities* offers intermedial spaces of cyberspace as means of understanding communities in a techno-driven world. Cartwright looks at uses of cinema in medical science to “analyze, regulate, and reconfigure the transient, uncontrollable field of the body.”⁶⁸ She says that the purpose of her study is to “demonstrate how the cinema, an instrument of popular entertainment, functioned as a part of a social apparatus through which the cultures of Western science and medicine shaped and built the life they studied, and how individual subjects and cultures aided, confounded, or resisted Western medical science’s normative life-building projects in the first half of this century.”⁶⁹ Specifically, her discussion of the microscopic motion picture, or cine-microscope, depicts a cultural shift through

⁶⁷ Ibid., 163.

⁶⁸ Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, xiii.

⁶⁹ Ibid., xvii.

microscopy that begins by seeing the body as unified, but then shifts to a systematized view of isolated parts and fragments that set up “microcosms of cultural norms about the body and subjectivity,” not of a “seeing subject” but of a “social subject.”⁷⁰

Morse, on the other hand, begins with the idea that cultural exchanges are “automated” and that machines now function within a cyberculture to facilitate these exchanges. For Morse, the accretion of technology has created a dizzying world of postmodernism and fragmentation and types of virtualities—in the case of this epigraph, video art installation—allow the “visitors” of the installation to reflect on their worlds by immersing themselves in the technology where an “experience” can occur, implying a reconnected “wholeness” through the immersion.

The Wooster Group’s use of technology exemplifies a shift from a conception of “whole” to the fragmented and back again but in a reconfigured form.⁷¹ The Wooster Group’s space of performance—i.e. the world of their stage—is similar to that of the “experience” Morse refers to. The Wooster Group illustrates Lisa Cartwright’s notion that “the body is rendered part of a living system that incorporates the technologies of its representations.”⁷² Through the meticulous balance of techniques and ideas of framing, gaps, presence, and layering, the “Wooster Group body” resituates Cartwright’s “social” subject and the authority of a “speaking subject” described by Morse, as a way to see a radically reconfigured, potentially even feminist, model of cyber-subjectivity, a model

⁷⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁷¹ I use quotations around the term whole, because I agree with Sue-Ellen Case’s notion that fragmentation presumes a whole from which to fragment—she instead prefers the term “net of notions.” See Case, *The Domain Matrix*, 7.

⁷² Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, xiv.

developed by Donna Haraway's *The Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway writes:

Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other.⁷³

The cyborg theatre as constructed by the Wooster Group is developed through a series of explorations into the mutual constitution between myth and tool. In *To You, The Birdie!* the group literally builds upon historic myth-making, examining the ways in which tools and myths imprint upon and reframe each other, ultimately positing technology's mythmaking in contemporary society.

To You, The Birdie, a loose adaptation of Racine's *Phèdre*, is installation-like as performance. The Wooster Group's deconstruction and blending of "texts" brings together: the story of Phèdre, the tormented queen who struggles over the lust for her step-son Hippolytos; the game of badminton; gliding three-foot screens and television-like monitors; Greek "ghosts in the machine;" a sophisticated vocal score of human narration and syncopated sound effects—as screens slide into place or birdies fly through the air; and scatological explorations of the body. The piece opens to expose the Wooster Group world—in the large hangar-like St. Ann's Warehouse, (a move to a larger space

⁷³ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 164.

for this production) Hippolytos and Theramenes, his friend, enter the typical grid-like frame and sit downstage center, behind a large screen on which a pre-recorded projection of their lower halves merges with the action of their upper bodies, creating a cyborgian illusion. The men chat, eyes following a match, a ball?, a birdie?, as they fidget, reaching down with their live arms which then simultaneously appear on the screen below as they adjust their exposed genitals beneath their kilts. The screen, shot slightly larger-than-life, creates a microscopic view that moves slightly faster and often out of synch with the live bodies. Upstage, live, and on a television monitor overhead, Venus, the referee, watches over the whole scene, perhaps controlling or foretelling the events that are about to unfold. The voices are miked and precise pops and whirrs fill the space, indicating how far from the Neoclassical world Racine inhabited the Wooster Group has come.

Or, perhaps it is not as far as it looks. I will agree with Morse's description that within the "automated cultural exchange" of today's (at least western) society, "there is a basic human need for reciprocity and the reversibility of 'I' and 'you' in discourse—seeing and being seen, recognizing others and being recognized, speaking, listening and being listened to."⁷⁴ In choosing the text of *Phèdre*, the Wooster Group emphasizes the isolation that today's technology can offer, an isolation not without fear and confinement. Morse goes on to explain that "Social institutions of family, education, politics, religion, and the economy . . . have converged to some degree or other with the media. The television is virtual babysitter, matchmaker, educator, (non)site of electoral, legislative, and executive political events, a judicial body, a church, and a mall."⁷⁵ With society's

⁷⁴ Morse, *Virtualities*, 10-11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

convergence with the media, a sense of community is lost. Theatre is under-attended, but chat rooms are overflowing. The *mise-en-scène* of *Birdie* could be Phèdre's personal chat room. A world of isolation has paradoxically rendered Kate Valk's Phèdre incapable of relating as individual to the world. She rarely speaks unmediated for herself, can't defecate without attendants, and is lost behind screens in a false world of desire. In her downtime, she demands that an array of shoes be brought to her. As she tries on several pairs on the screen that connects imaged legs and live upper torso, she could as easily be doing some Internet shopping as being attended to by servants. LeCompte may not have intended to so clearly find parallels between Racine's world and today's but in this production she and her company comment on and question the social subject of both worlds through ideas of isolation, surveillance, and desire that are expressed here through a convergence with technology, yet one that takes place in a theatre space, retaining the sense of community so often thought lost through mediatization. In the same fashion as microscopy, LeCompte isolates moments and frames parts of the body with a series of screens that give the viewer the feeling of looking through a lens, giving an illusion of control to the viewer/audience, but ultimately creating an environment for reflecting that gaze.

As I have discussed, the use of fragmentation and dislocation is a trademark of LeCompte's stage view. Video screens often isolate the live actors from their mediatized selves, either creating split personalities that obliquely question essentialist identity formation, or acting as literal representations of the multiple texts and characters within those texts. In *Phèdre*, fragmentation begins from the opening image, the slightly closer than usual eye view of the lower halves of the two men. This initial split sets up a

viewing process whereby we the viewers, like Cartwright's microscopists, are given an "insider" view, a sectioned-off fragment of bodies to analyze differently from the whole, which was historically "a mode geared to the temporal and spatial decomposition and reconfiguration of bodies as dynamic fields of action in need of regulation and control."⁷⁶ LeCompte's choice to begin with images of male genitalia may be outside the realm of this project, but I will speculate that by allowing us to enter the world of the isolated, fragmented image with this one in particular, instead of leading us directly to the protagonist Phèdre, LeCompte immediately parallels and then reconfigures the traditional mode of viewing Cartwright describes, commenting ironically on the tiresome types of representations of the same toned, thin, and exposed female "screened" bodies in the public media (billboards, magazines, films, television in the U.S.) by opening with an image that is never seen. The screen is itself exposed as a method of surveillance, control, and isolation, and like Cartwright's assertion that cinema was used in medical science to "analyze, regulate, and reconfigure the transient, uncontrollable field of the body." *Birdie's* opening suggests this regulation, but this screen's eye view of itchy, sweaty, exposed male bodies, begins to reconfigure stereotypical media representations as a form of surveillance shrouded in voyeuristic desire.⁷⁷ By "embodying" the technology, that is, by situating it in a cyborgian relation to the two live actors interacting with it, LeCompte lets the composite images gaze back, facilitating a dialogue, or a give and take with the bodies imaged that resists screens of regulation and fragmentation that impose the "impossibly perfect" mediatized bodies upon passive viewers.

⁷⁶ Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, xi.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Evolving out of techniques in previous works, the use of fragmentation in Phèdre layers isolation and desire upon ideas of multiple imaging. Unlike Racine's Phèdre, Valk's is not only trapped in an unrequited and forbidden love, but in a disjointed world of technological anxiety. LeCompte deftly uses techniques that can either comment on the stage world, or the "real" world outside the theatre. Whereas the technique of exposure I mentioned above served to convey an outside reflection of society's use of mediatized bodies, the same technique is expanded to create an interior world of the play, a world where the surveillance is imposed from within, and desire emanates through the screen. In the following examples, the gaps between the bodies and the screens serve as a space of dislocation and desire that require a reconsideration of the location of subjectivity.

Within the world of the play, Phèdre searches for a way out of her struggle with lust, her anxiety, her desire. At one point Valk stands alone behind a head-height screen that holds a projected image of her head. Merging her live lower body and recorded, emotionally imploring face, the composite Phèdre performs a gesture of intense longing and sadness. Valk's live arms rise up and in synch with the recording, become enscreened as her hands press the recorded surface in what might be an attempt to get out. After a moment, she steps out from behind the screen, leaving the now larger than life head still in motion beside her. The recorded moving image lingers beside the live Valk, leaving a dislocated space of identity, of subjectivity. Can Racine's queen live split between desire and reality? Does the body embody technology or technology embody the body? What is in the space between ourselves and our relationship to technology? Later, these questions are taken up again when Dafoe's Theseus has returned from war

and is being massaged by his attendants. He rests his body on the floor, half immersed in a screen onto which his head is projected. The projected head is slightly out of focus at first, and with the beginnings of a moustache not found on the live Dafoe, indicating a disjointed time and place between the live and the tech. The head stares out at the audience and “talks” flirtatiously while being massaged by attendants. After a while the image adjusts in focus, and Dafoe rises from the floor, leaving the head to linger, perhaps longing for the massage to continue, perhaps showing his level of comfort, as compared to Valk’s uneasy immersion in the technology. After all, Theseus is a warlord, comfortable with the “tools” of the time, whether they are for pleasure or destruction. As Sue-Ellen Case has written, “critical models [of technology] derive from chaos theory, semiotics, postMarxist studies of value, and theories from men whose work by and large ignores issues of gender and sexuality, such as Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Paul Virilio, Gregory Ulmer, Mark Poster, and Deleuze and Guattari.”⁷⁸ Leaving gaps and spaces that reverberate between the live and the technologized on stage, LeCompte creates her own space in which to pose questions, if not answers, of gender and sexuality in relation to the controlling and regulating forces of these mergings. Additionally, that the techniques of screening in *Birdie* are used only for the characters of higher status, rather than those of the nurse and attendants, bears further consideration about representations of class within technological structures.

In this section I would like to take the idea of re-constructing subjectivity through a cyborgian model a bit further. Already building on what Marvin Carlson has referred to as “body ghosting . . . made possible by a combination of the Group’s general

⁷⁸ Case, *The Domain Matrix*, 72.

recycling of material and its duplication of bodies within a single production by the use of video,”⁷⁹ LeCompte and the Group in *Birdie* continue the layering process: from the earlier use of small video monitors to larger-screened surveillant and regulatory double imaging systems. Upon that, gaps between the live and the screened are exposed to create an experiential and resounding space for questions of subjectivity. Onto this deeply layered terrain, the technique of mediatized narration is applied, decentralizing ideas of subjectivity emanating from a “speaking subject” and allowing mediatized voices to have an equivalent authority in the character’s subjectivity. This layering reinforces Morse, who, relying on semiotic analyses of Derrida, Austin, and Greimas, says, “to call oneself ‘I’, for instance, has to begin from the basis of a not-I and its negation. Thus, a rupture or break is and remains at the heart of subjectivity.”⁸⁰ In the Wooster Group’s work, I argue for the reconfiguration of object body and object technology through their interrelationship as a cyborg model of performance. Both body and technology thus attempt to speak as “I” for the other but the failure to do so completely strips either of the authority of the “I” subject. Morse explains that while we understand the slippage in digital representations such as photography, the fallacy of electronic media, specifically news television, is that “the subject or ‘I’ in the utterance or image is the one who actually enunciates it, here and now.” The fallacy here is that the body we see actually “belongs to another order of reality than the subject ‘I’ in the linguistic utterance,”⁸¹ and that once the utterance is disengaged from the speaker “I,” it

⁷⁹ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 169.

⁸⁰ Morse, *Virtualities*, 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

may be interpreted endlessly, questioning the authority of the speaker.

In *Birdie*, the utterance is doubly disconnected. The actors playing Phèdre, Theseus, and Hippolytus rarely use their own voices and the bulk of the text is read through a microphone by Scott Shepherd, in the disassociated and flat Wooster Group fashion. The bodies become objectified as visual commodities, destabilized through a separation between the speaker, the spoken, and the body ascribed to these utterances. In writing about cyberculture, Margaret Morse writes:

The argument to be made here, is not that once there was something sincere and unmediated called face to face conversation of which exchanges mediated by television and the computer are inherently inauthentic or debased simulations. If anything, machine subjects are made possible by the fundamental gap that has always existed between language and the world and between utterances—be they subjective or impersonal—and the act of enunciation—whether it is produced by a human subject or has been delegated to machines.⁸²

In *Birdie*, narration, then, becomes another form of “subject technology,” like moving screened body parts interacting with live bodies in a dialogue about representation, the narration technique separates the utterance from the body and filters it through a microphone—the voice is live but it is not the voice of the “speaker-actor.” This and the embodied screen techniques give technology a “voice” on the Wooster Group’s stage. Morse writes that, “such language-using, or more precisely, language-simulating machine subjects, insofar as they are embodied, belong to a category of ‘intelligent’ robots.”⁸³

⁸² Ibid., 14.

⁸³ Ibid.

While this concept is not literalized on the stage of *Birdie*, the idea carries over as the Wooster Group develops a new form of subjectivity on stage. Like the segmenting of body parts, the emphasis upon the gaps between the speaker and the spoken are at first disorienting—who is speaking, whose words are these, are they thoughts in the character’s head? But like a “chat” on the computer, the spaces between utterances allow room for interpretation, for reflection—who are we speaking to? Who are we as speaker? These gaps destabilize a traditional speaking subject while constructing an embodied machine subject with an alternate subjectivity.

