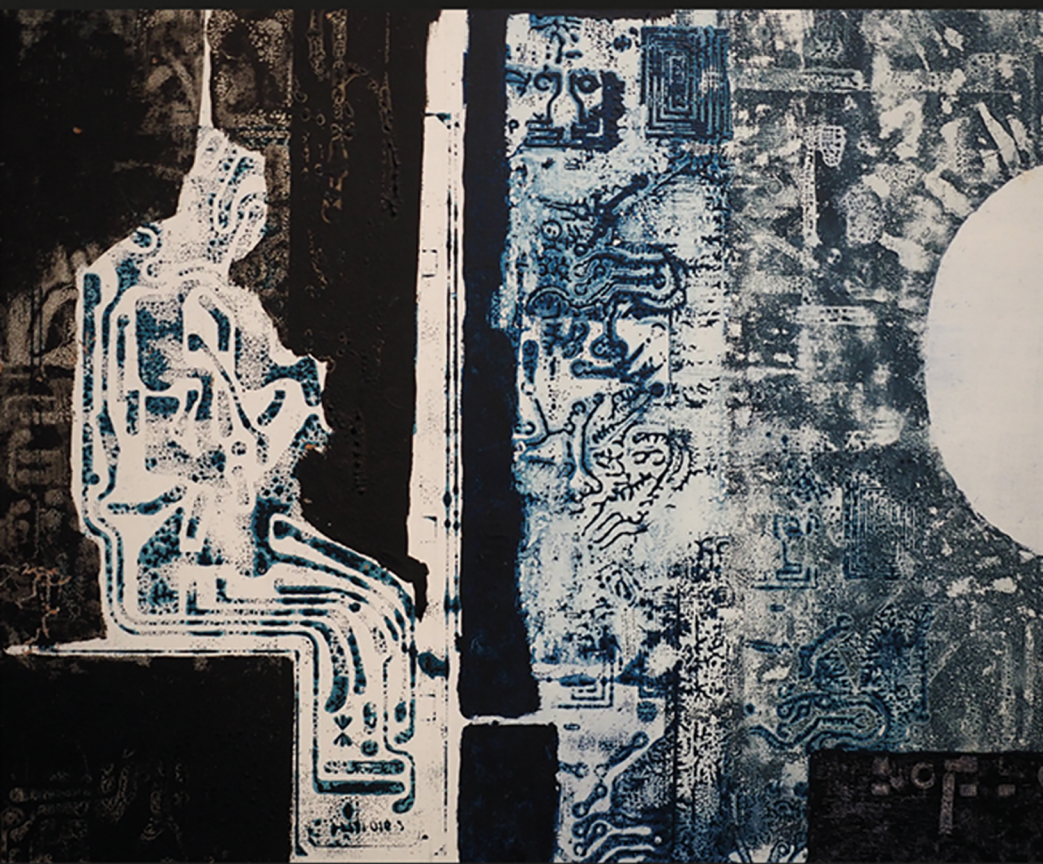


Ben Spatz

Blue Sky Body

Thresholds for Embodied Research



ROUTLEDGE



BLUE SKY BODY

Blue Sky Body: Thresholds for Embodied Research is the follow-up to Ben Spatz's 2015 book *What a Body Can Do*, charting a course through more than twenty years of embodied, artistic, and scholarly research.

Emerging from the confluence of theory and practice, this book combines full-length critical essays with a kaleidoscopic selection of fragments from journal entries, performance texts, and other unpublished materials to offer a series of entry points organized by seven keywords: *city, song, movement, theater, sex, document, politics*. Brimming with thoughtful and sometimes provocative takes on embodiment, technology, decoloniality, the university, and the politics of knowledge, the work shared here models the integration of artistic and embodied research with critical thought, opening new avenues for transformative action and experimentation.

Invaluable to scholars and practitioners working through and beyond performance, *Blue Sky Body* is both an unconventional introduction to embodied research and a methodological intervention at the edges of contemporary theory.

Ben Spatz is Senior Lecturer in Drama, Theatre, and Performance at the University of Huddersfield, UK. They are the author of *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (2015), the founder and editor of the videographic *Journal of Embodied Research*, published by Open Library of Humanities, and an internationally recognized speaker on embodied research methods. For more information, please visit www.urbanresearchtheater.com.



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BLUE SKY BODY

Thresholds for Embodied Research

Ben Spatz

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FOREWORD

This book is a theoretical, lyrical, and vulnerable uncovering of embodiment as the making and remaking of life in all its planetary forms. The first line of the preface: “Embodiment is first affordance” is the heart of the book. All else pulsates from this invaluable pronouncement, throughout the book and (I am convinced) throughout our lives. Spatz shows us how embodiment as first affordance is beautifully liberating yet righteously demanding. We begin to understand what this means as Spatz explicates the inborn reciprocity and innate difference between the body and embodiment. From the beginning a body does not simply enter the world of material realities but must engage, that is, survive, negotiate, experiment, transform, and cross through, infinite “thresholds” of materiality. We are shown how the entry point of a body is transformed toward embodiment as it must now learn how to engage material realities and specific techniques of crossing the never-ending thresholds that constitute reality. Spatz shows us how the body becomes derivative of embodiment, how embodiment is excess and quintessentially epistemic.

The gift of this book is not only that embodiment is an epistemic figuration and natural wonder, but also that it constitutes learned techniques from temporal and material worlds of sociality, politics, and cultural transmission. We are called upon to do something daring and inventive in collaboration with others for an ethical, active, and just unfolding of the world. What this book unleashes, in the claim of embodiment as first affordance, is that epistemic figurations as embodied techniques and

transmitted knowledges can make most anything possible and can change one thing into another thing when justice demands. If affordance means freedom from constraint and support for greater possibilities toward movement and action; if affordance falls outside what cannot be done or cannot be imagined, offering lines of flight generated by our greatest capabilities, then we can take up Spatz's call to "ethical and political" embodiments that require a greater intensity of time, labor, techniques, and practice—including the resilience, courage, and precise attention required to step across that safety line into unfamiliar territories of embodiments at risk and under threat.

The reader enters Spatz's unwavering concern for ethics and politics through the thematic and performative arc of their essays as well as their granular theorizing, enriched and kept lively through the presence and tone of their voice. This presence of voice is made more compelling as it is extended and inserted at key moments throughout the book, between and within the essays, through self-reflection, personal reportage, and narrative fragments. These ruminations—lyrical and vulnerable—are peppered throughout the rhetorical currents of the essays, making the politics and ethics of the book more performative, embodied, and material. The writing performs in print the affect and poetics of embodied knowledge. The book practices what it preaches and, as a result, sequence, personal distance, flow, and chronology are sometimes eclipsed by temporal disjuncture, discerning introspection, and fragmented realities. In these visceral and transformative moments, the writing becomes an invitation to enter the felt-sensing contours of experience.

The book's thematic content—from "City," "Song," "Movement," "Theater" to "Sex," "Document," "Politics"—comprise a multifaceted caravan, a polyvalent treatise, on the notion of embodiment as first affordance, particularly in relation to technique as the structuring dynamics of situated, enlivening practice. What accompanies "embodiment as first affordance" is Spatz's deep consideration for the epistemic, which is illuminated across content and theme. I will side step here to land more specifically on pedagogy. From Spatz's arguments, we realize that acquiring knowledge isn't simply incomplete, boring, painful, and insipid in the absence of embodiment and figurations of the epistemic, it is impossible. This is a truth whether the transmission of knowledge is a theoretical subject or a living moment—embodiment is a requirement. We can then understand pedagogy as, basically, the dissemination of knowledge for the purpose of learning. I mean this in a universal sense that whoever, whatever, or wherever you exert an effort—large or small—to transmit knowledge, at any

level of detail or intensity, within the realm and possibilities of learning, the stage is now set for an epistemic phenomenon that is pedagogy.

The conceptualization I find especially rich in the imagining and doing of pedagogy is what Spatz describes as the movement from threshold to technique. This means entering and passing through the liminal space between the edge of the unknown and the edge of the known. How is our pedagogy enriched when we ponder thresholds as crossing over into formations of new knowledge, where this new knowledge is acquired through transmitted embodied techniques? What are the pedagogical stakes as we understand how a body that first encountered the threshold may be changed through the embodiment of technique and the transmission of knowledge? Spatz expresses, with razor sharp clarity and intellectual depth, the significance of this crossing as it converts “the threshold into technique,” which thereby “becomes possible to train.” To know that crossing thresholds is trainable through the circulation of identifiable technique is no small matter, especially when your pedagogy demands the high stakes of deeply attending to and consistently exposing the “problems that beset our world.”¹ Pedagogy can be both blessedly and annoyingly messy. I appreciate Spatz’s endorsement for enumeration and their affirmation to the reader that listing, indexing, cataloguing, and the fascinating lexicon are most effective in synthesizing the excesses of complication and detail. To be concise holds qualities of precision and incisiveness. Spatz writes: “It seems that the enumeration of a set of fundamental categories of viewpoints is most often an act of pedagogy.” From enumeration, infinite combinations and pathways become accessible and epistemologically appealing.

Spatz’s first book, *What a Body Can Do*, was immensely helpful to me as an ethnographer in providing a vocabulary and conceptual framework to name and honor the hidden abodes of clandestine knowledges and the resistant performatives of local embodied practices. This book will be no less influential as an example of performative writing, offering another level in the discovery of “what a body can do” as first affordance, as well as showing how pedagogy can instigate threshold crossings, all in service of ethics and politics.

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1 Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997).

PREFACE: BLUE SKY BODY

*Embodiment is first affordance.*¹ The aim of this assertion is to offer a way of defining embodiment that gives it ethical and political force without elevating any particular bodies or body images. How can we honor and celebrate embodiment without fetishizing certain bodies? An affordance is a potential or possibility arising from a situation: that which a particular configuration of elements *affords*. To speak of affordances is to focus on possible actions, steps that might be taken, ways of doing and making, modes of alignment and coordination. Embodiment is “first affordance” in at least three ways: developmentally, for each living being; historically, as the difference between ecology and technology; and ethically, as the grounds of relationality. Embodiment is the way in which action and relation are worldly; or, from another perspective, the way in which the world is active and relational. The embodiment that is first affordance is not the biomedical body with its “normal” structures and associated abnormalities, diseases, and faults. It is rather a processual and never-finished *bodiliness* of being, as described and practiced in feminist, queer, trans, cripp, black, and indigenous studies and works. This is the body unfolding and dynamic, alive and vulnerable: the “flesh” of the world. The argument here is not that something called “the body” comes first, as that would presume the existence of a body prior to its life. Certainly there is no ethical or epistemological line that distinguishes “the body” from its “environment.” Instead, the argument is for an approach to embodiment as *that which appears first*, that which predates the division of ecology and technology, and that which above all requires care.

Embodiment as first affordance is premised on a distinction between technique and technology. In some critical theory today, technology is the more fashionable term, while technique is taken to imply a naïve humanism. This is a mistake. If we use “technology” to refer to *ways of doing*, then we have no word by which to refer to the force and inertia of the material things we have created and by which we may find ourselves alternately privileged or trapped. Technology is made by technique, so our focus must be on technique. But what does it mean to say that technique constructs embodiment, or even that embodiment is *made of* technique? Can we conceive of not only a pluriverse, a world of many worlds, but also a *pluribody*, a body made up of knowledges understood as worlding practices?² This is what I call “blue sky body,” invoking at least three different sets of connotations. In the first place, *blue sky body* may suggest the iconic body of power and privilege: beautiful, able, clean, athletic, white, probably educated, probably cisgender, probably heterosexual, probably male—a sedimentation of multiple forms of wealth. This body is total freedom imagined as lack of dependence, which is never far from the need to dominate others. Above all, this body appears to be *in control of itself*, because the labor that supports it has been hidden. It is “free” in an ironic sense, as that term has come to be used in U.S. imperialist projects. I hope this book offers a radical and fundamental critique of that clandestinely controlling body on multiple levels. I welcome readers who are invested in that fantasy (no one escapes it entirely) and I hope that everything in this book works to dismantle it.

In contrast, *blue sky body* could refer to an unknown, not yet realized, not yet determined, not-yet-arrived, or else very ancient body: a body made of sky as well as earth and water. This is not a type of body at all but a field of fields, where “blue sky” invokes the unknown and emergent effects of a research driven by joy, curiosity, and play. Yet discovering the unknown requires discipline; unlearning requires mastery; invention requires forgetting. How can we distinguish between research as a genuine and caring engagement with the affordances of life and research as an attempt to control, dominate, and exploit those same affordances? I hope that this book offers tools for drawing such distinctions, including an extended argument for the spatiality and temporality of knowledge, according to which the delineation of fields can never be final and must instead be understood as a response to particular moments and situations. Third, then, *blue sky body* is an ironic term, because blue skies are not predicted for our species or for the ecology of which we are part. What kinds of bodies would we need to cultivate, and how might we need to begin again from

shared embodiment, in order to stop destroying our own habitat? “Embodiment as first affordance” suggests a grounded but not ahistorical return to the body as a starting point, or at least a reference point, for ethics and politics. *Blue sky body* is therefore an ecological term. It refers to the body in its enfolded relations, where ecology is a practice of both world-making and world-tending.

In that case, another word for *blue sky body* could be indigeneity. This term, intentionally not capitalized, refers not to any particular nation, tribe, or people, but to a political reality based on relations of care for land as part and parcel of care for living beings. As I intend it here, this cannot be a matter of neocolonial or orientalist appropriation, although it does need to engage with technoscience and academia. At the risk of oversimplifying: *There is no avoiding the need for us all to become indigenous*. For those of us who are not already, this must not be confused with the appropriation of specific indigenous cultures.³ That is exactly the false way, the surface without the content, the stolen technique without its epistemic depth. What we need is the opposite: a politics of identity that recognizes difference, opposes whiteness, and privileges marginalized perspectives, combined with a deep ecological infrastructure of indigeneity. Such a politics can never be about taking someone else’s identity but only about finding one’s own. The question is how a lost indigeneity—a lost sense of justice as inextricable from the earth—can be found and *what that would mean*. Today, everyone can hear the screaming of the earth. Indigeneity is the question of who listens. Paradoxically, arguments against “anthropocentrism” go together with arguments for situated knowledge, which are defined precisely by recognizing one’s own positionality. If we are laying waste to what we need, in order to expand technologies that are mere luxuries, then we are working from a deeply impoverished understanding of *anthropos*, of the human. What we need is a new, or perhaps a very old, or perhaps just a *different* understanding of the human as a way of living that does not destroy itself. We need more and better anthropocentrism.

What is the difference between a car and a tree, from the perspective of embodiment? A car is a concatenation of a massive quantity of extracted labor that has been intensively shaped according to technological knowledge (engineering, design) in order to serve the human body that can afford to purchase it. A car is designed to serve bodies, but in doing so it harms other bodies, from the cyclists and pedestrians it may hit to the peoples whose land its production colonizes and the laborers who are exploited to manufacture it. A tree is neither for nor against a human body. Trees are with us, alongside us. They have a parallel ecological relation to us. A car

incarnates all of our “modern” social, economic, and political relations. A tree today is not so different from a tree one million years ago. In this sense embodied research has always been a decolonial project, but often without knowing it. It takes as its starting point embodiment, which is always the abjected and vulnerable “other” of coloniality, patriarchy, racism, ableism, and misogyny. Instead of treating the body as an object to be reclaimed or valorized, it opens embodiment as a field of fields, a world of worlds. Through such a reopening, perhaps those of us who have lost our grounding in the world can *come into relation* again, which is the technique Shawn Wilson offers for us settlers and diasporas to return to indigeneity.⁴ Donna Haraway’s vision of “making kin” is a critically scientific version of this invitation and challenge: *To come back into relation, to return to our kin*. Of course, such a return is not easily accomplished when those kin relations have been severed, burned, drowned, murdered, exploited, imprisoned, starved, genocided, and rendered extinct. But the possibility remains. As long as we are living beings, the kinship tie cannot be absolutely broken, no matter how violently we attempt to sever it, to reject and abject our own kin. How then can we distinguish between “materialist, experimental animism” and “neocolonial fantasy”?⁵

What Giorgio Agamben calls “destituent potential” is not as simple as not-working or refraining from participation in existing politics.⁶ It does not mean a simply negative critique of structure, or of institutionality, or of the social. Rather, what is suggested and badly needed is a reopening of all the domains of embodiment and a radical re-balancing of what is understood as the human. What can be the relation of *embodied research* to the “good living” cultivated across millennia by indigenous peoples?⁷ The two are fellow travelers, but the former has a different and more intimate relation to contexts of predominant whiteness and coloniality—the same ones that wield tremendous undeserved power over the future of the earth. In this narrower sense, embodied research can be understood as part of an alternative line of sanity or survival concealed within whiteness. This alternative line has two facets, each dealing with an aspect of the bifurcated mind/body dualism that founds modern whiteness. One side is that of Marxism, anarchism, feminism, and other left political movements. The other is that of embodied practice as carried by performing artists, teachers, therapists, bodyworkers, and other practitioners who have re-opened the forgotten and rejected fields of embodiment as first affordance. For me, the term “embodied research” suggests a bridging of these two aspects, an integration of the divided “body” and “mind” that might contribute to the healing of the many violences of whiteness and coloniality. Through

such a process, perhaps it could become possible for white people and other colonizers to unmake our self-exile and rejoin the world of worlds. If so, part of that process will be the dismantling of logocentrism, a project that makes every book outdated before it is written. But dismantling logocentrism does not mean burning our books. So I continue.

★ ★ ★

For me personally, this book is one step in a journey toward wholeness. I realized how much I had left out of my first book: my artistic practice, my nonbinary queerness and disability, my sexuality, my embodiment. These parts of myself were left out not only in order to discipline the book within a required scholarly style, but also because I had not yet found a way to integrate them within any kind of public-facing self. The present book is organized around seven previously published critical essays—the final item in each numbered section—which mostly follow a similar academic style, while taking the idea of embodied research in several new directions. But alongside these I have included a much wider variety of “fragments,” which are intended to illustrate some of the branches and pathways that remain hidden in *What a Body Can Do*.⁸ I always imagined a second book that would have a structural relation to the first like that which Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* has to their *Anti-Oedipus*. Everything that in the first volume was forced to cohere within a single framework would now explode and head off in many directions. Instead of a linear argument, the second book would offer a collection of “plateaus,” each of which could serve as an entry point to the volume as a whole. And the single note into which my artistic practice was formerly compressed would now expand and overtake the scholarly apparatus that had cleared space for it.⁹ Three decades of artistic and embodied research would no longer be carefully segregated from three decades of academic education and scholarship, as if all of this had not been conducted by the same person, through the same body, albeit usually in different places. This book has been through many versions, some more conventional and others even more fragmentary. I apologize for its remaining gaps and imperfections.