As Kate Valk’s Phèdre confesses her illicit love for her step-son to her nurse Oenone, played by Frances McDormand, the narrator, Scott Shepherd, hides behind a screen placed upstage center, again forming a cyborg relationship between live lower body and projected head. As the women whisper, Shepherd turns his on-screen, disproportionately large head to eavesdrop and his on screen ear begins to grow larger, creating a humorous moment that both makes visible the regulatory control technology often invisibly carries, while also itself mimicking the kind of fantastical techniques frequently employed by television shows such as *Ally McBeal*. Technological surveillance is also made plain through the character Venus, who sits upstage throughout the show, and frequently appears on the small video monitors overhead, controlling the badminton game that is a play on rules—of the game, the neoclassical rules of Racine’s time, of love and desire, and rules each character must uphold within the overall social world of the play. However, the Wooster Group’s layering makes any one reading impossible, and through the specific examples of framing and fragmentation, manipulating vocal subjectivity, and juxtaposing the live with the screened partial

perspective, a cyborg model emerges to alter essentialist thinking and binary constructions of the natural and the constructed, or the subject and the object.

Donna Haraway writes that “the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code”⁸⁴ To be at once a collective and a self is a monumental task. Isolated within a technological age, typing alone at a screen populated by millions of other presences, the contemporary subject is an amalgam of its parts. But without a critical exploration of the ways in which that screen functions the subject will remain a scattered collection of these “parts”—unable to assume any unified political code. The physically isolated cyber-subject of the chat room desires a community with which to interact. Sharing secrets, transferring erotic tales of lust and longing, gathering information, instant messaging and carrying on conversation with other users (including mechanized “chatterbots”), the cyber-subject exposes fragments of the whole, creating a composite on line “persona.”⁸⁵ However, to retain any sense of political agency within the dizzying world on-line, the cyber subject must question how all its components have been constructed: in what ways is it shaped by the ways its parts—identifying, physical, or electronic—have been shaped? How have its desires been shaped because of these constructs? The self Haraway seeks is cyborg. But to step beyond the many uncritical, masculinist, and militaristic formations of cyborg subjectivity, is to recognize that the “I” is formed by the not-I and that the spaces between the live and the technological are as important to

⁸⁴ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 65-108.

⁸⁵ See Philip Auslander, *Live From Cyberspace or, I was sitting at my computer this guy appeared he thought I was a bot*, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 70 (2002): 16-21, for a discussion of on-line chatterbots.

examine as the seamless mergings of the two. Morse writes, “In an era when cameras can travel under the surface of the skin, the desire to experience, interact, and even touch the image in an apparently unmediated way refuses to stop at the screen itself.”⁸⁶

Although I have not focused on a specifically feminist critique, nor have I read any indication that LeCompte and the Group consider themselves political or feminist, as Cartwright has pointed out, technologies shape our lives and “Women must actively reconfigure technologies of representation—precisely because these technologies have been invested with the power to transform the body physically . . . Although medical technologies may not be a cure, they are a critical—and heavily funded—area of visual culture. Thus this field is in need of active feminist technological refunctioning and counter surveillance.”⁸⁷ As I continue to watch the Wooster Group layer ideas of technology’s isolating forces, of surveillance, and regulatory image-making, I consider their work political because it inspires me to see between the images, to hear the resonating sounds that are so often missed as television and even film hold our attention so passively, to enter an environment where I can see and be seen, and where the live interrelationship with technology on stage is palpable, visceral. LeCompte and the Wooster Group place both the live and the technological on stage but neither for their own sake. The bits and pieces, the fragments and frames on the Wooster Group stage do not stand as isolated moments of the whole—we, the viewers, set in the position of the microscopist, watch the feedback from live to screen, from speaker to spoken, from the world of the stage to the world of today. I began this section by hoping to develop the

⁸⁶ Morse, *Virtualities*, 177.

⁸⁷ Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, 170.

idea of a feedback loop—Morse describes one way in which this can take place: “Once the simultaneity of liveness becomes instant feedback between images and the world, an inversion takes place in what was once called representation: neither image nor the world is ‘first,’ and each is likely to shape the other.”⁸⁸ The Wooster Group achieves just such an exchange.

Conclusion: The Object-Subject

In the formation of the cyborg theatre, the bodies are what is at stake—the materiality out of which the cyborg emerges. In the attempt to create a “non-acting” style, LeCompte and the Wooster Group have succeeded in developing a series of conceptions of the body that I describe as object. Through the actor’s own bodies the Wooster Group’s work has examined issues of race, gender, sexuality, fragmented identity, and body parts, rather than wholes. My formation of the Wooster Group body draws upon Grosz’s conceptions of a body that can be conceived as a “social object, as a text to be marked, traced, written upon.”⁸⁹ These bodily texts are placed in dialogue with technology on their stage—mainly through the use of video monitors, lighting, and aural manipulation—creating a liminal and potentially ethical space for the introspection of the spectator.

In this chapter I have examined several different of the social, object body intersecting with technology on stage. A racial inscription in *The Emperor Jones* ultimately conflates race and gender and is erased through technology, ceding power to a masculinist mask. *House/Lights* foregrounds the questioning of multiple identities and

⁸⁸ Morse, *Virtualities*, 21.

⁸⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 116.

sexualities as bodies are tangled within technology. The Wooster Group's deconstructionist style has led to a "fractal theatre" space wherein the techno-cyberized spectator can easily move from text to text effortlessly. Finally, *Birdie*'s examination of the use of technological lenses to image parts of the body in relation to the whole. In each of the cases discussed, the Wooster Group body not only transforms through its intersections with technology into an alternate way of seeing the constructed bodies, but the work also allows the spectator to see between the images, to hear the resonating sounds that are so often missed when television and film holds our attention so passively. To enter the space of the Wooster Group is to enter an environment where the spectator can see and be seen, where the live interrelationship with technology on stage is palpable, visceral. The Wooster Group relies upon the spectator's imagination to question, more often than to complete, the images.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRIANGULATED VIEWING:

GEORGE COATES'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL STAGE

This latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. It may now be suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment . . . can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.

—Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*¹

Almost a decade ago I sat in the neo-gothic church that is home to George Coates Performance Works in San Francisco, California.² There to see *Invisible Site*. I was skeptical about wearing the clunky cardboard 3-D glasses I received with my program. However, as images flew out at me during the show—a sword was thrown and morphed into a butterfly, a animated figure “walked” across the screen to merge seamlessly with the character playing the Dalai Lama in a “virtual reality dating game”—I watched in

¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 44.

² As stated in the program for *The Architecture of Catastrophic Change*, “Performance Works is located in San Francisco’s Civic Center, in a former cathedral with 60 foot high vaulted ceilings. George Coates Performance Works creates original live art in collaboration with this extraordinary building’s existing dimensions. Built in 1929, the building has a diverse history as a church, as a government office building, and a long period of abandonment before its reincarnation as Performance Works.” The building is located at 110 McAllister Street in San Francisco, California.

awe, stunned by the dazzling imagery unfolding before me. Afterwards, I tried desperately to use my critical faculties to analyze this performance with a group of family and friends and found, to my astonishment, that I could not. I loved the show and was, in colloquial terms, “blown away” by it. This inability to find a critical context for the piece began a long-standing interest and fascination with the technological creations of GCPW.

Forming the foundation for my theorization of the Cyborg Theatre, Coates’s work has the ability to seamlessly merge elements of live performance with technological effects that, when viewed through 3-D glasses, create a blend between theatre and film which somehow moves beyond both/either. As I continued to attend (and, frankly, be increasingly awed), I began to force myself to ask questions of the work. What exactly was the technological apparatus behind the “magic,” and why couldn’t I find fault in its slickness? How was it possible for the actors to blend so well within the technological frame at one moment and then in another possess the agency needed to send chills down my spine with their vocal presence and capabilities. Why was I respectful of the incredible diversity and sense of community I felt when reading the program and seeing that the actors were a blend of local mime, opera, dance, and theatre performers in combination with such varied performers as members of the African group Zulu Spear, or a Bulgarian Woman’s choir? These are all questions I have continued to grapple with as my critical thinking and “political correctness” beg me to analyze more thoroughly something so obviously connected to Silicon Valley and the multi-billion dollar computer industry. In this chapter I will address these questions, and ask others, to theorize how a “subject” body can combine with technology to create work that is capable of developing a new cyborg subject.

The bodies on the stage of George Coates's technological projects maintain an aura of "presence" even as they interact with technology. To understand the impact these bodies have upon me as the spectator I begin with an examination of those notions of subjectivity which focus on issues of the live body.³ Coates often includes forms of song and opera in his work (discussed in more depth below) and the live, singing bodies stir in me a physical sensation, inexplicable solely through the analysis of a discursive, or psychological subject. The bodies on Coates's stage have to oscillate between two "frames": one, as any live theatrical performer would, holding their own, creating characters, and claiming an agency on stage, and another, within a complex technological frame where the performers readily merge within a projected environment and interact with technological "subjects." I will begin by examining and projecting the actor's body into the twenty-first century and then analyze the subject body as it relates to theories of both presence and absence.

Subjectivity and the "Actorly" Body

In her essay, "Theatre and the Civilizing Process," Erica Fischer-Lichte constructs a model based upon three stages of the history of acting to exemplify how "all of the various cultural systems in the theatre contribute to its social function."⁴ She contends that the actor's body takes part in a historical "civilizing process," and that as this process occurs, acting, and the manifestations of the body are transformed to fulfill important

³ Although there is a much longer history in the analysis of subjectivity, for the scope of this project I will be addressing only a few of the lenses through which it might be analyzed.

⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre and the Civilizing Process: An Approach to the History of Acting," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 20.

social functions. Rather than the transformation's being "a progressive march of history," Fischer-Lichte claims that instead, "this spread of 'civilization' should be seen as the price, within elaborate conditions of order and control, that the European cultures had to pay for their technological, scientific, economic, and social changes."⁵ She proposes what is now a familiar concern in critical theory, that the body is shaped by "culture" and that "any human body should be seen as the result of a reciprocal process of the organic and the cultural, an interaction between individual nature and cultural context . . . The body, like any other cultural phenomenon, is historically determined."⁶ Fischer-Lichte's argument extends Foucault's examination of history into theatrical terms.

Fischer-Lichte traces three bodily processes that parallel the "civilizing processes" of their age: Baroque self-control; the eighteenth-century's bodily return to nature; and a dual process in the early stages of the twentieth-century avant-garde between body as raw material, acting as a signifier, and the body as a type of "essentialized" machine. Each of these processes is concerned with the way in which the body is perceived. She writes:

Theatre has contributed to the civilizing process by employing and interpreting the actor's body as a sign system. By gradually transforming the human body from an image of sensual nature into a system of arbitrary signs, Western theatre has continually confronted actors and spectators alike with changing cultural

⁵ Ibid., 22. Although Fischer-Lichte does not specifically mention economics as a "cultural" factor other than in this quotation, it can and should be assumed to be one of the driving cultural factors taken into consideration when she simply uses the word "cultural."

⁶ Ibid., 21-22.

systems that express, interpret, and control human nature—and this is exactly what characterized the civilizing process.⁷

Although she refers to a “gradual transformation,” Fischer-Lichte also claims that these new styles came about in “times of social upheaval or fundamental transformations,” and that, “each negated the aims and purposes of the preceding theatrical form. Each developed a new style of acting which paralleled the formation of new behavior patterns in society.”⁸ These assertions correspond to the ideas of Joseph Roach, who applies Thomas Kuhn’s idea of “paradigm shifts” in science from the seventeenth through the twentieth century to understand science’s impact upon the development of acting styles in each period.⁹

Fischer-Lichte acknowledges the trajectory of modernist theatre that has led to a contemporary realist style, but concentrates primarily on the avant-garde’s use of the body. “The actor’s body was no longer perceived as a text composed of natural signs for emotion but as raw material for sign processing with a wider field of reference than the emotions of a dramatic character.”¹⁰ Roach, on the other hand, concerns himself with the study of emotion—which leads him through Stanislavski and into the Laboratory theatre of Grotowski—and he too falls short of the new century. Fischer-Lichte only briefly projects the actor into the twenty-first century. She notes that current and traditional body concepts are under serious attack and describes a contemporary “attempt to free the

⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁹ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985), 13.

¹⁰ Fischer-Lichte, “Theatre and the Civilizing Process,” 29.

human body from the pressures brought about by the Western civilizing process.”¹¹ This is where my study comes in, as the avant-garde body that Fischer-Lichte discusses is closely related to my conception of the object body, yet I further contend that the plethora of new media technologies and the mediatization of society have effected a paradigm shift that results in the need for an analysis of the relation of the actor’s body to these technologies.

Over the course of the twentieth century, technology, such as film and the Internet, along with the rise of deconstructionist criticism have disembodied the corporeal, limiting it to serve largely as a discursive effect.¹² I will argue that the work of George Coates, by troubling the militaristic or consumerist intended uses of technology and re-inserting the live body into it attempts to restore a fundamental agency to embodiment. As my previous chapters have detailed, the actor’s body in the twenty-first century has the possibility to refract the theories of post-humanism and cyborg theory through its mergings with technology. Although not referring to the “theatrical” actor, Donna Haraway writes that “we need a concept of agency that opens up possibilities for figuring relationality within social worlds where actors fit oddly, at best, into previous *taxa* of the human, the natural, or the constructed.”¹³ Fischer-Lichte’s fusion of the “organic and the cultural” to form the body is analogous to Haraway’s cyborg creation in that the theatrical actor’s interaction with cultural (and I will specify as well socio-

¹¹ Ibid., 34.

¹² For an excellent study of this effect, see Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

¹³ Donna Haraway, “The Actors Are Cyborg, Nature is Coyote, and the Geography Is Elsewhere: Postscript to ‘Cyborgs at Large,’” *Technoculture*, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 21.

economic) systems is crucial to the theatre's historical outcome. In my previous chapters I have outlined ways in which the abject and object "actorly" body merge with technology to form a new sense of cyborgian agency. To complete the triangulation that constructs the cyborgian model of alternate subjectivity, I address the "subject" in this chapter. I will seek to formulate the "embodied subject"—in many ways the most complex of the three notions—as the model combined with technology in this section. However, I locate this notion through discursive lines of tension—the psychoanalytic subject and the phenomenological subject—each competing to overwhelm the other. As the two ideas entwine within the embodied subject, the issues of the actor's and also the spectator's agency are brought to the fore. First, briefly outlining these twinned conceptions of subjectivity, I will then build on the double helix structural conception of subjectivity that these produce and from which I feel Coates's theatre develops its cyborg subjectivity.