Some of the themes found here will be familiar to readers of *What a Body Can Do*: the work and legacies of Jerzy Grotowski; the concept and implementation of theater as a laboratory; and the idea that embodied research can best be theorized not through phenomenology or cognitive studies but through social epistemology, following thinkers like Karin

Knorr Cetina and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Other aspects of the content are quite different and reflect my work and growth over the past five years: more explicit references to my own identities, to whiteness, and to nonbinary gender; a wider range of genres that embraces other modes and styles of writing; and much more developed thinking about audiovisuality as an epistemic medium. The long essay “Thresholds” was written for this volume and represents where I am now with the idea of embodied research. It works primarily through close readings of other scholarly works, aiming to redefine the circulation of concepts like “object,” “threshold,” and “training” in contemporary thought. It also reframes the idea of technique, central to *What a Body Can Do*, as the crest of a wave or one moment in a cyclical and reversible onto-epistemic trajectory. At the other end of the book, there is an appendix comprising a pair of interviews with two major figures in theater and anthropology and a complete unpublished performance text. Complete versions of some items, as well as photographs and videos from performances, can be found on the Urban Research Theater website. Several others are available online as open access journal articles.¹⁰

The fragments collected here include unpublished essays and talks, performance texts both scripted and transcribed, unfinished artistic and academic notes, and personal journal entries. I feel vulnerable making this range of work public and that vulnerability is part of the point. Although many of these writings could be classified as mere juvenilia, they also represent incomplete strands of inquiry and identity—loose ends that I have not previously been able to integrate. Bringing them together here allows me to look back through my development as an artist-scholar and examine which aspects of my life have found a home in academia (at least so far) and which have not. I hope that this endeavor rises above self-indulgence to pose a broader question: How much academic writing only exists because of personal, artistic, cultural, and embodied research that underpins it but remains unnamed? In a sense, *all of it does*, and in this volume I try to expose some of that underlying abundance through my own example. To organize this plethora, I have given the book a spine: the seven scholarly essays mentioned above. Six of these were written or published in the past three years, with one stretching back further to 2010. Although they address embodiment and embodied research in a variety of ways—as first affordance, as “phenomenotechnique,” as choreography, as practical and ontological “viewpoints,” as a “laboratory of power,” as an effect of audiovisual technology, and as a site for decoloniality—they do so in a scholarly mode, carrying the imprimatur of peer review. Each complete

essay is preceded by a set of four “fragments,” some of which are made up of even smaller fragments from a single project. Together, each essay and its accompanying fragments make up one of the volume’s seven sections.

I could have grouped these essays and fragments together in any number of ways. Here, in the name of coherency, I have tried to gather within each section a group of writings that trace a particular thread or line of inquiry across diverse contexts and genres of writing as well as across a number of years. These are keywords, or perhaps better, *thresholds* that I have crossed and re-crossed in my artistic, scholarly, and personal journey: *city, song, movement, theater, sex, document, politics*. These seven thresholds are arranged in kind of chronological order: not so much that in which I “discovered” them, but that in which I feel I have been able to cross them, to render them explicit or practical. (I was fascinated by the idea of the city long before that of the body; and although I have always searched for a political theater, it is only recently that I feel I have begun to understand what that could mean.) Nevertheless, the sections can be read in any order. Alternatively, one could skip over the fragments and read only the scholarly essays; or read just the fragments. Some items, like “Choreography as Research,” “Ethics of the Scribble,” and “Criteria for Assessment,” are intended as accessible introductions. Others, like “Duration and Kinship” and “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment,” are meant as challenges to institutionalized performance studies and performing arts. Still others, like “Thresholds” and “The Video Way of Thinking,” aim to push the edges of current thought. For the most part, I have left the reprinted texts as they originally appeared, although some of the fragments have been lightly edited for clarity as well as length. At the risk of repetition, I have included full references in the endnotes following even the shortest items, in case they should be excerpted from the volume. The first note to each item gives its provenance. Each item is also preceded by a short text in which I speak to it from the present moment and situate it within the relevant section. I hope this will help to clarify the role of each piece in the whole, as well as offering various ways into its themes.

A note on the cover image: Livia Oestereicher was born to a Jewish family in Užhorod—then Czechoslovakia, now Ukraine. As the tide of antisemitism rose, her family converted to Christianity and she was christened Éva. “In the summer of 1944, escaping certain death as part of the condemned Jewish community, the family fled to Budapest, pretending to be refugees from Transylvania.”¹¹ In Hungary she changed her name again and, as Lili Ország, gradually established herself as a respected visual artist. Ország’s labyrinth series depicts nameless figures trapped or

protected by innumerable walls, doorways, gates, and mirrors. These are often layered with Hebrew and other letters, as well as the repeated motif of the printed circuit board, which she called “the twentieth-century symbol of the labyrinth.”¹² In *Labyrinth with Blue Mirror* (1977), a blue figure contemplates a pale oval shape hovering within a field of blue. One critic writes: “Blue is the colour of the sky and the sea, and hence that of the transcendental dimension, infinity, intangibility, clarity, angels and flight.”¹³ When I stumbled across a detail from this work online, I did not know its history. I only knew that, after much searching, I had found an image that could stand for the material I present in this volume. Here was another body traced by lines, this time ungendered and virtually featureless.¹⁴ Without knowing the work’s title, Ország’s mirror appeared to me as an egg and reminded me of a story I read as a child, about a magical community that maintained a giant floating egg in which all its forgotten stories were knotted and tangled. But here and in Ország’s other labyrinths, the lines that trace and structure the body are not bones, blood vessels, or nerves, nor even disciplines and lineages, but printed circuits: those now omnipresent mappings that delineate a material interface between lived embodiment and the digital world. Another analyst of Ország links her techno-mystical imagery to Kabbalah, recalling that scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem had this to say to the creators of modern computing, which he likened to the famous Golem: “develop peacefully and don’t destroy the world.”¹⁵ Today, this warning echoes throughout the many labyrinths in which we live.

1 See “Embodiment as First Affordance,” this volume.

2 Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

3 An internet meme has a child reporting: “My teacher says we are all indigenous to the earth.” An adult replies: “That’s just something hippies say to try and erase their white guilt.” I don’t say that we are all indigenous to the earth, but that we need to become so. I don’t propose erasing white guilt but decolonizing white bodies (see “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment,” this volume). I don’t support a “move to innocence” on the part of settlers (Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization* 1.1 [2012]: 3), but a wider politics of indigeneity.

4 Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008): 80.

5 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 165.

6 Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

- 7 Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): 23–4; and see Cadena and Blaser, *Many Worlds*: 199n54.
- 8 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 9 That note is Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 21n2.
- 10 Photographs and videos from *The Dark Ages, neverland, the desert, Theatrical!*, *PLAYWAR*, and *Rite of the Butcher*, are available on the Urban Research Theater website: www.urbanresearchtheater.com/. Complete versions of “The Electronic Heart” and “Vermilion’s Text” are also there — although some digging may be required to find them — as well as “Topology of Song” (video) and “Ethics of the Scribble” (audio). The following items are available on an open access basis from the journals in which they were first published: “Embodiment as First Affordance,” “Colors Like Knives,” “Criteria for Assessment,” “The Video Way of Thinking,” and “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment.” Thanks to the University of Huddersfield and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council for supporting the open access publication of several of these. Source and licensing details are provided in the first endnote to each item.
- 11 László Baán in *Shadow on Stone: The Art of Lili Ország* (Hungarian National Gallery, 2016): 6.
- 12 *Ibid.*: 7.
- 13 Katalin S. Nagy in *Shadow on Stone*: 136.
- 14 See “Thresholds,” this volume, notes 8 and 49.
- 15 Árpád Mikó in *Shadow on Stone*: 122, italics added. The quotation is from Gershom Scholem, “The Golem of Prague & The Golem of Rehovoth,” *Commentary* (January 1966): www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-golem-of-prague-the-golem-of-rehovoth/

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THRESHOLDS

This long-form essay charts an onto-epistemological trajectory through five phases or moments of knowledge and being. The journey is cyclical and reversible, describing movement in the direction of learning and research (*field, object, threshold, technique, principle, field*) as well as that of pedagogy and performance (*field, principle, technique, threshold, object, field*). To structure the discussion, I rely on two “companion” texts to illustrate each moment: one tending toward theoretical elaboration, the other toward concrete exemplar. These companions are chosen from a wide range of critical and philosophical contexts that represent some of my recent studies. They are analyzed here alongside and in support of my own thinking and experimentation in performing and embodied arts. As it moves along a trajectory from *field to field*, this essay ultimately attempts to rethink knowledge and disciplinarity from an intersectional or even decolonial perspective, confronting again and again the tension between knowledge and power. It concludes by suggesting that, in order to grapple with the complexity of power/knowledge fields, we will need an interdisciplinarity that is intersectional and an intersectionality that is interdisciplinary.

For years I have been fascinated by Karin Knorr Cetina’s description of epistemic objects as limitlessly unfolding.¹ It has seemed to me that Cetina’s account of research in the sciences offers a markedly better “fit” with embodied research than the mostly text-based, individualist methods of the humanities. Cetina takes Heidegger’s description of how objects pass

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from being *ready-to-hand* to being *present-at-hand* and gives it depth, showing how this transition does not happen only at a single threshold but over and over again, leading the patient researcher into a field of investigation that grows in size the further one burrows in. This description of research as “unfolding” resonates with Sarah Ahmed’s phenomenological account of life itself, of living in “a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn.”² From Ahmed we learn that every pathway into a world is also a pathway away from other worlds. For each object or field we open, an infinite number of possible objects and fields are closed. This is the process of sedimented agency by which we find ourselves living in such different worlds despite also sharing time and space. Too often our theories of research focus narrowly on the border between known and unknown, without acknowledging how mobile this border is, how it is constantly shifting, and how unstable is the distinction between question and answer, method and topic, premise and inquiry, the visible and the invisible. Are germs visible or invisible? What about climates, ghosts, societies, neutrinos, or minds? The answer depends on which pathways one has taken, which borders one has crossed, which techniques one has used, which principles one has sedimented, and in which fields one dwells. It is a common saying that the more you know, the more you realize how little you know, but the onto-epistemological implications of this are rarely acknowledged.