The Subject Body

It is difficult, and yet necessary, to begin *in medias res* when discussing a topic so historically complicated and multi-layered as the "subject." However, a full analysis of the term and its concepts are beyond the scope of this study. In the twenty-first century there is no unified answer to the question or definition of the subject. From the Greek subject of the *polis* to the ideal of the Renaissance man, from Descartes's mind/body dualism to Freud's psychological subject which was subsequently deconstructed by Lacan, Derrida, and feminist theory, the subject has undergone many conceptions and transformations. Jameson's postmodernist assertion that, "the old individual or

individualist subject is ‘dead,’”¹⁴ is a response to the universalized, essentialized (male) subject, which was also critiqued by Derrida’s development of the linguistic subject as well as transformed by Butler and other feminist theorists into a socially empowered (feminist) subject. Recent theorists, especially feminist theorists, have continued to search for a new subjectivity, perhaps to balance these disparate dualities within ideas of the subject. Kelly Oliver posits a theory where fluidity and chaos replace rigid notions of either material or discursive subjects, Ann Cooper-Albright writes about embodying dance criticism, Elizabeth Grosz employs the Möbius Strip as a way to bring together the theories of the mind and body, Peggy Phelan poses questions about visibility and invisibility to re-mark on the Unmarked. Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Katherine Hayles and others mentioned in previous chapters also seek to theorize alternative subjectivities.¹⁵ *Who* exactly is the subject? *What* exactly is the subject? *Where* exactly is the subject? I will briefly outline a few of the ways in which the subject has been read in critical theory to address how these questions represent a subject constructed primarily through the mind—the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic subject—and through the

¹⁴ Frederic Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1993-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), 6. Jameson in fact comments that the subject may be either a thing of the past or a mythological creation but recognizes that for his purposes (and for mine as well) it is not important to take a position between the two of these.

¹⁵ See Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997).

body—Merleau-Ponty’s body-as-experienced phenomenological subject.¹⁶ I develop these concurrently created ideas of subjectivity which I believe both contribute to contemporary understandings of embodied subjectivity.

The Psychoanalytic Subject

If performing is a process in which individuals, physically present on stage, think, speak, and interact in front of other individuals, then that very activity must throw into relief crucial questions about human behaviour. In making the hidden visible, the latent manifest, in laying bare the interior landscape of the mind and its fears and desires through a range of signifying practices, psychoanalytic processes are endemic to the performing arts.

—Patrick Campbell, *Psychoanalysis and Performance*¹⁷

Freud’s development of theories of the unconscious and conscious mind must be a turning point in any analysis of the subject. Despite the re-readings of, returns to, and critiques of Freud over the past century, his work continues to dominate the majority of discussions on subjectivity. His works are monumental, if masculinist, in/for providing a groundwork of terms and ideas with which to continue this discussion. Re-read by Lacan through the ideas of language, and then by Kristeva through the perspective of the maternal, Freudian ideas rest upon the split between the unconscious and the conscious mind and how behavioral “symptoms” provide access to the hidden sites of trauma that underlie all existence. In analysis, these symptoms are revealed and discussed and an attempt is made to find a “cure.” or unify the split. Acknowledging the vast scope of the combined writings on psychoanalysis, I will trace a straightforward route through

¹⁶ I use the word primarily because I recognize that the struggle within each argument is the placement of both the body and mind. One is implicated in the other regardless of the theory. For the sake of this argument I am reading the predominance of one over the other as the foundational assumptions for each argument.

¹⁷ Patrick Campbell Introduction to *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, eds. Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (London: Routledge, 2001) 1.

Freud's theories to point out their emphasis on the function of the internal neurological drives. Before so doing, I first refer again to Lacan, whom I discussed in the previous chapter, to point to the fact that his reading of Freud through the structure of language and with the terminology of Saussure, further distanced the actual lived body from the idea of body as secondary to the mind.

Freud splits the mind into driving forces that are in constant interplay: the id, which "contains the passions," and searches for gratification; the ego, "reason and common sense," to maintain a rational resistance to the id; and the super-ego, which enforces the rational rules set forth by the ego.¹⁸ While Freud is developing these elements of the mental processes, he does it within a sense of the world. "The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world . . . in a sense it is an extension of the surface differentiation. Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies."¹⁹ He complicates the discussion of the ego and the id with the super-ego, or ego-ideal, "behind it there lies hidden an individual's first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory."²⁰ Freud forms his concept of the super-ego—through his analysis of a child's repression and mastering of the Oedipus complex—as representative of the larger forces of controlling the unconscious:

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 636.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 635-636.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 639.

“it perpetuates the existence of the factors to which it owes its origins,” thereby historicizing the subject as well.²¹

What Freud’s legacy so often fails to develop is an exploration of the body, the actual vessel within which the mind co-exists with the external world. In the essay “the Ego and the Id,” he does refer to the body, if obliquely, as simply, “another factor . . . that seems to have played a part in bringing about the formation of the ego and its differentiation from the id.” He goes on to explain that, “a person’s own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring.”²² Freud’s language, full of “seems,” and “mays,” exposes the lack of consideration of the actual body itself. Although he places the ego as, “first and foremost a bodily ego,”²³ the Freudian subject is primarily one of the mind, the subject’s internal search to understand the origin of the unconscious mind. The subject is thus formed by a tension between the inner life and external world as a struggle that takes place within the mind. “Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will . . . ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is psychical, between the external world and the internal world.”²⁴ Freud’s construction of the subject as driven by the forces of the mind is a crucial springboard for not only a

²¹ Ibid., 642. For definitions of these terms, as developed in the literature of psychoanalysis, see Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: WW Norton, 1974).

²² Freud, “The Ego and the Id.” 636.

²³ Ibid., 636-7.

²⁴ Ibid., 643.

scientific understanding of the workings of the brain, but one which has also served as a catalyst for cultural critiques that have opened up spaces for the (female) body to discursively assert its own force in opposition.

The Phenomenological Body

For Merleau-Ponty, the self cannot be separated either from the body or the world. Indeed, the self is constituted precisely as a lived body.

—Ann Cooper-Albright, *Choreographing Difference*²⁵

All effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject's corporeality as a framework as it would be using consciousness or the unconscious. All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface.

—Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*²⁶

Phenomenology developed as a philosophical movement in the early twentieth century following the ideas of Edmund Husserl, who “conceived of [it] as a science of the essential structures of pure consciousness.”²⁷ As a philosophy it sought to explain consciousness and one’s encounter with objects. Husserl’s ideas and methods, which Merleau-Ponty describes as an attempt to “return to the ‘things themselves,’”²⁸ have been developed and deviated from through several different strands of phenomenological thought. One of these strands, which I feel is most appropriate to my project, is what is usually called “existential” phenomenology, which originated with Martin Heidegger and

²⁵ Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, 47.

²⁶ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, vii.

²⁷ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 60.

²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), viii.

was then developed further through the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.²⁹ Of the many theorists who have embraced elements of phenomenology, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, I will focus on the investigations of Merleau-Ponty, for his “radical description of the primary experiences of embodied human experience.”³⁰

Although phenomenology, especially from its Husserlian beginnings, is criticized for a “bracketing off” of the world outside individual consciousness, and a reliance on essences, the “corporeal phenomenology” of Merleau-Ponty reveals a subjectivity of the mind that focuses primarily on the body as lived in. He differentiates the body from the objects of his study and states:

I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out in it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a ‘natural’ subject, a provisional sketch of my own total being. Thus experience of one’s own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from

²⁹ For a more detailed breakdown of the different phenomenological branches, see Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. He explores the impact of phenomenology on twentieth-century philosophy through exploring the work of Husserl and Heidegger and then tracing its path through the work of Gadamer—philosophical hermeneutics, Arendt—the phenomenology of the public sphere, Levinas—the phenomenology of alterity, Sartre—passionate description, Merleau-Ponty—the phenomenology of perception, and ultimately Derrida—the interplay of phenomenology and deconstruction.

³⁰ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 391.

each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.³¹

Merleau-Ponty recognizes that phenomenology is the study of essences but delineates that it is also “a philosophy which puts essences back into existence.”³² The subject, he claims, is already in the world, “as an inalienable presence,”³³ and his philosophy is an attempt to understand and explain this being-in-the-world through the idea of perception and embodied contact with the objects perceived. Merleau-Ponty was influenced by psychology in the 1930s; writer Dermot Moran attributes this interest to the influence of Aron Gurwitsch, one of Husserl’s students, and writes that, “Merleau-Ponty combined his Hegelian-Husserlian concrete phenomenology of social experience with the holistic psychological approach of the German Gestalt psychologist Adhemar Gelb.”³⁴ Moran contends that much of Merleau-Ponty’s “original” discussions of brain dysfunction are influenced by these psychologists. In fact, one of the claims of phenomenology is that it offers “a holistic approach to the relation between objectivity and consciousness, stressing the mediating role of the body in perception.”³⁵ Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology then, should not be considered in opposition to the ideas of the psychological mind, but differentiated from psychoanalytic issues such as a return to an

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 199.

³² *Ibid.*, vii.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 411.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

origin or unconscious state, instead stressing an individual point of view, in which one's own experience comprises an individual's knowledge of and relationship to the world.

At times, Merleau-Ponty's writing can be understood to have too narrow a focus from which to develop any sense of a social subject. He writes, "I am the absolute source . . . I alone bring into being for myself . . . the tradition which I elect to carry on."³⁶ However, within the larger context of his work, he clearly situates this "I" in a historical, social, and ethical context. Statements such as "I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world," and "each moment of time calls all the others to witness"³⁷ open up his philosophy to a larger reading of the lived body as a site for subjectivity. This is the viewpoint that has been taken up as a methodology for analyzing theatre, or used as point of entry for a feminist study of the embodied subject, as seen in the theoretical writing of Elizabeth Grosz, or the writing on dance by Ann Cooper-Albright.³⁸

The Embodied Subject

In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz's analysis of subjectivity and her attempt to theorize an embodied subject, she outlines six strategies to answer "what criteria and goals should govern a feminist theoretical approach to concepts of the body?"³⁹ Of the

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, ix.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

³⁸ See Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) for a further examination of phenomenology as applied to theatre.

³⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 21.

six criteria, one stands out for me as the foundation for an embodied subject, her number five:

whatever models are developed must demonstrate some sort of internal or constitutive articulation, or even disarticulation, between the biological and the psychological, between the inside and the outside of the body, while avoiding a reductionism of mind to brain. Any adequate model must include a psychological representation of the subject's lived body as well as of the relations between body gestures, posture, and movement in the constitution of the processes of psychological representations. Both psychological and social dimensions must find their place in reconceptualizing the body, not in opposition to each other but as necessarily interactive.⁴⁰

In forming the model of the cyborg theatre through George Coates, the live body (an already blended phenomenological/psychoanalytic subject) on stage combines with technology to construct a reconstituted concept of subjectivity. But what is particularly crucial here is that the audience presents a third point, by bearing their own responsibility in constructing these fusions. To assess the complex layering of these mergings, I will map out the way in which Coates's actors are embodied subjects to the audience—through placement, voice, and song—and then draw upon Peggy Phelan's notion of the Unmarked to twist the equation and examine *how* the way that the spectators look at a "disembodied" subject can ultimately provide what is lacking in certain representations of cyborgian unions. I begin with phenomenologically inspired examples and move towards Phelan's more psychologically based ones employing the Möbius Strip model set

⁴⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 23.

up by Elizabeth Grosz. Ultimately, I turn back to the audience, recognizing that through the positioning of the audience subject, the phenomenological and psychological meanings are always blended.

The Cyborg Subject

In attempting to understand what I might now describe as a “phenomenological” reaction to George Coates’s work, I draw upon both phenomenological and psychological theories to begin to answer some of the questions I posed at the beginning of this chapter. However, without an understanding of Coates and the specific technological *mise-en-scène* he has developed, this analysis could merely reflect the “mind,” without the “body,” when I am instead attempting to uncover the location of an embodied subjectivity. Ever aware of the problems of writing a description of an experience, I refer to Peggy Phelan’s recognition that, “the challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself.”⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty distinguishes phenomenology from analytical reflection in that the former is not a “reconstruction,” a word closely linked to Phelan’s preservation.⁴² Indeed, when I approached George Coates in 1997 for slides to show at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference, where I was delivering a paper on his work, he was reluctant to let me show slides of the complex and layered images that comprised his 3-D effects. Neither those slides, nor my descriptions

⁴¹ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148.

⁴² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, ix-x.

of his work can function as substitutions for the live experience and instead serve merely as vague illustration. Coates rightly feels that the closer you get to the image without actually experiencing it, the more you will feel you have actual “knowledge” of what this work is about. Coates’s caution serves as a disclaimer as I write through the three-dimensional cyborgian topography of Coates’s work.

Coates’s facility in balancing the live actors and the technology on stage may be better understood through a brief chronology of his career in the theatre. He arrived in San Francisco from the East Coast in the late sixties and auditioned for a production of *Macbeth* at University of California at Berkeley. No one bothered to ask him if he was a student there (he was not) and he got cast as the Porter. Coates began to read all that he could about the theatre and from this point his theatrical career began.⁴³ In 1971, Coates went to New York and acted with the National Shakespeare Company, with whom he went out on tour for nine months. Upon returning to San Francisco, he spent two and a half years with a collaborative Bay Area experimental group called the Blake Street Hawkeyes. By 1977, his desire to direct and create his own work led him to the creation of George Coates Performance Works, or GCPW.

Coates’s early work privileged movement and sound over text and the spoken word. The company’s international touring influenced Coates, who describes the company’s evolution: “You use the language that will work for each piece . . . so, we used musical languages, visual languages. Now we’ve got character actors and we’re

⁴³ Although this story appears in several newspaper articles, for precise documentation of such lore and a thorough history of Coates, see Douglas William Gordy, “‘Compelling Accidents’: A History of George Coates Performance Works” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1995).

opening in America, so we can get verbal."⁴⁴ The blending of multiple "languages" has expanded to include the visual and indexical elements of emerging technologies. Coates went on to develop his unique style through a series of productions in the 1980s and has continued to produce steadily through the present.⁴⁵ In 1989, Coates formed SMARTS, Science Meets the Arts Society, to forge new relationships between the arts and the nearby Silicon Valley computer industry. This union was forged out of the dissolution of another: the 1989 *Right Mind* had been a co-production with American Conservatory Theatre based loosely on the multiple personalities of Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll). Two weeks into the run, the 1989 earthquake hit San Francisco, bringing down the lighting grid at the Geary theatre and closing the show. With the insurance money, George Coates Performance Works was able to buy their rehearsal space, a neo-gothic church in the heart of San Francisco. One year after the earthquake, GCPW opened *The Architecture of Catastrophic Change*, my first experience with Coates. The SMARTS collaboration's first major production was the 1991 *Invisible Site*, which was based on the innocent premise of a virtual reality dating game—played by characters as diverse as Prospero, Medea, and Arthur Rimbaud—that is interrupted by a computer hacker who proceeds to manipulate and impose new scenarios on the game. Coates has consistently created original work based upon his interest in emerging technologies, but also remains

⁴⁴ Robert Hurwitt, "In His *Right Mind*," *San Francisco Examiner*, 29 September 1989, sec F, p 6.