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, another historian-sociologist of science, takes a further step in describing the process by which the boundary between known and unknown moves and by which some worlds are opened and made real, while others are closed and at least temporarily abandoned. Rheinberger, in a passage to which I constantly return, describes a process in which the “epistemic things that ground the experimental sciences emerge from the deposit of the technical and its potential for tinkering. Whence it follows that time and again they lend themselves to becoming reincorporated in that deposit.”³ The gradual but constant sedimentation of the epistemic into the technical is the process by which paths are laid down. This description goes further than binary models of the research edge as the place where the known meets the unknown. Such models are accurate to a degree, but they fail to account for the continual movement of the research edge. The technical and the epistemic, like automaticity and awareness, are not opposed to one another. They are better understood as two sides of the same coin, the forward and backward facing sides of consciousness. In this sense, knowledge that recedes from awareness is “behind” us, while in “front” of us are new fields of knowing that only become possible because of what has been automatized. As we move forward

into these new fields, they too gradually become sedimented and “deposit” into the known. I have described technique in this sense as “a network of fractally branching pathways that vein the substance of practice.”⁴ Any point along these pathways can be defined in terms of what is behind (implicit, automatic) and what is ahead (emergent, unfolding). But movement along these pathways is not simply linear, nor are the pathways themselves contained by any plane that we might fully grasp as if from above. In calling them fractal, I mean to recall Cetina’s limitlessly unfolding objects, which take us not forward but down and through what we explore.

The present long-form essay offers further concepts for thinking about the structure of knowledge, with an emphasis on *how it feels* to move between worlds and with an eye toward developing a more complex topology of the epistemic and the technical. As I write, I am thinking primarily about research in what I call embodied technique. This is, I argue, the first and most fundamental kind of research that we do. As such, my description of the experience and process of *embodied research* can also be applied to the more technological and institutionalized kinds of research that we may associate more readily with that term. The context for my remapping is a growing, widespread, and urgent debate over knowledge in every arena of contemporary life: from the science and culture wars to fake news, from speculative ontology to critical anthropology, and from the institutional structure of academia to the increasingly explosive interactions between politics and new media. Here I turn to social epistemologists and cultural theorists in order to rethink embodiment as first affordance.⁵ Social epistemologists excel at describing the tactility and sensation of moving through knowledge, but they have mostly looked at research in science and technology, whereas my aim is to develop an idea of embodiment that goes beyond the scientific. Cultural theorists grapple with embodiment in crucial ways, but sometimes get stuck in a critical reflective mode that can foreclose effective action. Here I wager that the *spatial metaphor for knowledge* could be a meeting ground for what I see as these complementary projects. Such metaphors have already appeared in Cetina’s “unfolding,” Ahmed’s “turn,” and Rheinberger’s “deposit.” Here I want to pursue those spatial, topological, and geological metaphors a bit further, teasing out the kinds of experiences we have when working with knowledge as embodied researchers, teachers, students, and advocates. *What is it like to move through embodiment as epistemic space?*

It is increasingly common to conceive of academic research through “turns.” Rebecca Schneider writes: “All these turns can make you dizzy.”⁶ Yet I find the metaphor of epistemic turns very precise. It is not that

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researchers or institutions stand in one spot while turning and turning to face in multiple directions, like someone who is lost. Rather, these “turns” are part of an active journey, a movement in epistemic space, headed first this way and then that. Each turn is also a threshold through which individuals and communities pass: the linguistic turn, the materialist turn, the decolonial turn, and so on. Such turns are difficult to compare because they are points along a journey that is multidimensional and nested according to its own history. A given turn is only possible because of the turns that precede it. The spatial metaphor evokes the limited and contestable but nevertheless essential process of *knowing together*. I see you turn and may follow you, or I may turn a different way. Or I see you far away, making another turn, a turn which I cannot make because I am in a different place. No one has exactly the same journey as anyone else, but we can pass through some of the same fields, pathways, and thresholds. We can explore branches of knowledge, cross boundaries, situate ourselves, work with neighboring ideas, or follow lines of inquiry. We can take positions, negotiate distant perspectives, find insights nearby, arrive at points of view, move between paradigms, debate between fields, and discover common ground. “To say that the world is made of articulated propositions”—a better term would be technique—

is to imagine first *parallel* lines, the propositions, flowing in the same direction in laminar flow and then, because of some clinamen, generating intersections, bifurcations, splitting, that produce many eddies transforming the laminar flow into a turbulent one... To name such a world, I will employ the term *multiverse*... The *multiverse* designates the *universe freed from its premature unification*.⁷

In epistemic space we move forward and make progress, yet the spatial metaphor suggests nothing like a singular advance toward complete understanding. In fact, this metaphor is a comprehensive rejection of the progressive fallacy. Space situates us. If we are in one place, then we are not in another. Space limits our perspective, not just in terms of what we can see but also what we can hear, whom we can encounter, what we can do. Epistemic depth, in the sense of radical difference and relative incommensurability, is a way of nuancing how we find ourselves differing and apart from each other, yet unable to escape our shared horizons. How different is different? Is it merely skin “deep”? Even the idea of lineage is a spatializing metaphor, bringing teachers and ancestors into a line that could never be physically assembled.⁸

The idea of “thresholds” is meant to express something about the structure of knowledge as it is experienced in research and in training. When I was working with my friend and colleague Nazlıhan Eda Erçin on a sustained project of embodied research, she often referred to “entries,” starting points, and ways “in”: how to get into the space of practice, how to begin... She asked me if I had a name for this. Eventually I realized that I had proposed such a name in a different context:

A radically new area of research is often one that branches off close to the roots of previously existing knowledge. Instead of taking existing knowledge for granted, and seeking to discover new possibilities at the edges of what is known, radically new research may locate a hidden doorway or threshold—a branch of technique that had previously gone unseen or been dismissed as unimportant—and dive through it into hitherto unexplored territory.⁹

These are two different ways of talking about the same phenomenon. What I call a *threshold technique* is a key branching point—a “turning” point—that defines, marks, and rigorously affords a specific area of technique. What Eda was talking about was not necessarily something new, but rather a reliable step marking the bifurcation between two worlds, a crossroads that would reliably allow one to enter a particular zone of practice. This is what a threshold becomes once it has been made routine, relatively reliable, even automatic. Like literacy, mechanical physics, or binary gender, such thresholds are initially hailed as major discoveries, but eventually they become routinized and invisible, so that we no longer notice them until significant alternatives appear, new thresholds, new branching points: video, quantum, trans.

As I thought further about the idea of thresholds, I realized that it might be possible to articulate a phenomenology of knowledge, or a spatialized onto-epistemology, through a series of transformations including that of the threshold. What does a threshold look like when it first appears? Certainly that which later becomes an entry point does not initially present itself as a beautifully framed portal, inviting one to cross through it. No, there is a process of emergence by which something appears that does not at first even seem to be a threshold. Initially it is just an anomaly, something different or unusual. Only later, this “thing” is recognized as a threshold. Once recognized, the threshold can be crossed. Once crossed, what becomes of the threshold? What is its relation to the field in which we may later find ourselves on the other side? In this essay, I examine a set of five

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“moments,” phases, or manifestations in which we encounter things, phenomena, worlds: as *field*, as *object*, as *threshold*, as *technique*, and as *principle*. At the end, I return to the *field* in a different way, showing how the whole process is cyclical. Of course, these concepts are provisional and interwoven. I have no interest in sharply demarcating or universally applying them. What I offer is not a fixed ontology, if by that we mean a coherent and analytically exhaustive set of types, but more like an *onto-epistemological toolkit*, which at present contains five items that are already recognizable from contemporary thought and which I here resituate in a particular relation as points along a journey. The journey is both cyclical and reversible: *from field to field*.

The orientation or directionality I have mostly tried to theorize, and which provides the structure of this essay, is the direction of *research*, or of *opening*. This is also the direction of *learning*. When moving in this direction, what I called thresholds above first appear as *objects* within fields. At a certain point, an object becomes crossable, transforming into a *threshold*, border, or boundary. Although one can now cross this boundary, the space on the other side remains unclear, fuzzy. It can only be defined by the threshold that gets you there (the *limen*, hence it is *liminal*) until another transformation takes place, at which point it becomes possible to specify in precise and technical terms just what happens “over there.” Then one enters into an area of explicit *technique*, which may be codified and formalized as exercises, definitions, or instructions. This moment is the crest of a wave, the high point at which the “thing” seems to crystallize and to be known for *what it is*, in its grain and detail. This moment may not last very long. Soon, through repetition, the same technique that had been an explicit discovery is trained and repeated until it becomes habitual, automatized, and sedimented: an implicit *principle* that underpins and affords what can only then be recognized as a new *field*, different from the one in which we began. Linking these terms together in a cyclical linearity allows us to name some aspects of how knowledge works without reducing epistemology to anything as simple as a unified plane or field. In the direction of research and learning, the journey looks like this:

field → object → threshold → technique → principle → field

I call this a pathway but it is not simply a line. Nor are the transitions from one phase to another of the same kind as each other. The object appears within a field and is later converted into a threshold. Once crossed, the threshold opens into an area of technique, which must first be explicitly

enacted and can later be trained as principle. Those principles make another field available by bringing about new affordances. The second field is in a sense contiguous with the first, but in another sense also within it. It is possible to travel between the two fields; however, the journey does not take the same form in both directions. In the direction of research and learning, the overall journey is one of opening, entering, unfolding, delving into, uncovering, expanding, drawing near. We can also move in the opposite direction, through a journey of closing, folding up, getting out of, and gaining distance. This is the direction of *teaching*, *pedagogy*, and *mastery*—the direction of *closure*. Movement in this direction is experienced differently:

field → principle → technique → threshold → object → field

In order to teach or demonstrate what one knows, one has to fold it up, step away from it, establish distance, and enact closure. It would be a mistake to diminish the value of this directionality, as epistemic closure and opening are two sides of the same coin. The results of research are useless outside their specific fields unless they can be folded up and made available in containable forms. Similarly, the experience of learning, in which objects unfold to reveal fields, is made possible by the labor of teaching, or pedagogy, in which those fields are folded up to present as objects. Anyone who has designed a class, workshop, or other pedagogical form knows that it is useless to confront students with the entire complexity of the field one hopes to introduce. A good teacher, by moving in the direction of closure, meets the student, who is moving in the direction of opening. The teacher folds up the field in order that the student may unfold it. The two meet at the crest of the wave—in technique—which for the student is a discovery lying beyond a threshold and for the teacher is an explicitation of the field's most essential principles. Of course, in the best teaching and learning encounters there is another dynamic at play also, wherein teachers and students meet as peers, each folding up and offering their own expertise, in order to embark on a perpendicular journey toward a field that is unknown to both.

Because the trajectory is both cyclical and reversible, it could be traced in any number of ways: from one technique, opening into another; from one threshold, closing or zooming out to another; etc. The possible combinations of these linked concepts are too numerous to explore here. Instead, what I do in the rest of this essay is to work through the trajectory—in the direction of opening—through a series of examples. As

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even this could easily spiral out into an untenably broad philosophical review, I constrain the following reflections to a close reading of a single pair of author-companions for each moment of the journey—one to whom I turn for a significant critical or philosophical treatment of the concept and another who offers a concrete example or case study—with additional works cited in the notes. Thus, I draw on Isabelle Stengers' cosmopolitics to understand why Shaun Gallagher treats embodiment in embodied cognition as a *field*; on Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology to explain why Annemarie Mol sees atherosclerosis as an *object*; on Gloria Anzaldúa's border theory to consider why Paul Preciado approaches testosterone as a *threshold*; on Peter Sloterdijk's anthropotechnics to analyze as *technique* what John Matthews' calls training; on Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenology to grapple with Christina Sharpe's unearthing of antiblack racism as *principle*; and on Ange-Marie Hancock's intellectual history of intersectionality to explore Roderick Ferguson's study of the "interdisciplines" as new *fields*. In each case, the question is why a given analysis operates at a particular moment or level of analysis and not another. Why does Mol not see atherosclerosis in terms of fields? Why does Preciado not treat testosterone as a principle? Why for Sharpe can antiblackness not be just technique? As this choice of thinkers and examples shows, what is at stake here is not simply a way of modeling knowledge but also the development of a set of tools by which defenders and stewards of subjugated knowledges might articulate their depth and value, responding to contemporary institutional and political contexts without submitting that for which they are responsible to rationalist, economic, or technoscientific criteria.

Field

We find ourselves in a field. We have no memory of how we arrived here. The field is simply where we are. Its horizons are our horizons, its ground is our ground. We cannot imagine another place. We cannot guess what exists beyond this field. We can only wait for others to arrive—or else begin to move on our own, striking out for an unknown elsewhere.

The spatial metaphor for knowledge highlights the relatively static quality of shared knowing, which is nevertheless obtained through temporal and interpersonal processes. When something is capable of being taught and transmitted, learned and trained, then despite the diversity of each of these moments, we cannot deny that it is shared. What is shared however is not something that can be held physically, but a kind of experience—hence the metaphor of a shared position in space, a shared location in a field. A field maintains its identity because it remains itself over time. Witnesses

to a performance may perceive it as temporary, ephemeral, extraordinary, but for the performers themselves, and for expert witnesses (witnesses who dwell in the same field), that same event appears as durable epistemic location, having a quality and content to which one can return over and over again. To call a performance or an embodied practice a *field* is precisely to imply that one can return to it again and again. But it is also to imply a significant degree of freedom in relation to that shared experience. A field is not a box. When we call something a field, we invoke the spatial metaphor to suggest the abiding but expansive quality of knowledge, the relatively reliable qualities that allow us to learn and to know together.

I have previously emphasized the importance of *relative reliability* in establishing the epistemic dimension of technique: “When technique works, we know that we are dealing with some relatively reliable aspects of reality.”¹⁰ Many of today’s major debates around truth and knowledge hinge on the question of reliability and in particular on the status of the sciences in comparison with other ways of knowing. While it is clear that science affords a special and very powerful type of access to reality, putting embodiment first requires us to avoid the trap of *scientism*, the according of absolute priority to science. We need a way to understand the particular strengths and limitations of technoscientific knowledge within a wider context. If science is the quantification and maximization of reliability, then the fallacy of scientism is that it equates reliability with reality. From this follows the fantasy of a *unified field* that inspired previous generations of scientists and philosophers of science and which still structures some of the most common ways of understanding embodiment. Every time we look to physics, biology, or neuroscience to validate knowledge produced through embodied practice, we subscribe to this kind of scientism. This does not mean that we should avoid building interdisciplinary connections between sciences and other fields, but we must reject the assumption of a unified field in which science can provide final answers to questions outside its domain.

Isabelle Stengers, a philosopher trained in chemistry and physics, offers an authoritative critique of scientism in her work on “cosmopolitics.” Comprehensively tracing the rise of a particular kind of scientism, she demonstrates that the near absolute reliability represented by the correspondence of physics and mathematics is a special case rather than a general rule. The “perfect harmony” of the equations of classical mechanics, Stengers shows, allows physicists to jump from experimental data to metaphysical claims about the nature of reality. These equations provide a “freedom of redefinition that detaches the identity of the dynamic system from the world in

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which humans prepare, control, and measure,” until gradually “any trace of a ‘cause’ has been absorbed to the benefit of the triumph of invariance as such.” In this way, the mathematization of motion

creates new beings of such great simplicity, such elegant autonomy that it is difficult not to be tempted by the idea that the transformation is veridical, that it gives expression to a “pure” reality, unshackled by our mode of understanding. The physicist then becomes a kind of Platonist: having left her cave and her distorting games with shadow and light, she contemplates a finally reunited beauty and truth.¹¹

The phrase “invariance as such” points to the crucial ontological move by which the reliability of equations is interpreted as a kind of ultimate truth and reliability itself is equated with reality. Stengers’ analysis shows how this move is tied to a particular sequence of scientific discoveries and not to the progress of knowledge—or even science—as such. Mathematical physics, then, is not the foundation of reality, but merely the limit of reliability.

For some part of the twentieth century, it was possible to imagine that smaller elements were always more reliable. This allowed for a poetic mapping according to which getting at very small objects would be the same as getting at reliability and thus getting at reality. The dream of a unified field theory reaches its apex here. But even in the most technoscientific research, this elegant unification is no longer on the table. Quantum physics has revealed a world of even smaller particles that are less mathematically reliable than those of the previous era. Splitting particles into smaller particles no longer increases reliability here, let alone reality.¹² Yet many today still cling to the idea that subatomic particles have a kind of primal reality—as if, given sufficient computing power, it would be possible to explain phenomena like embodiment, gesture, or voice entirely through physics. As it turns out, however, the most reliable things, such as the laws of mechanical physics, are not the most important, while the most important things, like just and sustainable social institutions, are not the most reliable. That science affords modern technology does not make it ontologically primary. Breath is more fundamental to human life than the chemical composition of air, just as light is more primary than a photon, even though breath and light cannot be quantified or rendered reliable to the same degree. When it comes to the human body, we must avoid at all costs the attempt to map historical and emerging knowledges into a single coherent field.

Science tells us that “the body” is composed of many layers and interacting systems, each of which is complex enough to afford a whole field

of research even when reductively separated from the others. The biology of cells, the linkage of tendons and muscles, the circulation of blood and hormones, the transmission of neuronal impulses, the ecology of gut bacteria: each of these is both its own field of knowledge and an inseparable component of what we experience and know as embodiment—and those are only the technosciences of the body, not yet the innumerable fields of embodied technique that unfold and construct embodiment in sometimes radically different ways. The relatively new fields of biomedical embodiment work with more reliable elements of embodiment—in some cases almost mechanical, although never, even with the bone skeleton, to the degree of mechanical physics—than those older fields. The fields of embodied technique do not benefit from, but are also not limited by, the technoscientific obligation of absolute repeatability. They come to know and make the body through embodied practice rather than through the study of fragmented body parts.

This much ought to be obvious, yet the epistemological dominance of technoscience is so powerful that even scholars of theater, dance, and performance may find themselves turning to cognitive studies in order to defend the legitimacy of embodied knowledge.¹³ Superficially, this makes sense, as theorists of embodied cognition seem to recognize embodiment as a complex field of negotiation between the mind and the world. I take Shaun Gallagher as my second companion in this section because he is deeply aware and critical of the ways in which more reductively scientific approaches to cognition have dismissed embodiment, locating cognition solely in the brain and equating it with “information processing.”¹⁴ Yet even the notion of “radical embodiment” that Gallagher proposes remains trapped within a type of scientism that admits little room for embodied research as I mean it. Gallagher argues that “cognitive processes are not just in the head, but involve bodily and environmental factors,” and hence that “the mind is embodied.”¹⁵ But even for Gallagher, embodiment is invoked in order to explain cognition. In Gallagher’s enactivist account, embodiment “permeates,” “governs,” and “influences” cognition, but the aim is still and always “to help explain cognition.”¹⁶ The gulf between cognitive studies and embodied research is evident when Gallagher concludes his main argument by summarizing: “I’ve pointed to significant evidence showing that affective and intersubjective aspects of embodiment are also important contributories to perceptual and cognitive processes.”¹⁷ From the perspective of embodied research, it is astonishing that one would need to marshal evidence for this claim and frustrating that embodiment is still positioned as a “contributor” to cognition. We are indeed those for whom

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Gallagher's main argument on behalf of embodiment "may seem obvious or even trivial."¹⁸

Because cognitive studies cannot get away from the primacy of cognition—even if cognition is more than rationality, more than representations, more than neurons, more than the brain—it inevitably treats embodiment as a single field, a phenomenal interface between cognition and world, rather than a primary affordance out of which cognition and many other capacities arise.¹⁹ This is evident in how Gallagher approaches culture and affect, which he treats as additional elements or layers that must be added to embodiment in order to explain cognition.²⁰ Of course, it is the prerogative of cognitive science and neuroscience to take cognition and neurons as their methodological starting points. What must be rejected is an implicit hierarchy of knowledges according to which the phenomena discovered and constructed by these sciences would be positioned as underlying, underpinning, or ontologically prior to the messier and less reliable matters with which embodied practices grapple. The trouble with brain scans and quantitative measurements of embodied processes is not that they tell us nothing, but that, within the current onto-epistemological order, they tend to overwrite more nuanced and sophisticated fields with their own coarser terms—for example, by zeroing out the differences between areas of technique. Even if something like drawing or playing the piano could be localized in the brain, this would tell us little about the differences between them, to say nothing of the differences between styles of drawing or techniques of playing. Why then do we continue to respond to neuroscientific evidence as if it proves the validity of what we as practitioners already know?²¹