⁴⁵ The productions in the early 1980s are called the "How Trilogy," comprised of *The Way of How* (1981), *Are/Are* (1983), and *Seehear* (1984). These were followed by *Rare Area* (1985), *Actual Sho* (1987), *Right Mind* (1989), and *The Architecture of Catastrophic Change* (1990). I will be focusing my analysis on examples from *Architecture* onward. Unless indicated, the examples I cite are from productions I attended.

close to his roots in theatre, occasionally producing and directing plays written by others, as in the 1993 *Waiting for Godot*, or the January 2000 world premiere of Valerie Solanas's *Up Your Ass*.⁴⁶

Coates has experimented with many forms of technology from “low” to “high.” He explained to me that he prefers the word “tools” to technology (a word he professes to have banished), and is frustrated that the press constantly refers to him as a “techno-wizard,” which to him implies the iconography of priesthood, giving the impression that he waves his arm and the technology appears. In fact, Coates's productions are collaborative and imaginative. Despite the intricate systems he has developed for the shows in the nineties, he and his scenic collaborators began with the simplest ideas and trial and error—how the technology is put into practice is what concerns him. “I have used very simple technology for years, very simple tools.”⁴⁷ He explained some of his early experiments to me:

If you use simple tools and materials to interact with space and collect light or move through patterns of light, you can take a black slide, put little dots in it with a pin, and project on a Levelor blind, open the blind halfway and raise it like a curtain. As the dots of light go through the blind and hit the blind you have a \$50,000 effect—a giant, flashing star curtain. And you'll read in the paper that

⁴⁶ Solanas, the author of the “SCUM Manifesto” (Society for Cutting Up Men) and a fringe figure in the downtown New York scene in the late sixties, shot Andy Warhol, because he reportedly did not acknowledge the existence of this play, which she had delivered to the Warehouse hoping he would read and direct. *Up Your Ass* received its world premiere 12 January 2000 at George Coates Performance Works in San Francisco.

⁴⁷ George Coates, interview by author, Berkeley, CA, 3 April 1999.

you are using holograms, and you'll be called a techno wizard. This could have been happening in 1955, but if it looks grand it must be lasers or holograms.⁴⁸

From these simple techniques have evolved innovations in three-dimensional imagery, enhanced by 3-D glasses that attune the audience's senses to what is taking place live on stage. In a discussion of Coates's work, Theodore Shank points out the originality in using 3-D glasses on stage, which first appeared in *Invisible Site* in 1991. "While 3-D projections had been used before in movies, this may have been the first time that interacting live actors and 3-D computer images were used in a theatre production (it preceded *Monsters of Grace* [1998], by Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, which used such projections.)"⁴⁹ The glasses challenge traditional ways of seeing live performance while giving the audience a feeling of being part of a virtual world. To provide an example, imagine looking through the glasses to see a small child appear to float upward as a three-dimensional film projection of a bunch of white balloons rise in tandem, giving the appearance that the balloons are lifting her through the sky. The look, which Coates calls "Live Max 4-D," is made up of many layers, and it is within this technology that the actor appears. Perhaps the memory of his own body on stage inspires his technique, because both the actual creation/building (over time and physically) of the live-technological *mise-en-scène* and Coates's directorial choices when dealing with actors

⁴⁸ Coates, Interview, 3 April 1999.

⁴⁹ Theodore Shank, *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 273. This volume is a re-published version of Shank's volume called *American Alternative Theatre*, published in 1982. This new edition includes that volume unchanged, covering the period from the 1960s to 1980, but also includes new material that spans from the 1980s to the present. This survey contextualizes Coates's work within a section entitled "New Technologies and Techniques."

within it, give a sense that the actor's live presence is the foundation upon which the entire look is built.

Technically speaking, the space is in a proscenium-style formation but instead of the arch there is a screen, or scrim. Coates had this screen custom developed; it is capable of allowing actors to be seen clearly through it, while at the same time holding the projected 3-D images without their spilling through. Behind the screen there are three mechanized ramps that lift actors up and down to be united in relation to projected imagery.⁵⁰ On the screen there may be three types of projections: slide, film, or data images which are manipulated in real time by a computer operator. All the projections have been recorded three-dimensionally. The slides are made by scanning the image into the computer, separating each image plane by plane, and recording horizontal and vertical images of each to achieve a polarization effect. The 3-D film projections are achieved by gearing two sixteen millimeter projectors together to film one left and one right eye view of, for example, a pair of hands, or flying white doves. The fluid combination of live actor, computer-generated object/ "actor" and projected film or slide image is completed by viewing through the glasses, potentially making the audience more attuned, and at least more appreciative of the other mergings taking place in the room.

Coates describes his work as "a fusion of live theatre and cinema . . . a 'real time' mixing of live performers with the kind of special effects Hollywood can take its time with."⁵¹ He attends computer graphics conferences and is often asked to develop

⁵⁰ For technical details on the stagecraft, see Gordy, "'Compelling Accidents',"294.

⁵¹ Scott Rosenberg, "George Coates and Virtual Reality," *TheatreForum* 3 (Spring 1993): 8. Parts of Rosenberg's article are taken from various other theatre reviews he wrote in the *San Francisco Examiner*.

emerging technologies. His work has been mistaken for film but Coates remains attracted to the live theatre:

I've got flesh and blood performers, it's real time, not in the can, it has to be recreated every night. I don't want to make movies . . . I do think that going to the theatre may become a hybrid experience of being at a video game and a movie and a theatre. It may be that the integrated media experience becomes the big thing, like film overtook everything else. Because in many ways it might make film seem like something's missing: Hey, where's the live folk?⁵²

It is this philosophy that propels Coates to find ways to foreground the live actors, and not just let them become displaced by the multimedia images. Coates has an eye for composition and manages to place his actors within the images he creates as a painter would, weighing the sizes, shapes, and movements of the actors and projections to shape the "narrative" of his work. The composition is crucial because when placed "inside" the image, the actor is also lit in such a way as to fuse optically with his or her surroundings. Another technique Coates uses is perhaps the most fundamental in theatre—he brings the actor downstage or out from behind the technology and stages moments of interaction unmediated through the screen fusions or 3-D glasses. Although I will discuss the 3-D glasses in more depth below, I will say here that, especially as a non-glasses wearing viewer, having moments of unencumbered viewing allowed for a space of reflection about my relationship with the actors and the overall act of seeing.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

Ann Cooper-Albright writes that “perceiving dance means more than a flat visual gaze, it also means attending to kinesthetic, aural, somatic, and spatial sensations.”⁵³ In addition to the technical precision with which Coates physically places actors in spatial relationship to the audience and to the technology, I must return to the question of “feeling” that I asked at the start of the chapter. In attempting to describe what might best be called the “phenomenological experience” of George Coates’s work, my intention is not simply to oppose Cooper-Albright’s “sensations” to the traditional “flat visual gaze” of describing proscenium theatrical experiences. I aim instead to recognize that in experiencing live, bodied productions, these sensations are often the most elusive to impart. In Coates’s technological productions, the kinesthetic, aural, somatic, and spatial are all activated, and I want to focus on how these interconnected sensations function in defining presence on stage.

The Techno-Text and the Grain of the Voice

In *20/20 Blake*, Coates’s 1997 piece based on the painting and writing of William Blake, an actor appears as a small dot in the middle of a projected landscape—a recreation of one of Blake’s paintings, full of mythology and grandeur—and plays a scene amidst both filmic and data image projections. Suddenly, piercing through this rich and dense visual is the clear tenor of the actor playing the Herculean metal worker, Los, (sung by tenor Nathan Aaron Place) drawing our ears first, then our eyes, to the actor, not letting him be obfuscated by the multiple images within which he resides. The attraction to the singing voice, and song in general throughout Coates’s work, and my own inability to explain this attraction is again a part of what I describe as my “phenomenological

⁵³ Cooper-Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, xix.

reaction” to the work. Originally I thought it was the unique blend of voices coupled with a melodic and catchy score, and then I realized, many different voices and several collaborative composers later, that it was the intrinsic power of the voice, coupled with the imagery that left me speechless.

I turn to Roland Barthes’s “The Grain of the Voice,” in an attempt to analyze that which eludes analysis. Barthes’s essay takes as its premise that in attempting to write music criticism there is something imaginary, or inexplicable that cannot be expressed and a sense of loss that “comes to language via the adjective.”⁵⁴ The power of music, its need to be expressed *as* music can only be translated through the adjective in language. Through its inexplicability, Barthes necessarily grants music a fundamental “presence.” To counter the adjectival mode of expression, Barthes creates the idea of the “grain of the voice.” He first borrows and shifts Julia Kristeva’s terms pheno- and geno-text to understand these two types of text in song. The pheno-song represents “all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre . . . the style of the interpretation . . . communication, representation, expression,” and the geno-song is, “where the melody really works at the language—not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters—where melody explores how the language works.”⁵⁵ Using these two texts, Barthes uses two different singers as examples to contrast the two. When I apply this to the music and song of Coates’s work, I begin to differentiate between the complicated mix of song styles and voices communicating via harmonious tonalities combined with the splashy visual stimuli, and the sounds

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 181.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

themselves, what Barthes calls the “diction.”⁵⁶ In *20/20 Blake*, which is called “an opera-music theater work,” Coates collaborated with the Bay Area composer Adlai Alexander, musician Todd Rundgren, the San Francisco Chamber Singers, and live musicians to achieve a blend of opera, jazz, and rock that provides the musical interpretation of the 3-D creations of Blake’s paintings which provide the visual.⁵⁷ In each show Coates tries out new elements and keeps some of his collaborators from the last, members of the San Francisco Chamber Singers, for example, were also featured in *Architecture* but there blended with the African *a cappella* ensemble Zulu Spear, members of Savina—an Eastern European woman’s chorus—an operatic tenor, and a boy soprano, producing a totally unique sound created by composer Marc Ream.

Barthes introduces the third term, the grain, as “the encounter between a language and a voice.”⁵⁸ In a sense, the grain is the thing in-between which could be called “presence,” or for Walter Benjamin, the “aura.” Any analysis of Coates would not be complete without exploring the grain. But as Barthes proposes the grain in relation to the specific examples of singing styles, he also suggests that the term could be expanded to include other types of music criticism. He himself extends it: “The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.”⁵⁹ Although cryptic in nature, the concept nevertheless suggests the ability of music to express a meaning which may be inexplicable in/untranslatable to music criticism. I find that in Coates’s work, the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁷ *20/20 Blake* Press Material

⁵⁸ Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” 181.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 188.

grain is carried through each piece for me, despite the “quality” of the music, or the mix of musicians—some choices have been more melodious, some more cacophonous, but each piece strikes me as having this grain. Realizing its abstract quality, Barthes himself writes that it is “the impossible account of an individual thrill that I constantly experience in listening to singing.”⁶⁰

For Coates, the thrill is not merely a function of the pheno- or geno-song, but is of its combination with what I might call the “techno-song,” that is, the methods by which the lyrics, structure, and sound of the songs and voices complement, are influenced by, and related to the technological imagery on stage. For example, in *The Architecture of Catastrophic Change*, the first show to follow the Loma Prieta earthquake that destroyed the production of *Right Mind*, a young actor climbed up onto a large ramp on stage as an image was projected of a car rushing up and over the top, stopping just in time and left to dangle. This image has its own context within the show but is here intertwined with the boy soprano who stands on the edge of the ramp as he witnesses the crash and sings, “stop the bleeding mess, no hearing her cries, no feeling, the baby’s breathing.” The human interaction adds depth to the visual image, which in this case, is already an imprinted photographic memory from the press coverage of the earthquake. The actor’s placement and vocals triangulate with the visual image to create a contextual grain, one that can be broken down into its parts but taken as a whole is more difficult to process analytically. For Barthes, the experience of listening to the grain of the voice is not psychological, as he explains: “it is not the psychological ‘subject’ in me who is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 181.

listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce—to express—that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it.”⁶¹ This is the power of presence.

As I will describe in more depth below, what I describe here is not new, and everyone has their own sense of what moves them. I will further this discussion, and begin to understand what sets it apart once the “techno-song” is more fully drawn out through the use of the 3-D glasses. However, at this point I would like to begin to twist my argument slowly around and move gradually from the “phenomenological presence” I have discussed through the use of placement and song/voice through to a “psychological absence.” I continue the discussion on voice/sound/image through an alternate grain that is understood through the friction between these terms and forms of absence. I begin with examples from the 1992 *The Desert Music*, and then proceed to the use of the 3-D glasses and how they facilitate an alternate mode of viewing that transposes traditional representational subjects into ones with resistant potential.

In the program of *The Desert Music* is printed one of the three poems by William Carlos Williams that originally accompanied Steve Reich’s “The Four Seasons” and “The Desert Music” compositions. The following text from one of the Williams poems, printed in the program, shifts the idea of perception from the phenomenological one described about, to one that also begins more actively to set up an engagement with the psychological process:

Well, shall we think or listen?

Is there a sound addressed

Not Wholly to the ear?

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

We have closed our eyes.

We do not hear it through our eyes

It is not a flute note either, it is the relation

Of a flute note to a drum. I am wide awake.

The mind is listening.⁶²

The Reich piece was rewritten by composer Marc Ream into an electronic orchestral version which was accompanied by a vocal score, sung by fifteen members of the San Francisco Chamber Singers, and live marimba, drum, and flute instrumentation. The piece also featured an ensemble of dancers and the Coates 3-D visuals. In addition to the grain described in the section above, this piece addresses what Barthes alludes to when he notes that the significance of the grain is the “very friction between the music and something else . . . the particular language . . . the song must speak, must write.”⁶³ *The Desert Music* literally writes its song/texts as well as plays them. The friction set up is between many, often conflicting “texts.” Parts of the performance text appeared as projections on the screen portion of the set. Coates juxtaposes the text and accompanying music with the mythologized narrative of D. B. Cooper’s 1971 skyjacking and subsequent parachuting into Eastern Washington’s Cascade wilderness with \$200,000 in marked bills, never to be heard from again. Cooper remains mute throughout the show, his directives to the flight attendants and thoughts are projected as notes, or fragments of floating text. Also projected are bits of the Williams poems, and direct-address

⁶² William Carlos Williams, “The Desert Music,” Provided in *The Desert Music Program*, 1992, George Coates Performance Works.

⁶³ Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice.” 185.

instructions to the audience at the end of the evening. The texts are visual as well as auditory.

The clashing and overlapping voices of Coates, Ream, Williams, Cooper, and Reich filled the stage with music, song, text, movement, and images all at once, obfuscating any simplistic conclusions. The Cooper story is lifted out of the mix momentarily as the actor playing Cooper interacts through the 3-D glasses with images symbolic of greed, nature, and ignorance—he appears from within the projected image of a huge twenty-dollar bill; he is juxtaposed with images of an uncontrollable fire, spreading out of control at the hands of humans; he wanders into a dense forest and watches three wood nymph characters at a pool of water. Much of the imagery relates to the legend of Cooper and, as is Coates's proclivity, the actor often stands alone onstage—but in this piece he never speaks. His silence is a haunting one, and speaks more than the array of other actual sounds in the space. The grain of this piece then lies in the revelation that from within the friction between the music and the language there is a silence, a literal writing through the sound, of thought. What at first appears messy and chaotic on stage leaves in its wake a calm, a space of palpable absence. Barthes's quote bears repeating: "it is not the psychological 'subject' in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce—to express—that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it."⁶⁴ By adding the techno-song to the mix, Coates's work begins to tease *in* the psychological subject. Allowing the bodies on stage to retain their own sense of presence while also immersing them in the technological re-directs the position of the subject from on-stage bodies to those in the audience. The 3-D mergings begin to

⁶⁴ Ibid., 188.

integrate the subjectivity of the audience to the subjectivity of the actor to construct a cyborg blending of phenomenological and psychological subjectivity.

Seeing in 3-D

By introducing the element of 3-D glasses, Coates provides an additional common ground to that of being in space together for the experience of the audience. Taking as a given that each member of this “interpretive community” will bring his or her own social constructedness, ideology, and history into the room, the viewing experience will inevitably vary from audience member to audience member.⁶⁵ While we each emerge from what Pierre Bourdieu calls a “habitus,” no two experiences will be the same and interpretive strategies will vary.⁶⁶ Perhaps in an attempt to engage the viewers within the world of experience he is creating, he attempts to “neutralize” one specific element of the experience—the somatic relationship to the image—through the prosthetic aid of the glasses. In dance, the bodily movement is the primary means necessary to achieve this effect, and as Cooper-Albright explains, our individual cultural, social, and economic relationship to the world conditions the viewing process:

Although it is true that movement necessarily engages the viewer’s bodily presence, the viewer is not necessarily engaged in the same manner. While almost everybody would feel a clenching of the gut to see someone free fall through space and then get caught at the last moment, we all have very different

⁶⁵ I borrow the term from Susan Bennett’s *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1997), 40. She borrows the term from Stanley Fish but refines his definition, which is a reading strategy, to say that, “Interpretive communities are not stable, holding privileged points of view, but represent different interpretive strategies held by different literary cultures at different times.”

⁶⁶ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, eds. Randal Johnson and Lawrence D. Krizman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

expectations about what kind of dancing is pleasurable to see or do. These expectations are culturally constructed and yet experienced somatically on a very deep muscular level.”⁶⁷

To achieve a unifying kinesthetic and spatial effect, Coates gives out cardboard 3-D glasses with the programs for the performance. Instantly, certain cultural tropes unite the audience—whether you wore or have seen footage of 3-D film audiences, a relationship to this iconic 1950s image is forged as audience members don the glasses and try to look composed. Any “highbrow” associations with the theatre are negated and giggles can be heard throughout the crowd as the ridiculousness of the visual image registers. Once the show begins, the glasses become the portal into complex images (as associations of stereoscopes come to mind) and exhilarating lurches of movement that feel as if you are experiencing them in that moment (recalling the fall through space Cooper-Albright mentions).

Coates had experimented with other forms of optical tricks before creating the screen and using 3-D, including the previously mentioned car scene from *Architecture of Catastrophic Change*. The visual image was a replication of a frequently replayed clip of a car balanced precariously over the broken edge of a bridge during the actual 1989 earthquake. There were no 3-D glasses yet but this image sent a shudder through an audience already familiar with the physical sensations of tremors and quakes. The 1992 *Invisible Site*, as the first of the SMARTS enterprises, allowed Coates to have the screen built and was described as “the closest thing yet to an out-of-body experience that you

⁶⁷ Cooper-Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, xix.

could buy legally and enjoy without harmful side effects.”⁶⁸ In this production, based upon the premise of a virtual reality dating game that is interrupted by a computer hacker, Coates introduced the 3-D glasses to his theatre audiences after developing the technology for the SIGGRAPH conference the previous year.⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, Coates uses a series of ramps behind the screen where actors can place themselves in order to be seen interacting with the images on the screen—as seen through the glasses, which fuse the images into a three-dimensional effect. Although the show provided experiences of flying with the character of the Dalai Lama, or experiencing an animated figure self-immolating, (Coates used the Life Forms program to generate these body images), the most powerful images were those of fire and destruction that appeared to leap through the lenses. Coates explained to Douglas Gordy that “the Oakland/Berkeley fire [of 1991] happened and we were up there the next day with the 3-D photography and we created the 3-D shots that showed the journey through all the devastation.”⁷⁰ His awareness/sensitivity to the local—which physically, emotionally, and historically produces meanings on his stage—situates the audience’s viewing experience within their own sense of the events taking place on the stage.

Whether an audience member is from the area or not, the shifted optical relationship to the space through the 3-D effects results in at least a physical feeling of connectedness to the image. This kinesthetic sense, at times disconcerting (when an

⁶⁸ Scott Rosenberg, “George Coates and Virtual Reality,” 5. See this article for an in-depth description of the technical apparatus and its function. Coates remains wary of discussing the technical “trademarks” of his company.

⁶⁹ SIGGRAPH is an annual computer graphics trade show.

⁷⁰ Douglas Gordy, “‘Compelling Accidents’,” 328.

object suddenly appears to be coming at you), at others simply annoying (as the glasses begin to get uncomfortable), transforms the traditional gaze of viewer to performer and begins to challenge traditional notions of seeing. Additionally, the traditional proscenium-style frontal approach of the spectator-performer relationship has let Coates explore/exploit the cinematic value of his stage. Cleverly relating to America's obsession with the television, Coates uses the screen to make the audience feel at home. He foresees and hopes to eventually implement a fully interactive set-up whereby each audience member has access to remote controls and can participate in the creation of the overall piece.⁷¹ Using the western audience's (and increasingly the globalized community's) familiarity with screens and remote controls has the potential to reconceive notions of traditional theatre, foregrounding cyborgian relationships and "fracturing the voyeuristic relationship between audience and performer."⁷² Perhaps personally involving more people in the construction of a "work of art" will serve as a strategy to increase its economic status and value. Or perhaps there is already a strategy in play in Coates's work that resists the corporate globalization—that allows technology to serve as a subversive agent in the service of art?

Re-marking on Visibility

"What would it take to value the immaterial within a culture structured around the equation 'material equals value?,'" asks Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked*.⁷³ Using a foundation of psychoanalytic theory, Phelan questions the constant equation of

⁷¹ George Coates, interview with Author, San Francisco, CA, 15 March 1997.

⁷² Cooper-Albright. *Choreographing Difference*, 4.

⁷³ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 5.

representation to power and turns her attention instead to the subversive potential of the unrepresented, or unmarked. Phelan's *Unmarked* is the female, although she writes that:

“To the degree that the ethnic or racial ‘other’ (not the norm and thus remarkable) is also always already feminized, the same risk is encountered. Visibility reproduces the self-same and converts the other into a fetish, a phallic substitute. The other is a metaphor understood within the pre-existing grammar and frame of the given to be seen.”⁷⁴

Coates's work can be seen as existing within two frames, a “proscenium” theatrical frame (the marked) and a technological, environmental one (the unmarked). As I have shown, Coates makes a point to develop the traditional theatrical elements in order to foreground the actor's body at times during the performances; there is no attempt to trick the audience into thinking this is film. Nor does Coates constantly rely on the slick technological images to carry the weight of his work. Coates has his roots in the live theatre and it is to this space that he is committed. Phelan writes of this theatrical representation: “mimetic correspondence has a psychic appeal because one seeks a self-image within the representational frame . . . so that the spectator can secure a coherent belief in self-authority, assurance, presence.”⁷⁵ That is, this need for self-identity, as Phelan tells it is based in the psychoanalytic origin, or “primal scene” which, “is remembered and (re)visited through the dream and the symptom—through the imaginative attempt of the unconscious to replay the (past) scene on the stage of the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 182, footnote 12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

present.”⁷⁶ But in that there is not a chance of ever re-living this origin, which also necessarily represents conclusion, or death, a means in which to live situated in the center is sought, one that “employs seeing as a way of knowing.”⁷⁷ It is from this need that one finds comfort in mimetic representation. This statement is ultimately the psychoanalytic equivalent, or flip side, of the phenomenological presence I have discussed. It is driven by the unknowable, the inexplicable, and so it turns to representation for validation.

Indeed, at first, Coates’s representational frame was one to which I could cling. Coates’s work sates my desire to see a greater representation of diversity, of local community; it often draws attention to ideologies of economy and ecology that I could feel situated in—it makes me feel that I can, unlike Jill Dolan’s unhappy feminist spectator, applaud *through* the curtain call.⁷⁸ Now from a psychoanalytic perspective I can begin to answer my initial questions. However, when first encountering Coates’s work, I never stopped to ponder the possibility that, as Phelan points out, “visibility . . . provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonial/imperial appetite for possession.”⁷⁹ She goes on to explain that:

While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly underrepresented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁸ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, (Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press, 1991), 2-3.

⁷⁹ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 6.

the putative power of these identities. A much more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility needs to be pursued than the Left currently engages.⁸⁰

Phelan's examples include the subversive and thought-provoking work on passing done by artist Adrian Piper and the strategies of the feminist group the Guerrilla Girls, who refuse to be named, marketed, or fetishized. Her argument is well-drawn and points to an undue emphasis on representation with relation to power. She pointedly sums up her argument with the catchy phrase, "if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture."⁸¹ Directing my vision back to the representative frame of Coates's stage, I feel almost ashamed. Am I merely a voyeur in Coates's space, fetishizing the "other"? Yet there is another frame within this work—the technological. Perhaps I will be redeemed.

I have established the means by which the Coates actors are embodied, representing the tension between the psychological and phenomenological strands of theory about the body. These are the bodies that slide into the technological landscapes and become "invisible." However, this invisibility is more akin to Phelan's unmarked than it is to disappearance. Coates deliberately does not conflate the two ideas of framing but instead maintains a fluidity between the two (that is, there is no structure by which I could describe the two frames alternating, or split into equal temporal frames). For a merging to take place, Coates provides the 3-D glasses through which the spectators can witness the merging. Without the glasses, each of the multiple layers—the performers, the screen, the lighting, the props—on the stage seems flat and disconnected. With the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

glasses on, a complicated world of depth opens up. By making the live performers suddenly “invisible” to our naked eye, only to be seen anew through the glasses, Coates calls attention to the process of seeing, perhaps as a reminder of what we do not see in the traditional methods of viewing? The present and live bodies on Coates’s stage become a part of what Phelan calls an “inclusive representational framework,” in the sense that the representational and visible bodies merge within the technology, losing their representational visibility but in the process are re-marked as something new to be seen.⁸²

If I invert this structure of live-as-marked, technology-as-unmarked, yet another strategy of resistance unfolds. If, given the massive onslaught of globalized media display, the technological is read as the visible representation, that which is familiar to the larger audiences of film and television, then the live elements of Coates’s stage become the unmarked, the subversive invisible. Because live theatre, rather than film, continues to be Coates’s goal, he occupies, and oscillates within, a unique space between theatre and film, between the non-profit and profit worlds—and he relies on both to survive in a complicated fiscal space. In order to develop the new “tools”/technologies that he fuses with live performers, he works with large industries, and is often asked to create presentations for industrial conferences that will wow their crowds. In exchange he gets to keep the “tool.” He was hired in 1988, for example, by Steve Jobs, to develop a presentation to introduce the NeXT computer, which Coates got to keep.⁸³ Coates serves to infuse the emerging technology with imagination, and out of these ideas often comes his next theatre piece. He fuels his “art” through the corporate powers of

⁸² Ibid., 7.

⁸³ George Coates, interview, 15 March 1997.

technology and capital. His dependency on the corporate capital is certain, but perhaps subversive, or at least, practical. He explained to me the thrill of putting this corporate technology into action, “there I was, using this computer technology supplied to me from a trade show to show Arthur Rimbaud’s fever dreams! The corporations give me the opportunity to do theatre, I’m sure they never even think anyone will subvert this tech and use it to make ‘art.’”⁸⁴ Coates may depend on the system of corporate capitalism to provide him with tools far beyond those obtainable within the non-profit world; this at-times problematic relationship has the potential to challenge and subvert the very structures of American capitalism by his boundary blurring between these two worlds.

In many of Coates’s productions, the insider access to emerging technologies get his creative juices flowing and what he learns becomes part of the content of the show. In the 1993 *Box Conspiracy*, for example, he fashioned a show around the idea of interactive television. He told me that he knew this technology was in the works and he wanted to play with the ideas—primarily because it was important to him to put forth the ideas that this technology will allow more access to personal information that will be used by large corporations. For example, insurance companies want to obtain access to buying patterns on the Internet so that they can see which people are higher risk takers than others.⁸⁵ So in this piece, a man loses his job and hears there is a marketing firm looking for people as test cases—they have unlimited on-line shopping access in exchange for all of their use records, which will be tracked by a marketing firm. One reviewer said the show “seems prescient in light of the planned merger, recently

⁸⁴ George Coates, interview with Author, Berkeley, CA, 5 April 1997.