Embodied cognition is preferable to disembodied or neurorealist cognition, but all approaches that attempt to *include* body and environment as explanatory factors for cognition remain wed to a scientific conception of embodiment (and reality) as a unified field. In the terms offered here, such approaches position affect, culture, and technique as *objects* arising within the *field* of embodiment, which they continually attempt to ground in a unified physical, chemical, or biological framework. This approach allows one to study a gesture, ritual, or song as effects of cognition, but not to develop these as distinct fields offering alternative methodological standpoints from which cognition and cognitive studies could be radically decentered. Consider, for example, how something like "the eye" or "sex" appears within the unified field of embodiment as theorized by cognitive studies. For the most part, these are implicitly framed as unproblematic parts of the body. Only if something goes wrong—perhaps something feminizes, queers, or disables the assumed neutral field of embodiment—does eye or

sex suddenly stand out as an object, separate from the field. Some people menstruate; some people are intersex; some people are blind. Crucially, this still does not change the overall mapping of the field: There is no threat that the topology of knowledge will be reconfigured. But what if pregnancy, intersexuality, or blindness *are themselves fields* within which we might locate cognition as an object? From a cognitive studies perspective this is nonsense, because the very question of cognition assumes that we basically know what embodiment is. We are stuck then in an old understanding of embodiment that holds the body together in a single mode of coherency, even if this is no longer conceived as fully rational. If, on the other hand, we allow the organs and zones of the body to blossom into thresholds and fields of their own, then we will have to surrender the primacy of cognition or indeed any kind of central function that would hold the organs and objects of embodiment in place. From this starting point, we can begin our journey out of and away from embodiment as a unified field.

Object

As we dwell in the field, an object appears. The uniformity of the field is broken by this appearance. In some way the object was always there, yet not apparent. Now it stands out, differentiates itself, ap-pears and ob-jects itself. Some part of the field is no longer just field. At first we perceive the difference as noise, distraction, or error; but eventually we cannot ignore it. It calls to us. It beckons. The ground reveals a figure. The object clamors for our engagement, it invites our attention. There is some thing there. Objects are things that have just arrived from noise.

There are some obvious ways to divide the body into parts: arms, legs, head, trunk... Other parts of the body are not evident until a corpse is dissected, and even then do not always lend themselves to the same interpretation: heart, veins, muscles...²² Modern biology tells us that it makes more sense to think in terms of systems: skeletal, endocrine, respiratory... But where is a feeling? Where is gesture? Where is a song in the body?²³ Like it or not, the body has organs.²⁴ The question is, which ones? In competitive sports, vastly different approaches to embodiment are folded up through the act of quantification, their technical complexity reduced to numbers. In some sports, this folding-up takes place through an *object-ive* (objectifying) measurement of distance or duration; in others, like gymnastics, more complex elements have to be quantified by human observers in order to generate a numerical output. The number folds up and radically condenses the complexity of running or swimming or jumping,

turning these elaborated practices into objects. Sport is the extraction, from a field of technique, of a principle of distance or speed, which allows the construction of a strict border separating that sport from everything else. Out of certain highly charged events and actions, a single scalar object is generated—time, distance, score—which allows individual moments of practice to be definitively compared.

There is nothing wrong with quantifying the body, although we might question the tremendous resources dedicated to such quantified achievements in sports. The full violence of quantification only appears when it is applied to bodies in general rather than to specialized athletes.²⁵ Nor is quantification the same as objectification. Folding the body up into a number is one particularly strict and reliable way of objectifying it, but there are many others. Any demonstration of mastery, as well as any pedagogy or curriculum, requires some kind of condensation or reduction, in order to make the complexity of a field graspable from outside. Skills cannot be tested or taught, fields cannot be compared or synthesized, until they are folded up into principles or exercises, which can then be made available as objects. Although we may fantasize about a pure research in which everything remains open, in all practical situations we cannot avoid some degree of object-ification and organ-ization of the body. But the object is only one moment or phase in the trajectory of folding and unfolding. What difference does it make to focus attention on this phase—on the *object moment* of embodiment—rather than on fields, thresholds, or techniques? As I will argue here, objectification in this sense is essentially an act of *distancing*, with particular onto-epistemic force as well as socio-political implications.

Like Cetina's work on epistemic objects and "objectual" practice, Graham Harman's philosophy of objects—known by the acronym OOO, for "object oriented ontology"—begins from a response to Heidegger.²⁶ Both Cetina and Harman are fascinated by the object's hidden qualities, which it only ever partly reveals. Yet Cetina emphasizes the "unfolding" of the object, while Harman emphasizes its "withdrawal." Cetina's account of epistemic objects highlights their unlimited depth, while Harman's OOO proclaims a "flat" ontology.²⁷ This flat ontology is most often visualized through what Ian Bogost has called a "rhetoric of lists":

Following Latour's lead, Harman also adopts the rhetoric of lists, whether as introduction ("object-oriented philosophy holds that the relation of humans to pollen, oxygen, eagles, or windmills is no different in kind from the interaction of these objects with each other"), as argument ("For we ourselves, just like Neanderthals, sparrows,

mushrooms, and dirt, have never done anything else than act amidst the bustle of other actants”), or as emphasis (“among the coral reefs, sorghum fields, paragliders, ant colonies, binary stars, sea voyages, Asian swindlers, and desolate temples”).²⁸

Given this wild diversity, what is at stake in the claim that objects are “everything that is” and that OOO is therefore “a new theory of everything”?²⁹ Harman acknowledges that the word “object” usually suggests “a hard, material, solid, durable entity,” something that is “physical, solid, durable, inhuman or utterly inanimate.”³⁰ Why does this word become the focal point of his ontology?

Harman aims to counteract what he calls the undermining and “overmining” of objects. These are, on the one hand, the reduction of an object to its parts, and on the other, a holism of the object that defines it exclusively in terms of its relations with others. In other words, what Cetina celebrates as the epistemic depth of research objects is for Harman equivalent to a reductivism that fatally undermines the object via the assumption that “most objects are simply too shallow to be real.”³¹ On the other hand, Harman coins the term “overmining” to name theories “that reduce things to their impact on us or on each other, denying them any excess or surplus beyond such impact.”³² In overmining, “rather than viewing individual objects as too shallow to be the truth, modern philosophy treats them as too deep.”³³ I find the terms overmining and undermining quite useful, but only if they are understood in a different way: not as analytical fallacies but as onto-epistemic moves or directions. In this sense, overmining and undermining are alternative terms for the two directions I called “opening” and “closure” above. In my account, these are not traps to be avoided but essential strategies for getting at things in different ways. We can hardly take Harman seriously when he declares: “All objects must be given equal attention.”³⁴ Instead, what I take Harman to be doing is drawing attention to *the object moment of things*. Object *orientation* is then a particular moment, phase, level, or step in a larger trajectory.

Harman and others working on OOO effectively argue *against depth*, against the vertical dimension of knowledge. By constantly—even anxiously—returning to the “object,” what they accomplish is a move of analytical distancing, of backing away or zooming out, which effectively collapses fields into objects. The significance of such a move depends entirely on which kinds of expertise are being collapsed. We might be happy for OOO to collapse a field like economics, or even astrophysics, in order to reexamine its value in light of systemic injustice or the climate crisis, but the same approach wielded

against subjugated knowledges would be an act of violence. Harman does not seem to recognize the onto-epistemic politics that attend the question of *which things get treated as objects* and who gets to decide. Yet some years before OOO became popular, Annemarie Mol also drew attention to the “object” moment of things, worlds, and especially bodies, in a work that more explicitly operates through a politics of object-ification.³⁵ Like OOO, Mol’s ontology of “the body multiple” rejects the epistemological or perspectival model. Her questions “do not concern the way in which medicine *knows* its objects,” but rather “the way medicine *enacts* the objects of its concern.” Her book “does not speak of different perspectives on the body and its diseases. Instead it tells how they are done.”³⁶ For my purposes, Mol’s intended shift “away from epistemology” is less important than her choice to characterize atherosclerosis, or heart disease, as a multiple *object*, rather than—for example—a set of techniques or fields.

Mol uses object-orientation to distance herself from an entrenched epistemological hierarchy related to the one I critiqued in the previous section. By collapsing whole fields of medicine into objects, she renders impossible the unified field theory of the body according to which atherosclerosis would be a singular and coherent disease. More specifically, Mol argues against the primacy of pathology as the “crucial discipline” that “unveils the *underlying reality* of the disease” and which is “called the *foundation* of modern medicine by many analysts for that very reason.”³⁷ Just as Stengers, Harman, and others question the claim that mathematical physics unveils the underlying reality of the world, Mol contests the institutionalized hierarchy of medicine within which pathology is understood as more fundamental than the daily general or clinical practice in which doctors meet and speak with patients. The political dimensions of Mol’s project are thus more direct than those of Harman: Essentially, Mol folds up pathology and other fields of biomedicine into objects in order to bring attention to health as primarily a matter of everyday life, exemplified by clinical interaction and diagnosis.³⁸ Mol’s “praxiographic” approach allows her to fold up a field as complex as pathology and treat it in terms of the types of medical and technoscientific objects it enacts. In place of atherosclerosis as a single and coherent object, the disease is revealed as a multiple or “composite” object.