⁸⁵ George Coates, interview with Author, San Francisco, CA, April 1999.

announced, of Bell Atlantic phone company and the cable giant Tele-communications, the first step in what is touted as a 500-channel future."⁸⁶ Coates's work often prefigures the practical uses of the technologies in order to playfully question these ends. In this case, it gave him the opportunity to use film projections from an empty model home, which the family could furnish by a click of the remote. Coates used old movies, for example, the family wanted the lamp from *Singing in the Rain*, and "click," it appeared via movers at their door. Although the artistic possibilities are limitless, Coates is wary of the technology he uses:

There is an element of surveillance that the box is going to be set up to do because everything that comes into your house—because it is digital—leaves a digital trail. The phone company or the telecommunications companies will be able to sell your purchasing record to insurance companies. You might find that your insurance rate goes up at the end of the year when they discover how much double sausage pizza you have been ordering.⁸⁷

When Coates uses technology as content, as in *Box Conspiracy*, or in the VR dating-game (which was, incidentally, interrupted by a computer hacker) of *Invisible Site*, what is visible then goes beyond the stunning grain of the techno-text and begins to engage a political commentary on another level. In this equation, the unmarked is the live, the traditional frame of theatre that so often gets subsumed by the screens and frames of television and film. Coates's work has the potential to constantly shift its meanings and challenge all modes of viewing.

⁸⁶ Ruthe Stein "George Coates Tries a New Channel." *San Francisco Chronicle*, Datebook, 7 November 1993, 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

What began as a Cold War effort to speed up communications has become cyberspace, an electronic geography that reterritorializes pre-existing geographies, opening new social and cultural worlds that are only beginning to be explored but that quite probably are already redefining what it means to be human.

—Mark Poster, “High-Tech Frankenstein, or Heidegger Meets Stelarc”⁸⁸

Although Poster regards the contemporary condition through cyberspace, his arguments can be extended to emerging technologies as a whole. As the concept of the human evolves to include such influences as technological culture, it is absorbed and acculturated within the lived bodies of society. As a theatre practitioner, George Coates bridges the theoretical divide between body and technology, constantly putting into play questions about the impact technology has on society and vice-versa. In so doing his work is representative of a subject-driven cyborg theatre.

As D.B. Cooper parachutes into the dense forest below, money begins to swirl through the air. It takes a moment to register and pull off the 3-D glasses—this is *real* money. Two hundred real dollar bills are spiraling through the air above the audience’s heads. As the entire audience registered that it was real, a frenzied scramble through the aisles begins as some pluck bills from the air, others bend and reach for those on the floor. After posing the question of Cooper’s greed to the audience, the audience gets to experience it themselves. This device replays Abbie Hoffman’s actions of throwing money on the stock exchange floor in the sixties, and the audience responds immediately with their own sense of personal greed, but because it is framed within a theatrical space

⁸⁸ Mark Poster, “High-Tech Frankenstein, or Heidegger Meets Stelarc,” in *The Cyborg Experiments: the Extensions of the Body in the Media Age*, ed. Joanna Zylińska (London: Continuum, 2002), 27. Despite its rather general title, this book is a collection of essays about the work of performance artists Stelarc and Orlan.

they are then reminded through the tools of theatrical production of the nature of their actions. Slowly, the projected plea for the return of these “props” is acknowledged, as a screen displays a percentage figure of how many bills were returned the previous evening appeared on the screen at the end of the performance. I drop my dollars in the box outside, reminded, and reassured of the power of the theatre.

Coates directly confronts issues raised by Walter Benjamin’s ground-breaking 1935 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” that have been struggled with by theorists ever since. Postmodern society is now represented through a Baudrillardian hyperreality, “where the simulacrum precedes the thing it represents” and further, as a world of “simulations for which there is no original referent.”⁸⁹ In the wake of these definitions, it might be useful to return to Benjamin’s original work to see how, in our “age of mechanical reproduction,” technological, hybrid theatre could retain its origins, rather than aura, while transforming into something new, yet always fluctuating somewhere in between.

Benjamin claims that mechanical reproduction displaces the “aura” of the original work of art causing it to wither and be destroyed. “For the first time and this is the effect of the film—man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to presence; there can be no replica of it.”⁹⁰ Although Benjamin’s use of “aura” has been debated,⁹¹ and even dismissed, I will stick with Benjamin’s definition:

⁸⁹ Sally Banes, “Will the Real . . . Please Stand Up?” *The Drama Review* 34.4 (Winter 1990): 21.

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 231.

⁹¹ For a lively debate over the details of Benjamin’s idea of “aura” see, Ian Knizek’s “Walter Benjamin and the Mechanical Reproducibility of Art Works Revisited,” *British*

the aura is an enigma that centers around the notion of the authenticity of the original. As Benjamin describes it: “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.”⁹² Benjamin contends that the original has an authority that its reproduction does not.

However it is the idea of the “original” itself that complicates the idea of authenticity. Sandy Stone, in a discussion of the idea of “mimetics and iconics” explains the process by which power has been delegated through iconic symbols representing the original authority. In fact, paper money itself, as an iconic symbol standing in for a nation’s wealth, can trouble the question of representation and the aura. By using actual money within the theatrical frame Coates raises further questions about the real and the theatrically produced. Stone explains that

The close of the mechanical age is the dawn of the virtual age, in which agency is in such danger of decoupling from politically stable bodies and floating off into the prosthetic never-never that our society’s hottest hot buttons have to do with location technology. . . . Virtual systems are dangerous because the agency/body coupling so diligently fostered by every facet of our society is in danger of becoming irrelevant.⁹³

Virtual systems, and VR, are certainly areas that raise questions about this agency/body coupling, and the same questions can be asked about the ideas of the reproduction of

Journal of Aesthetics 33.4 (October 1993): 357-366. Knizek states that one of his problems is a distrust for the term, “because it refers to something which is not in the work of art; it is, indeed, an extra-aesthetic feature.” (358).

⁹² Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 222.

⁹³ Sandy Stone, “Split Subjects, Not Atoms: or, How I fell in Love with My Prosthesis,” *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995), 404.

technology, projected images, and the types of cyborg forms appearing on Coates's stage. As his work continues to explore interactions of the live and the technological, the organic body could be seen to lose its agency, or at least be subverted by the technological, therefore, losing the authority and authenticity Benjamin wrote about. As I have demonstrated however, the creation of this new form of hybrid emerging in the twenty-first century carries with it the rebirth of an "aura" that is imbued with the potential to have a greater unifying power than the original. This may be read as a move from Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction to an age of virtual reproduction.

Only if the "non-organic" body is seen as a "virtual reproduction" of a privileged, and sacred site (the organic body), will it have the ability to out-authenticate and out-authorize its original. It is precisely this distinction that makes twenty-first century mechanical reproductions, (cloning, for example) so frightening. However, the potentiality of a performative hybrid as a live presence with perhaps a *multiple* authenticity and authority has been underexplored. The advantage of this form is that its virtual reproduction is only a part of its reproductive abilities. Putting aside the debate over biology in the face of evolving reproduction technologies and sticking to a theatrical metaphor, the cyborg theatre would necessarily reproduce at least a part of its originality. The cyborg-hybrid never loses its authenticity because as it transforms into a new form, it always retains an element of its origin—as Coates's shows appear filmic, they also destabilize their cinematic apparatus through a retention of a theatrical aura that is difficult to pin down but nonetheless present. Maintaining a live presence will necessarily maintain a sense of agency and authority, for, even when coupled with a technological other, as Stone points out, "humans act at a distance by delegating their

agency to someone or something else that has the freedom to travel out of their sight, and if we follow that agency back far enough, eventually we can trace it to the original human's physical presence, where the buck stops."⁹⁴

I began this chapter with a quote from Frederic Jameson in which he argues that the fundamental condition of postmodernity is a move beyond the "capacities of the individual human body." Reading technology as "actor" allows me to extend Fischer-Lichte's argument into the development of the cyborg theatre. In the new millennium, the cyborg, whether as a metaphor for the boundary blurring of multi-media techniques, or as an attempt to expand forms of reproduction and representation of traditional living actors on the stage, is a necessary theoretical construction to investigate in order to consider the space of the live body on stage. In the theatre, as Fischer-Lichte points out, we have already transformed our views on the history of acting and the once common belief that "the body belongs to the realm of nature. It has organic traits: it has physical and physiological functions, needs, and purposes. It is a part of nature."⁹⁵ As she charts the civilizing process through several time periods, the body's function change, but: "The human body never exists as pure nature, apart from history."⁹⁶ The historical, political, economic, and cultural atmosphere surrounding the twenty-first century is beginning to emerge, and it seems to be taking the shape of a cyborg.

Jameson writes that:

⁹⁴ Ibid., 400.

⁹⁵ Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre and the Civilizing Process," 21.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole now decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself.⁹⁷

As I have discussed, Coates's use of technology on the stage both mesmerizes and raises questions about the structures that support multinational capitalism. However, as I recognized in my initial response to Coates's work, the visual representation of technology, if not delicately balanced, can obscure these important questions of power. Coates's cyborg theatre attempts to maintain this precarious balance through the re-presentation of the subject body in the face of the technology that elsewhere threatens to overwhelm embodiment.

Through technology, Coates's work is able to narrow the gap between the advances in film and television and the live theatre. Projecting film, slides or computer graphics on a screen for live actors to interact with allows a camera's eye to assist the spectator for unique effects in live theatre. The audience can travel from place to place in a continuous stream of images, as *Invisible Site* journeyed from a rainy street to a rocky desert to a dense forest. The camera can dissolve the image and cross-fade into another in seconds, expanding the possibilities for not only scenic experimentation, but

⁹⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 37-38.

dramaturgical style and acting as well. With a new cyborgian language for the stage, the power of presence can be restored. "Theatre must find out what it can do on-stage that is better than what can be done on film or in a book or on the tube. When you see something live that's impossible, then some magic has happened"⁹⁸

As I have explored in this chapter, George Coates's work is the closest model of the cyborg theatre. By working with what I have described here as the embodied subject, a bringing together of phenomenological and psychological strands of subjectivity, and allowing space for the audience's own subjectivity, Coates constructs a cyborg theatre that allows for a consideration of the questions of presence and re-presentation in the contemporary moment. The cyborg theatre is one that opens up possibilities for the future of theatre.

⁹⁸ George Coates, qtd. in Michael Lassell, "George Coates Becomes Popular in a Rare Area—Performance Art." *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 6 August 1986, sec. F, p. 3.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: CYBORG STAGES

“Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.”

—Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents”¹

Freud wrote these words in 1929, ostensibly about the progress of civilization. Already living in a prosthetic society—a society in which the idea of the technological “tool” as extension of oneself was firmly established and understood—Freud recognized that the technological advances taking place in his lifetime, although imbued with great potential, were growing at a more rapid pace than could be comfortably assimilated. He goes on to say that “future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great advances in this field of civilization.”² However, in a footnote the editor explains that Freud was most probably referring also to himself because he had to wear a prosthesis, “an enlarged cumbersome, chafing, often painful plate, since his cancer operations on his palate and jaw in 1923.”³ Freud recognizes his own troublesome body as a metonym for society. The attempt to extend his conflicted feelings about his prosthesis to civilization uncannily prefigures the current, and cautionary, debates about the cyborg. In fact, a new volume called *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture*, (the catalogue from an exhibit of the same name) takes as a premise Freud’s formulation

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989), 738.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, n. 9. Note added by Peter Gay, editor.

of the concept of the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, which he explicates through Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. In this tale, which I discussed in my introduction, it is Nathaniel's inability to recognize Olympia's automatism that forms the basis of the uncanny. As the curator for the exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Bruce Grenville, uses the term uncanny to describe the very familiarity with the same entity that provokes fear, anxiety, and potential destruction. In his preliminary article within *The Uncanny*, overall a somewhat contradictory volume, Grenville describes the cyborg as having these qualities of Freud's concept:

The cyborg is uncanny not because it is unfamiliar or alien, but rather because it is all too familiar. It is the body doubled—doubled by the machine that is so common, so familiar, so ubiquitous, and so essential that it threatens to consume us, to destroy our links to nature and history, and quite literally, especially in times of war, to destroy the body itself and to replace it with its uncanny double.⁴

My own reading of the cyborg is, like some of the other contributors to this volume, less wary or concerned with the cyborg's destructive potential and more concerned with its disruptive potential. However, I bring up this idea of the uncanny because it signifies a historical and cultural understanding of the contemporary cyborg that grounds it in issues of embodiment. As technologized society has progressed from a largely prosthetic to an integrated system, that is, as technologies have evolved from simple tools used by

⁴ Bruce Grenville, ed., *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery/Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), 20-21. This volume is the catalogue which accompanied an exhibit of the same name. I consider this book contradictory in the sense that while curator Grenville writes that the cyborg is "a cipher of our own anxiety" he also promotes a utopic vision through glossy prints and the inclusion of the very images he critiques. The volume also includes essays that do not reflect as pessimistic a stance as Grenville.

humans to more sophisticated and integrated devices such as robotic limbs or internally implanted pace-makers, the concerns and questions about humanity's cyborgian relationship to the world continue to reflect the societal consciousness of the body.

The cyborg is both a magnetic and a practical idea to evoke when theorizing multimedia performance. I began this study with the image of two major throughlines in the twentieth century, the body and technology. The cyborg is the idea through which the two lines are drawn together, in this historical moment magnetized, rather than repelled, and then intertwined into a new form of subjectivity for the twenty-first century. Chris Hables Gray defines the cyborg as "a self-regulating organism that combines the natural and the artificial together in one system. Cyborgs do not have to be part human, for any organism/system that mixes the evolved and the made, the living and the inanimate, is technically a cyborg."⁵ Although I ground the cyborg theatre in the human, Gray's point calls attention to the integration, the mutual dependence, of the organic and the inorganic. As filmic and televisual modes of seeing—mediatized and enscreened understandings of the world—have begun to dominate over the unmediated, and representations of "liveness" are depicted and distributed in our homes more easily than in live performance, the cyborg theatre has the potential to re-invest in the live and revive the imagination.⁶ Although Philip Auslander maintains that it is no longer possible to see through anything but a mediatized lens, I think it is also important to consider that this lens is inherently cyborgian and that the viewing position is human.

⁵ Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

⁶ See Philip Auslander, *Liveness* (London: Routledge, 1999) for an in-depth analysis of the televisual in relation to the concepts of the "live."

From the start of this project until its completion I have seen a rising increase in interest in the cyborg. Cyborg constructions appear everywhere—in books, art and video installations, print ads, media labs, and on film. As recently as the 31 January 2003 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, an article called “The Soul of a New Machine,” surveyed the tropes of cyborgs in the humanities and provided a bibliography of current books dealing with the cyborg. Author Scott McLemee discovers through his research that “one effect of reading a lot of scholarly work on cyborgs is that you begin seeing them everywhere.”⁷ Perhaps this is true, or perhaps the scholarly work reflects and refracts the cyborg’s societal prevalence.

The cyborg’s position on the border of both the live and the technological holds great appeal as a theoretical site where those who do not hold a unified or universalized position in society can perhaps locate themselves. The cyborg provides hope for those whose bodies are unable to perform as society requires: the cyborg provokes hostility in those who cannot imagine their bodies ever needing help. Cyborgs are also imaginative, they are the future yet to be determined, thought out, experienced. As Gray somewhat playfully points out:

They are dangerous. They are exciting, transcendent, exuberant, even liberating. They dwell on the border between cultures, between living and dead, between organic and inorganic, between natural and artificial, between now and the future, and in doing so they obscure, and reify, these very boundaries. We must carefully choose the borders we inhabit and transgress. We must carefully choose our stimulations, the music we dance to, the costumes we wear, or the future cannot

⁷ Scott McLemee, “The Soul of a New Machine,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no.

be ours and we will not even have a good time. We are, after all, our rituals. It is our life, our carnival. As individuals we can cry if we want to, we can dance, we can love and hate, we can leave early, we can pretend it is not happening. But we cannot stop the cyborg carnival; it is already well underway. We just do not know how it is going to turn out.⁸

This seems to be the philosophy of performance artist Stelarc. His cyborgian experiments have ranged from a “stomach sculpture,” in which he had a specially designed probe, complete with mini camera, inserted down his throat into his stomach without the aid of anesthesia, to a robotic third arm with a fully-functional hand controlled by electrical impulses attached to the body. Stelarc may best be known for his performances in which he inserts large metal hooks into his flesh and suspends himself from various locations. Stelarc always refers to his body as “the body,” raising disconcerting issues about questions of where identity is located. Gray ends his book *Cyborg Citizen* with a quote from Stelarc, who ironically focuses on his own personal body. “In this age of information overload, what is significant is no longer freedom of ideas but rather freedom of form—freedom to modify, freedom to mutate your body.” Gray’s response complicates Stelarc’s utopic techno-fanaticism by replying that “the freedom of form comes out of freedom of ideas, and in most places, even the freedom of ideas is threatened. People must organize to protect all their freedoms, actual and potential. That ultimately involves working together.”⁹ The theatre, a collaborative

21 (31 January 2003): A14.

⁸ Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 195-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

enterprise by nature, provides a constructive place to rehearse the ideas of cyborg representations, to put into play that which is perhaps not yet accepted fully in a non-performance context. It is here that on one hand, borders of subjectivity can be blurred and on the other, imaginations can supercede technology's intended use. The cyborg theatre provides a lens for a re-viewing of bodies—conceptions of live bodies in this posthuman time that cannot be divorced from their mediatized reflections.

As I conceive it in this project, the cyborg theatre is an externally applied concept for a theoretical analysis of subjectivity and embodiment. This model is a means of analysis for types of multimedia theatre that form a cyborgean relationship between bodies and technology. In many of my examples, technology also becomes a component of the content—these artists's interest in the applications and uses of technology are what allow me to focus on the reconceptualizations of the body that emerge from their projects. However, cyborgs are defined by a blurring of boundaries, and the parameters of a cyborg theatre will be necessarily tested and stretched, questioned and destabilized, by other visions of cyborg identity. Consequently, an alternate model of cyborg theatre emerges that is perhaps more driven by the reconceptualizations of specific bodies than by the applications of technology. This example is applied in the work of performance artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes who consciously use the term cyborg in their performances of identity, ethnicity, and nationality.

Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes stage a conception of the cyborg that intentionally emerges from within their work, rather than from any external conception of it. Their boundary blurring is also a border crossing, as reflected in the title of Gómez-Peña's book, *Dangerous Border Crossings* (2000). In his book, Gómez-Peña recalls that the

fascination with technology in the art world of the 1990s was conceptualized only in ways that were not viable “for Chicano/Latino performance artists and other politicized artists of color interested in new technologies.”¹⁰ The three trends he saw happening, a “machine art” movement in which the body disappeared, a prosthetic movement which considered the body obsolete but in need of augmentation, and a Luddite reaction that eschewed technology in favor of a “primitive” body as the central site for performance, were inadequate to trouble the concerns about otherness and ethnicity so central to his work. Gómez-Peña turned to the concept of the cyborg as a way to “employ new technologies to enhance mytho-poetical interactivity between performer and live audience, and as a tool for researching fundamental expressions of inter-cultural fear and desire.”¹¹

One example of Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes’s experimentation in “ethno-techno” art takes the form of performance that is constructed around “habitats” or “diorama” stations that are often equipped with technology such as projection screens, computer keyboards, or weapons.¹² With their company La Pocha Nostra, Gómez-Peña, Sifuentes, and company appear in the dioramas in costume as “ethno-cyborgs,” specimens for the audience to look at and interact with. These characters and habitats have been collaboratively developed through Internet dialogues in which audiences are asked to respond to questions about representations of Mexicans and Chicanos. The audience’s

¹⁰ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossings: the Artist Talks Back* (London: Routledge, 2000), 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹² The piece I describe is called *El Mexterminator* and it has toured extensively through at least eight countries as of the publication of Gómez-Peña’s book. I saw a version of this performance at the Performative Sites Conference at Penn State on 28 October 2000.

input then contributes to the development of the characters Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes create and then enact. Gómez-Peña was surprised that stereotypes of the “sleepy Mexican,” or the “Exotic border senorita” were replaced by “mighty robo-Mexicans”:

Armed with mysterious shamanic artifacts and sci-fi automatic weapons, their bodies enhanced with prosthetic implants and their brown skin decorated with Aztec tattoos, these hyper-sexual ‘ethno-cyborgs,’ clothed in high Tex-Mex/gangster-rap regalia, both defied and perversely incorporated every imaginable Hollywood and MTV stereotype, every fear and desire secretly harbored in the fragile psyches and hearts of contemporary Americans . . . After reading thousands of pages of Internet submissions, my colleagues and I concluded that a perverse dialectic of intercultural violence and interracial desire was central to America’s perception/projection of cultural otherness.”¹³

What Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes put into performance is cyborgian on many levels—a compilation of voices and texts integrated through the use of technology, and then assembled through the lenses of the artists. The artists have developed hybrid characters that push the concepts of to their borders and beyond—“El Mad Mex,” “CyberVato,” “La Cultural Transvestite”—are a few of the characters in the piece, and on stage these characters interact with forms of technology as well as with the audience, who are encouraged to do so “at their own risk.” Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes’s work plays upon contemporary culture’s fascination with technology and the fear and anxiety of “otherness.” This cyborg theatre provokes profound questions of the abject, object, and subject bodily conceptions of Mexican/Chicano people as well as the audiences of the

¹³ Ibid., 50.

performance, all as developed through globalized techno-communication devices such as the Internet and as influenced by film and video representations of identities.

The three bodily conceptions I put forth as the basis of this study—the abject, object, and subject—form the foundation and framework for the cyborg theatre. Through an integration with technology, each of these bodily configurations emerges as a cyborg-subject. Cathy Weis's work re-configures ways of understanding bodies that are “abject” or outside supposed societal norms. The Wooster Group's object bodies—bodies constructed more through ideas than the materiality of the bodies themselves—are transformed through their intersections with technology, producing a way of seeing not just the constructed bodies in the work but also the spaces between the bodies and the images, reminding the viewer of what is often missed in the more passive acts of viewing television and film. By acknowledging the subject bodies of both the performers and audience's real bodies, and re-positioning them vis-à-vis emerging technologies—often taking the forms of the screens and remote controls that are becoming ubiquitous in Western society—George Coates attempts to restore agency to embodiment and to re-imagine theatre. I have intentionally constructed this model around multiple understandings of the body and only one understanding of technology. First, because this subject level of technology can subsume abject and object technology, and second, because I take the live bodily elements to be the central focus of the study. How bodies combine with technology interests me more than the converse.

Although my study is developed within a theatrical context, it could be extended to examples outside of theatre. In the aforementioned volume *The Uncanny*, an article is included by writer/performer Randy Lee Cutler called “Warning: Sheborgs/Cyberfems

Rupture Image-Stream!” In this article Cutler examines the cyborg and cyberfeminism in the work of three artists (works included in the exhibit upon which the book was based) Lee Bul, Mariko Mori, and Nina Levitt, to focus on “gender identity, the body, culture, and contemporary technologies and their potential for change.”¹⁴ In reading her analysis, I was struck by the similarity to my own project. Although earlier focusing primarily on cyberfeminism, her final thesis was remarkably (uncannily) similar to my own. “The idea of cyborg identities proposes alternate modes of embodiment where the ‘self’ is performed and interrogated. This may include the disassembly of bodily form (Bul), the creation of an alternate subjectivity (Levitt), or the multiplication of self (Mori). All of these strategies create distance between oneself and a normalized, naturalized body.”¹⁵ Cutler’s reading of these artists and their artwork supports the drive behind my own project—there is a need and a desire to reconceptualize forms of subjectivity in contemporary technological society to include “alternate modes of embodiment.” The cyborg provides the site for such a reconceptualization.

Cyborg Theatre(s)

In the following sections I propose and briefly explore additional examples of performance that I define as cyborg theatre. I will extend the development of the cyborg theatre beyond the strict borders which separate abject, object, and subject bodies elsewhere in my study. I have chosen these examples as some of the most intriguing recent work with multimedia on stage. Although I have outlined each category of the

¹⁴ Randy Lee Cutler, “Warning: Sheborgs/Cyberfems Rupture Image-Stream!” in *The Uncanny*, ed. Bruce Grenville (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery/Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), 189.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

body separately, I do not intend these as temporally or historically fixed configurations—initially they, along with the technologies, matrix the field of cyborg performance, yet maintaining them as fixed categories would undercut the transformative potentials of the cyborg theatre. Thus, the examples that I discuss in my conclusion build on these developments of the cyborg theatre; these are forward-looking performance groups which allow us to imagine future developments of the cyborg theatre. The boundary blurring that occurs out of each of the bodily conceptions I have outlined, for example, from the abject body to its emergence as a cyborg subject body in performance, indicates a fluid and fragmentary condition that allows for multiple, and in some cases disruptive readings of contemporary embodiment. Through examining several other performances that I consider cyborg theatre, I hope to differentiate and nuance the questions of subjectivity that are at the core of this project.

The Builders Association

The Builders Association was founded in 1993 by director Marianne Weems who had previously worked as a dramaturg and assistant to Liz LeCompte for the Wooster Group. Their press material describes the work as defining “a new theatrical idiom by combining historical and new texts with performance, sound, video, and architectural sets, creating a world onstage that reflects contemporary culture.”¹⁶ Their work has ranged from productions of Ibsen’s *Master Builder* (1994) to O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1998); from a version of *Faust* called *Jump Cut* (1998), to a text about modern travel called *Jet Lag* (1998-2000). Like the Wooster Group, the Builders Association combines canonical texts with technological “texts,” but this work is more

¹⁶ *Xtravaganza* press material.

akin to the technological content of George Coates. Both Builders Association and Coates create their work around the ideas of technology's impact or influence on contemporary societies. *Jet Lag*, a piece created in collaboration with architects/media artists Diller + Scofidio, intertwined two true stories, the first is that of Sarah Krassnoff, who kidnapped her grandson and flew back and forth over the Atlantic 167 times in six months, never leaving the airports and finally dying of jet lag. The second story was based on Donald Crowhurst, the yachtsman who faked a trip around the world, sending reports of his journey home to Britain where his logs were published.¹⁷ The Builders' concern with technology often directly provides the content for fuels their work.

In *Xtravaganza* (2000-2002), the Builders created a historical pastiche of technology in performance and its innovators, all framed within the 1990s club scene, which Weems is quoted as saying is "another pop form of multimedia spectacle."¹⁸ The show pays homage to the magically-lit dances of Loie Fuller, the showgirl revues of Florenz Ziegfeld, the filmic spectacles of Busby Berkeley that far exceeded what could be staged theatrically, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, and the "extravaganza" that Steele MacKaye, the theatrical and mechanical innovator, planned for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.¹⁹ *Xtravaganza* recreates these technological highlights blending stock footage

¹⁷ This material comes from the Builder's Association press kit as I was unable to see this show in person. I did see *Xtravaganza*, on 23 April 2002.

¹⁸ Randy Gener, "Chopping Up History to Make a New Stew," preview of *Xtravaganza*, by the Builders Association, *New York Times*, 21 April 2002.

¹⁹ The press material provides a one-page biographical outline of each innovator, and notes that MacKaye planned to build "a mammoth 12,000-seat theatre, which he called The Spectatorium . . . In 1893, just months before its completion, work on the Spectatorium ceased as a stock market crash swept the country and panicked his financial backers. The nearly-erected structure was razed to the ground." See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*

with contemporary technology, effects, and live bodies. Using only a few actors and a lot of computer assistance, Ziegfeld and Berkeley's extravagant spectacles are recreated through a contemporary lens. Two actors *cum* showgirls, complete with big feather fan props, begin to walk up a staircase positioned center stage. As they step up, more and more dancers appear—projections of the two live women—spilling onto surrounding screens, creating the illusion of hundreds of showgirls. The Builders also blend film techniques with live performance and in a sophisticated take on the Wooster Group's use of chroma key technology on stage, they foreground the blue screen itself and the technology of this, rather than simply utilizing the technology to develop a particular aesthetic image. Here, the Builders position live actors on a downstage playing area performing in front of a blue screen as their images simultaneously appear on a large screen center stage seamlessly merged with stock background and other characters as part of a film.