The advantage of this approach is that it allows Mol to set the accounts of diverse disciplines alongside each other horizontally, rather than vertically stacking them as in a unified field theory. But there is also a disadvantage. Because she adamantly remains at the level of objects, Mol overstates the incommensurability of the practices she studies and is then compelled

to develop an ahistorical account of the process by which they are sutured together:

It is one of the great miracles of hospital life: there are different atheroscleroses in the hospital but despite the differences between them they are connected. Atherosclerosis enacted is more than one—but less than many. The body multiple is not fragmented. Even if it is multiple, it also hangs together. The question to be asked, then, is how this is achieved. How are the different atheroscleroses enacted in the hospital related? How do they add up, fuse, come together?³⁹

This passage reveals both the strength and weakness of object-oriented approaches. Folding up fields like pathology, radiology, and clinical practice allows one to encounter them freshly, as they appear in contemporary practice, and therefore to set aside dominant hierarchies that structure their relations within medicine as a unified field. However, this same tactic leads Mol to overstate the object-ness of her multiple-objects: Severed from their history as fields of knowledge, atherosclerosis *in the clinic* and atherosclerosis *in the lab* now “cannot be aspects of the same entity” and must instead be “different objects.”⁴⁰ We then face the task of reassembling or coordinating these distinct objects. Mol approaches the problem of coordination via a topological language that in some ways resembles the one I am proposing here. In this “topography of the relation between pathology and clinic,” images of “the patchwork, the fractal, the landscape, the mixture” are invoked to describe the “manyfoldedness of objects.” This is even envisioned as fractal: “Blow up a few details of any site,” she writes, “and immediately it turns into many.”⁴¹ However, because her method is resolutely praxiographic, Mol leaves out epistemic depth and historicity from her account, treating her multiple objects only in terms of their present manifestations and without reference to the layers of research and training that allow them to appear.⁴² As a result, Mol’s topography also becomes too literal—as if atherosclerosis changes its nature and meaning according to physical location (clinic versus laboratory), rather than varying with the *epistemic* location of the practitioners (diagnosis versus pathology).⁴³

Object-oriented approaches are extremely effective for decentering expertise, because they fold up fields of knowledge into objects that can be treated as equivalent or at least horizontally comparable by the philosopher or ethnographer. The wider implications and politics of such an approach therefore depend absolutely on *which things* one is object-ifying. Object-oriented ontologies can be radical in their capacity

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to deprive powerful fields of their assumed primacy. By taking distance on such fields and collapsing them into objects, it becomes possible to re-assess their value without denying their internal validity. However, if one aims to accord greater epistemological power and legitimacy to historically subjugated fields, then object-oriented approaches are not of much help. In that case, the move of distancing is counterproductive; what is needed instead is a move of drawing near, coming close, or stepping into.

Threshold

We draw near to the object and it changes in kind. It is no longer solid or closed. The surface of the object has become porous: The thing has become a door. Portal, threshold, limen, it no longer beckons only our attention but our whole being. This is no longer some item that we can pick up and hold, but a gateway that we may cross—or not. The transition from object to threshold is a breakthrough, a breaking through. In crossing the boundary, we transgress objectivity, for we no longer have distance on the object. Now we find ourselves inside it; transformed by it.

We have to cross into the object before we really know what it contains. This is most clear in a pedagogical situation. A student signs up for a class, which at that point is merely an object: “physics”; “dance.” Then they attend, crossing over and into. The threshold of entry is set up by the teacher, with the intention to help the student stop perceiving this thing as an object and start experiencing it as a portal. In research there is no teacher, but the same threshold exists: the same need to *attend*. I may know that I want to work on a certain problem, but in order to commence that work, I have to go “into” it. I feel this strongly after I have been away from an area of work for some time. If I stop writing or dancing for several weeks or months, I cannot simply pick up from where I left off. I can go into the office or studio, but the work stares back at me. It has receded from me, folded back into an object, become opaque. I am not inside it. I have to *get in*. Patience is needed. Everyone who works in a specialized field has experienced this. The problem, the project, the topic, the medium calls out: *Enter and do!* But we can be in the physical location associated with the work, without yet being inside the work itself. The classroom, studio, or lab is merely a physical context, an immersive platform, for the epistemic shift that needs to take place. How to get “in” to something is the question of the boundary or threshold.⁴⁴

No one has asked the question of the threshold more fiercely than Gloria Anzaldúa, the great theorist of borders and borderlands. With Anzaldúa

we cannot escape the violence and rage that attends radical embodied research, especially in the moment of transgression that is the crossing of boundaries. She evokes the exhilaration of discovery as might a particle physicist, but always in a context that is bound to culture and land as much as to repeatable technique. Whereas crossing boundaries is a commonplace metaphor in research, Anzaldúa ties this from the beginning to the political border with its fences, guns, and sharply policed identities:

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.⁴⁵

At first glance this might not seem like an epistemic border separating known and unknown, but merely a political border between two known "states" (in both senses). When you draw near to the United States from Mexico, or vice versa, *if you are able to cross*, do you not cross into something that is already clearly defined, at least to others? Perhaps, but Anzaldúa's writing is never only about that kind of narrowly defined line in the sand. Her poetics of the border is more about the indeterminate potential of cultural hybridity than the legalities or mathematics of migration. Like some of the works already mentioned, Anzaldúa aims to overturn dominant knowledge hierarchies, in this case those of colonialism and patriarchy. But Anzaldúa expresses no interest in gaining distance on the world in order to study it. Her starting point is not science but personal and cultural myth. It is therefore not surprising that Anzaldúa explicitly rejects object-oriented approaches: "In trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence."⁴⁶

As a counter to the object-ification of the world, Anzaldúa offers visions of borders, boundaries, and thresholds between and beyond known worlds. Drawing on Nahuatl mythographies, she describes "The Coatlicue State" as a radical disruption leading to creativity, in which the Earth—transforming from object to threshold—"opens and swallows us, plunging us into the underworld where the soul resides."⁴⁷ Stories of plunging into unknown worlds, only to be transformed and transfigured in the process,

are further developed in a posthumous collection of Anzaldúa's later writings. Here she adopts another Nahuatl term, "nepantla," defining it as "an in-between space, el lugar entre medio," and likening this to Victor Turner's notion of the liminal.⁴⁸ Nepantla here is both a theory of the border and a concrete description of Anzaldúa's own writing process, which she conceives as a passage "through the birth canal, the threshold nepantla" and simultaneously as a mode of "artistic research."⁴⁹ Writing about the crossing of boundaries is exhilarating: "By crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change. [...] In the final reckoning, it comes down to a matter of faith, trusting that your inner authority will carry you across the critical threshold."⁵⁰ Anzaldúa's writing not only points with vibrant poetry to the transgressive potential of boundary crossing, but also illustrates a potential risk taken by theories that emphasize the *threshold moment* of things. There is a possibility of getting stuck or caught in the threshold itself, in the moment of liminality, rather than crossing through it to what lies beyond. Anzaldúa acknowledges this risk herself, warning: "Challenging the old self's orthodoxy is never enough; you must submit a sketch of an alternative self"; and "it's not enough to denounce the culture's old account—you must provide new narratives that embody alternative potential."⁵¹ Yet articulating what lies on the other side of a threshold is no easy task.

The rhetoric of the threshold is central to what I have called the trope of excess.⁵² In Anzaldúa's writing, the limitations of that trope can be seen in her navigation of cultural appropriation and individualism and in the way her descriptions of boundary crossing and liminality sometimes collapse important differences. Although the materials collected in *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro* are explicitly decolonial in places, they also reflect the author's ambiguous position in relation to both indigeneity and antiblack racism.⁵³ In this regard it is striking that she draws so heavily on the writings of Carlos Castaneda, whose best-selling books offer neither rigorous ethnography nor indigenous perspectives, as well as Western psychotherapists like Carl Jung and Arnold Mindell. The problem is not the invocation of these sources but what Anzaldúa carries forward from them, namely, a dualistic account of the relationship between ordinary and non-ordinary life. For Castaneda, as for many new age thinkers, there is just one threshold: that separating the ordinary, mundane, known world from a vibrant, re-enchanted one. This is often what it looks like and *feels like* when one is standing in a threshold.⁵⁴ On one side is the known, which is also the past; on the other, the unknown, which is also the future. Behind you is the static system you want to escape; in front of you, a brave

new world. In that moment, it may seem unimportant or impossible to specify what lies on the other side: indigeneity, new age philosophy, or quantum physics? In fact, nothing could be more urgent, because a threshold is never simply a place of liminality and transgression, but always also a gateway to specific new possibilities.

If object-oriented ontologies risk placing too much emphasis on objects, then the trope of excess names a similar risk in regard to what we might call threshold ontologies. Radically un-distanced, a threshold experience puts one inside the moment of transition, from which point little else is visible. The risk is that the crossing itself becomes primary, rather than the place to which one arrives. Anzaldúa's focus on movement between worlds leads her sometimes to understate the depths and incommensurability of those worlds. This is the nature of the threshold: The very transgression that makes the crossing so exciting also compels the one who crosses to ignore the more deep-seated, technical, and not-yet-known challenges that await on the other side.⁵⁵ The trope of excess is a rhetoric of the threshold: We stand at the threshold and declare its importance, but we do not pass through it. We ceaselessly announce that there is something *more*, but we do not step into that world, which therefore remains vague. The trope of excess can be a valuable exhortation to explore a particular unknown, to open an object that has previously seemed closed. Such impulses, whether out of suffering or curiosity, play a huge part in any research process. But one can also get stuck in this trope, celebrating the threshold to the point where one begins to resist the development of new techniques, new principles, and new fields. We see this fairly often in contemporary humanities writing, whenever excess, ephemerality, transgression, queerness, or related terms are celebrated as fundamentally "more-than," as if they were inherently opposed to institutionality and disciplinarity, rather than being potential foundations for alternative institutions and disciplines.⁵⁶

Taking up Anzaldúa's comment that "gender bending" is "another kind of border crossing,"⁵⁷ I will now consider how gender is figured as a threshold in Paul Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, as well as how, in the latter part of that book, it begins to take on a more technical form, pointing toward the following section on technique. Like Anzaldúa's books, *Testo Junkie* is not a memoir, although it includes autobiographical material, but something more fragmented and visionary: "a testosterone-based, voluntary intoxication protocol," a "body-essay" or "somato-political fiction."⁵⁸ At its most positively technical, it is "a manual for a kind of gender bioterrorism on a molecular scale," yet for the most part the book does not read as a manual.⁵⁹ There are few if any instructions or practical exercises and it is not easy