Although *Xtravaganza* is about historical applications of technology, it recreates these effects using contemporary techniques and devices within a live theatrical space. The show was described by Lawrence Van Gelder as "a tribute by the Builders Association to a handful of dreamers born in the 19th century who seized on new technology like electricity, stage machinery and motion pictures to bring to reality the conceptions of lavish entertainment that propelled show business in the 20th century and

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), and Robert C. Allen and Alan Trachtenberg, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) for more information on these practitioners and their times.

beyond."²⁰ However, I believe that this show goes beyond a simple tribute to expose audiences to a new set of dreamers in the twenty-first century who reverse this dynamic and seize instead the lavish entertainments of the past to bring to reality the conceptions and possibilities of new technologies on the live stage.

The cyborg theatre of the Builders Association combines elements of the abject, object, and subject bodies and technologies on stage. An actor holds a large white screen in front of the lower half of his body onto which is projected the lower half of a body doing intricate dance steps a la Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly—the live and the projected seamlessly dance as one; in the reverse image, two steel frames of female manikin legs (like those of the showgirls), four pairs on each, are wheeled out and manually lifted up by levers in a kick-line by operators standing behind them. Live actors perform a scene center stage with the projected image of an actor on film behind them, who is also actually downstage left performing in front of a blue screen. *Xtravaganza* exemplifies multiple mergings between the bodies and technology on stage, but as in the work of George Coates, the live actors are also periodically foregrounded, shifting the focus back to the embodied subject in the midst of technology. The piece has several scenes in which the “downtown club legend” Brahms “Bravo” LaFortune and several other actors perform hip-hop style dances, sometimes to swirling psychedelic projections, and other times to old film footage of, for example, the Wild West Show, all synched to a heavy club beat.²¹ Using a combination of historical and emerging techniques of technology, the Builders Association explores integrations between these technologies and bodies that

²⁰ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Saluting Spectacles of the Past,” review of *Xtravaganza*, by The Builders Association, *New York Times*, 1 May 2002.

²¹ This description is applied to LaFortune in the press material.

promises a socio-historic grounding for this form.

Yubiwa Hotel

My next example draws on the work of the Japanese-based performance group Yubiwa Hotel, whose piece *Long Distance Love* began as an experiment with technology but in the context of world events took on far more meaning.²² I include this piece as representative of the cyborg theatre's potential to build community and reciprocity—specifically through its engagement with participating audiences that were linked via Internet technologies. On 22 September 2001, I tentatively went to the theatre. I had heard that Yubiwa Hotel was performing in the area and using the Internet as a cyborgian device to link performance communities. I live in Brooklyn, New York and on this day, eleven days after September 11, we still had little phone service, one poorly received television station, and riding the subway felt like taking your life in your hands. Luckily, this production was in Brooklyn at a small theatre space by the waterfront under the Manhattan Bridge called RedLab Theatre. However, it also took place in a space called Club Asia P, in Tokyo. As commentaries across the city pointed to forces of globalization as reasons for the September 11 attack, some of these very structures would that day enable me to be part of a dual, international audience that shared both performance and politics. This certainly draws upon the same ethos of reciprocity that I used to characterize Cathy Weis's work, but it goes beyond this as well, developing and exploring further possibilities of/for the cyborg theatre.

²² Although I have framed my overall project within the context of North American culture, I include this example as a mirror to the Internet works created by Cathy Weis, who seeks to connect with cultures other than her own. Additionally, this piece was created out of a collaboration between actors from both the U.S. and Japan.

I come to this idea of reciprocity as a way of recognizing the mutuality in the cyborg. Although I remain focused upon the live bodies, I also acknowledge the give and take between technology and humanity. The cyborg stands as a symbiosis, a reliance upon the technology that can in turn provide advances for the live. I have analyzed the Internet performances of Cathy Weis from the perspective of the abject body and its ability to be re-envisioned through the cyborg in performance. However, this technological link, as I discuss in reference to Weis's work, is further examined through the reciprocity of embodied audiences in the work of Yubiwa Hotel.

On 22 September, at this performance of *Long Distance Love*, the audience sat in a long, narrow room with a shallow stage in front and a large screen house left, somewhat more cramped than the on-line publicity blurb about the show described:

The actresses, both in New York, and in Tokyo, will perform facing a large screen upon which images from the live stream video and previously shot video clips will be projected. The audience will be positioned between the two, giving them the choice of which visual element to watch, and putting them in the limbo-land that represents the distance between the two groups of performers.²³

The performance took place simultaneously in Brooklyn and at Club Asia P in Tokyo (I went to a matinee; due to the fourteen-hour time differences, the only other show was at midnight) and while watching the live feed I could also see bits of the enthusiastic audience in Tokyo. Because the audience was between the performance spaces, although in more of a triangulation than their quote suggests, the relationship with the audience is more pronounced here than in Weis's work.

²³ Program Notes, Yubiwa Hotel.

The program stated that, “Yubiwa Hotel plays with the state-of-the-art, *fin-de-siècle* communication tools as if they were play phones made with two paper cups connected with tightly drawn strings.”²⁴ While ultimately I was not as impressed with their use of the Internet as a creative device within the piece, I was intrigued by its premise. In four drawn-out segments, each comprised of two actors, one in New York, one in Tokyo, types of child’s play were acted out by the coupled actors, utilizing the Internet to foreground a global connection/perspective to performance in this hi-tech age. Unfortunately, the technical elements Weis plays with so artistically—grainy and broken-up feed, time lags and delays that were here often over five-seconds long—were not as aesthetically successful when specific texts were applied and a dialogue was spoken over the distance. I sensed a frustration in dealing with the delays for both the performers and the audience; technology’s seductive power was suddenly not strong enough to steady these fragile links. Perhaps this was part of their point. And yet, for the audiences, the bi-directional connection was comforting in those days after September 11.

Overall, the piece did contain many provocative themes. Director Shiritama Hitsujiya developed four types of play based on childhood experiences: from long-distance teasing, one U.S. actor says, “I’d beat you up if you weren’t in Japan,” to imaginary object play where each actor’s prop, one a large candy cane, the other a mirror, became different objects to manipulate—a horse, a baton, a machine gun—eventually turning into a twisted aggressive striptease with blood streaming from the U.S. actor’s mouth. What struck me that day about the interactions between actors was a cycle of child-like aggression that always reverted to friendship, and the loss of innocence as seen

²⁴ Ibid.

through children. Or perhaps, as the mother of a then seven-year old, I was just acutely in-tune then with the ideas of a child's innocent understanding of the world turning to one that incorporates tremendous aggression.

Afterwards, a question and answer session was encouraged and it was there that I realized the larger implications of this technology's global usage. Although we had access to email by this point, the live sputtering video stream coming from Japan showed concerned expressions and shared feelings. While this technological link that spanned from Tokyo to the still burning New York was unsteady and incapable of fully bridging the trauma we felt, the comfort of knowing that this community so far away was in the room, talking to us, was powerful. Technology's powers of seduction can serve as a strategy of empowerment and forging communities. The audiences in Japan clamored to know how the audiences here were coping with the tragedy and wondered if we could find any resonance in the piece we had just seen. The answers represented the mixture of still-fresh emotions in the crowd. One young man stood up and spoke of the loss of a good friend of the family and said this "escapism" was exactly what he needed. His tears, and perhaps too much of the free wine, prompted him to leave and go to the restroom in time to miss the perplexed response from the Tokyo audience, who evidently felt more as I did about the piece's connections to current events and political relevance. There was a sense of relief from Tokyo to have heard stories from New York and to have shared this time as a community. For us New Yorkers, the technology in this small room allowed us to feel we were embraced. I left feeling more grounded than when I arrived. The addition of the audience's subject bodies in both spaces—each physically embodied in only one of the two spaces—at this particular time highlighted the possibilities for

connectivity to which Weis's work only begins to allude.

Richard Maxwell

Although Richard Maxwell's work is typically far from technological, a particularly interesting exploration of the object body is found in his recent *Joe* (2002). The play is made up of six scenes, each a lengthy monologue from the perspective of the same person, Joe, at different ages.²⁵ The piece begins with a young boy and progresses through young adult, middle-age, and so forth, replacing the actor in each scene for an older version. Each actor wears the same costume—sneakers, jeans, and a red zip-up sweatshirt—and the overall effect is a layering and an accumulation of experience of the same “subject.” What makes this play stand out as cyborg theatre is uniquely different from the other models I have outlined thus far. In this play, the final stage of the man's life is played by a moving, talking robot. The cyborg here is created in the physical space—the robot does not merge, interact, or fuse with the live bodies on stage. However, this robot is Maxwell's projection of the next age of [this] man and therefore on this stage is an extension of the live character that is Joe. As this man's life progresses from living being to robot, the body is literally made both abject and object, as it is first cast off and then replaced by a literal, mechanized object. The technology here literally replaces/becomes the subject body in question at the center of the play.

This example does not specifically fit into my taxonomy of the cyborg theatre, but I see the figure of the robot as a promising means through which to explore a more literal cyborg theatre in both practice and theory. Although I have yet to see many uses of robots in the theatre, outside of the confrontational robot wars of Survival Research

Laboratories, in which the subjects are all robots, or in the case of performance artist Stelarc, who, as I mentioned, has created robotic prosthetics and turned himself into a literal cyborg, I suspect that robotic presences will become more prevalent in the near future.²⁶ Recently, Robert Wilson used a robotic toy monkey in his production of *Woyzeck* and although this was less central than the robot in Maxwell's *Joe*, it served as a catalyst for the action on stage as it periodically clapped its cymbals together.

Final Reflections

I mention above only a few of the many examples of cyborg theatre. Companies and artists in the U. S. such as Collapsible Giraffe, Hopeful Monsters, Troika Ranch, John Moran, and John Jesurun, as well as Robert Lepage or Pps Danse from Canada, La Fura dels Baus from Spain, and some of the work of Robert Wilson, Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich, and Merce Cunningham would all be productive for further study. As I have distinguished, I do not consider every application of technology on stage to be cyborg theatre. There is much experimentation with multimedia that does not question conceptions of the body in the ways I have outlined.²⁷ Technology as spectacle, or mere environmental backdrop, or when used as projected as concurrent parallel commentary to

²⁵ I attended this performance on 13 September 2002. The production was done at P.S. 122 in New York, NY.

²⁶ For more information on Survival Research Laboratories, see Jim Pomeroy, "Black Box S-thetix: Labor, Research, and Survival in the He[Art] of the Beast." *Technoculture*, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). See Joanna Zylińska, *The Cyborg Experiments: the Extensions of the Body in the Media Age* (London: Continuum, 2002).

²⁷ See Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999) for a general account of contemporary media in performance. He devotes one chapter to performance and surveys, in an unspecified manner, many companies using new media.

the narrative on stage generally falls outside of the term as I have formulated it. However, it could also be argued that all technology on stage asks questions in juxtaposition to live bodies on stage. The layered construction of scrim and projection in the Ridge Theatre's *Jennie Richee* (2003), provides an example of my distinctions.

Jennie Richee, based on the work of "outsider" artist Henry Darger attempted to construct the world of Darger's already imaginative and disturbing paintings.²⁸ These paintings were accompanied by an extensive text (over 15,000 pages), that told the story of a group of seven young sisters, the Vivian Girls, who are engaged in a fantastical war against evil male adults and aided by hermaphroditic winged child-creatures called Blengins. The Ridge production, with text written by Mac Wellman and directed by Bob McGrath, carves out a small portion of the novel and tells the story from within a layered depiction of the paintings themselves. Although the actors became part of the re-created paintings by appearing in tiered intervals between scrim, onto which visual elements were often projected, the technological-live entwinement in the recreation of the painting did not lend itself to a questioning of this merging, but only served as a method of recreation/replication. There were occasional projections of a house on a large scrim, in front of which Darger appeared, that served to differentiate his lived world with that of his paintings, but in these instances I felt the projection might have as easily been a painted drop. I was intrigued by the techno-live mix in this production but feel that it served more an aesthetic function than anything socio-political.

Ultimately, the cyborg theatre is a political one. In it questions are raised about

²⁸ Darger's work was given a retrospective, which I attended, in 1997 at the Museum of American Folk Art in New York City. The paintings were displayed back to back on flat

contemporary subjectivity and its relationship to technologies. I have attempted to re-imagine conceptions of the abject, object, and subject bodies in their inevitable dance with technology in the twenty-first century. The cyborg theatre can serve as a site where bodies not often seen or heard can be reconfigured within a politics of the contemporary moment. Chris Hables Gray reminds us:

Certainly, the body is the ground; it cannot be ignored philosophically any more than it can be ignored in real life, no matter how much one aspires to be virtual. Bodies inhabit space, whether it is outer (the 'high ground' to the military), micro (now being colonized by nanotechnology), cyber (the simulated universe of virtual technologies), or symbolic (not cyberspace, as some virtual reality technicians claim, but the 'high ground' of Platonic philosophers, the human imagination, origin of cyborg). Space is modified by speed (action), mass (presence), and by simulation (thought).²⁹

Gray's bodied spaces that are modified by action, presence, and thought sound inherently theatrical. The space of the cyborg theatre has at its center the materiality of bodies. In the interplay with technology, the theatrical simulation rehearses new models for embodied subjects who have the potential to re-invest the theatre with political and ethical concerns. In *Cyborg Citizen*, Gray outlines a politics of cyborg citizenship and cautions that knowledge is both powerful and situated. With these points he echoes other techno-scholars who recognize the current cyborg condition. Cutler also reminds that, "Digital space is warming up, becoming mammalian. The future is upon us. And when

glass panels suspended from the ceiling of one gallery and the viewers walked around them following the adventures of the girls.

²⁹ Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 194.

the future is created, so the past is reconsidered, preparing the way for New Histories. The cyborg figure has provided a model for rewriting history or writing women into the history of technology.”³⁰ The potential for the cyborg theatre is not only as an effective model for feminist reconceptualizations of the subject. It does not simply provide new modes of understanding gender, race, and ability within subjectivity. It does not just question the positioning of identities—unified, fractured or multiple—in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, the cyborg theatre can provide a place for theatre practitioners to reflect back knowledge of technology and its effects upon local and global theatrical practices. Through an informed understanding of the power that shapes technologies, cyborg theatre practitioners can insist upon participatory strategies and thereby strengthen the applications of technology on their stages. The impact of new technologies on medicine, the environment, reproductive techniques, and communication is evident in daily life. By re-deploying these technologies, the cyborg theatre can question their political content and ubiquity. For theatre to survive in a cyborg age it must fearlessly take up, question, and integrate new technologies in conjunction with live bodies.

³⁰ Cutler, 191.

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