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to distinguish between Preciado's personal experience and what might be counted as transmissible knowledge. Reading *Testo Junkie* alongside *Light in the Dark* reveals many similarities, as both Anzaldúa and Preciado are the- orists of the threshold. Both books are written from and about the experience of transformation: from and about the border, threshold, or bifurcation point itself. In *Testo Junkie*, the key figure of the threshold is testosterone or "T," which Preciado describes precisely as "only a threshold, a molecular door, a becoming between multiplicities."⁶⁰ Testosterone is a gateway like any drug.⁶¹ But more specifically, T is a gateway to a new kind of gender. In fact, "of all the mental and physical effects caused by self-intoxication based on testosterone in gel form, the feeling of transgressing limits of gender that have been socially imposed on me was without a doubt the most intense."⁶²

Retrospectively, Preciado's use of testosterone could be framed as part of a "female-to-male" gender transition pathway.⁶³ However, this is not how it is defined in the book. Preciado rejects this framing, just as Anzaldúa rejects the equation of her borderlands with the "actual physical borderland" between the United States and Mexico. The passage or transformation described in *Testo Junkie* is emphatically not from one known, state-sanctioned gender to another, but rather toward a new, unknown place:

I do not want the female gender that has been assigned to me at birth.
Neither do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can
furnish and that the state will award me if I behave in the right way.
I don't want any of it.

The meaning of testosterone here is no longer contained with a binary transition and instead becomes radically open-ended: "There is no predestined direction for the changes in me that are triggered by testosterone." Preciado figures his experimental practice as outside the law, a project undertaken alongside other "gender pirates" and "gender hackers." Like Anzaldúa, he compares the experimental space of identity transgression to linguistic hybridity: "The unique pleasure of writing in English, French, Spanish, of wandering from one language to another like being in transit between masculinity, femininity, and transsexuality. The pleasure of multiplicity."⁶⁴ The threshold is a place of dwelling in the unknown, here figured as a site of onto-epistemic pleasure.

A similar rhetoric is found in Preciado's account of contemporary "pharmacopornographic" society, which he argues is passing through a transformative threshold into a "postsexual era" in which "all forms of sexuality and production of pleasure, all libidinal and biopolitical economies

are now subject to the same molecular and digital technologies of the production of sex, gender, and sexuality.” Thus it is not just Preciado who is hurtling into the unknown—and mapping new nonbinary genders along the way—but all of us. The heady, simultaneously utopian and dystopian style of this writing risks emphasizing the immanence of transgression over the experience of ongoing restriction and containment, which has not lessened in the face of technological advances. Preciado acknowledges this risk, just as Anzaldúa acknowledges her own creative appropriation of indigenous cultures:

Obviously, such a position is one of political arrogance. If I’m able to take such a liberty at this time, it’s because I don’t need to go out and look for work, because I’m white, because I have no intention of having a bureaucratic relationship to the state.

Yet *Testo Junkie* in some places remains stuck in the threshold, repeating the trope of excess. Like Freud’s polymorphous perversity, Lacan’s *jouissance*, or what today we might call queerness, Preciado’s “*potentia gaudendi*” loses its specificity when it is defined negatively as pure excess, as that which is “characterized not only by its impermanence and great malleability, but also and above all by the impossibility of possessing and retaining it.” Occupying the threshold, we at first perceive only an apparently unlimited field of potential, a cornucopia, an infinite proliferation: “It’s no longer only a question of asserting the existence of four or five sexes, as several scientists and theorists of sexuality desire, but of accepting the completely technoconstructed, undeniably multiple, malleable, and mutable nature of bodies and pleasures.” But does *Testo Junkie* take us into the proposed technique of “sexdesign”?⁶⁵ Does it begin to construct what comes after sex?

Toward the end of the book, Preciado does begin to articulate possible futures in more concrete terms. The shift begins when he names a principle: not testosterone (that remains a threshold, world-altering but not yet world-making), but self-experimentation itself, “the principle of the auto-guinea pig.” Here we find not a boundary to be crossed but something more rigorously established, a foundation developed by generations of feminist, queer, and trans embodied researchers: “The first principle of a trans-feminism movement” is “the fact that your body, the body of the multitude and the pharmacopornographic networks that constitute them are political laboratories.” When autoexperimentation becomes “a central technique of the self,” when we “use our living bodies as biopolitical platforms [...] to create and demarcate new frameworks of cultural

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intelligibility,” then we are no longer stuck in the threshold but moving through it into the elaboration of alternative possibilities.⁶⁶ Preciado does not offer anything like a repeatable method or technique through which to enact such elaboration.⁶⁷ But he does offer the beginnings of a technical description. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this comes through a shift in focus: away from testosterone the molecule and toward embodied training, including training in performance. In a section called “the drag king plan of action,” we encounter not the intoxications of the threshold but the micropolitics of practical workshops that “create and distribute knowledge.”⁶⁸ These are not primarily oriented toward the unknown potentials unlocked by drugs, but toward the transmission of embodied knowledge in performance and other art forms.⁶⁹ While still insisting on a threshold mode for imagining the future, Preciado acknowledges here the enormous practical work that remains to be done, as well as that already accomplished, in learning to live otherwise:

Diane Torr’s technique of the deconstruction of femininity and apprenticeship in masculinity depends on a theatrical analytic method, on the breaking down of learned body gestures (a way of walking, speaking, sitting, getting up, looking, smoking, eating, smiling) into basic units (distance between the legs, opening of the eyes, movement of the eyebrows, speed of the arms, fullness of the smile, etc.) and examining them in their capacity as cultural signs for the construction of gender. In a second synthetic moment, different cultural codes are rearranged to construct a different gender fiction. The goal of Diane’s workshops is to experiment physically and theatrically with the ways in which masculinity is produced.

It is this practical transmission of embodied knowledge that informs Preciado’s own pedagogy: “In order to construct my own workshops, I have learned from Diane’s performative analysis of action, combined with a psychopolitical method that is closer to posttraumatic reeducation of the body and to the training of political minorities for survival.” Here we are on the other side of the threshold, elaborating embodied technique through practical exercises, such as exploring the city in “drag” or with the techniques of what would now be called trans and nonbinary gender.⁷⁰

Testo Junkie offers a clear movement, not just toward new genders but toward a new understanding of what gender is. It enacts a shift from *gender as threshold* to *gender as technique*.⁷¹ In Preciado’s words: “Little by little, the administration of testosterone has ceased to be a simple political test and

has molted into a discipline, an asceticism, a way.” But once it is rendered technical, this new gender is no longer a space of pure excess. It soon risks becoming a principle: “an addiction, a form of gratification, an escape, a prison, a paradise.” We know that we have passed far beyond the threshold moment when we encounter the language of mastery and skill, as in the demand for “a virtuosity of gender.”⁷² Thresholds are opposed to virtuosity. The threshold, as both Preciado and Anzaldúa show, is a place of non-mastery, of experimentation, of the encounter with the unknown. For this reason it is both exhilarating and terrifying. In order to become virtuosic, in order to open up genuinely new worlds, a threshold has to be sedimented, made routine. Before this can happen, it must be articulated in technical terms, converted to instruction, pinned down and made repeatable. Without this step, the threshold remains eternally liminal: no one knows what it can do. By converting the threshold into technique, it becomes possible to train.

Technique

Now we are inside what had previously appeared as an object before us. Here we encounter what before we could only have guessed at: structure, detail, grain. Was this structure hidden before, and only now revealed? Or has it emerged for us and with us, through our encounter with it? Here, in emergent technique, one thing is clear: We are not making this up. Some thing is (i)here with us, some otherness that pushes back, reflects our gaze, touches us, even wrestles with us. We know this because we can feel its texture, its differential malleability. Some relations are easy, others difficult, still others impossible. Through the negotiation of trying, the dance of practice, we gradually develop technique (art, craft, skill) that works here, where we are now.

Ironically, this has been the most difficult section to name. Behind us lies the threshold, boundary, border, or gateway: the moment in which we could choose to cross or not. Ahead lies the possibility of automatization, the sedimentation of principles. In order to get from the not-yet-known to the known-and-forgotten, we must pass through the moment of conscious articulation, the moment in which something is rendered *technical*. This moment is the crest of a wave. It is the “thin band of consciousness,” the moment of *explicitation*.⁷³ The formalization and making-repeatable of what lies beyond the threshold make possible processes of learning and teaching. Moving in the opposite direction, the deconstruction of a principle requires its rearticulation in technical terms—so that it can be loosened up, un-sedimented, and eventually changed or avoided. Rearticulating principles as technique is a crucial step in allowing

for conversation across worlds and fields: A field cannot communicate with another field until its principles have been rendered technical according to shared terms.⁷⁴ Why then is it so difficult to name the technical moment? In part this is because its substance differs radically from one context to another. This is the moment in which substance, being, worlds, phenomena—or whatever you want to call *things in general*—reveal their qualities and structures. The moment of explicitation most fully reveals the difference between contexts, the ground of difference itself. The best name for the explicitation of painting is *painting*; the best name for the explicitation of dance is *dance*; and so on. It is the doing, the details, the grain of the thing, the texture of the paint, the weight of the gesture, that make the thing what it is. And yet we need a name for this moment.

I considered several possible terms by which to name the moment of explicitation—including *exercise, instruction, training, task, definition, lexicon, and form*—only to land back with *technique*.⁷⁵ What do we mean when we call something “technical”? What are *the technical, technicity, and technics*? I assume here that the contemporary association of technology with machines is erroneous. What I mean when I call something technical is that its reliability has been established and tested as a repeatable pathway. This is literally and materially the case with advanced technologies, but prior to that—chronologically, ontologically, and ethically prior—it also describes the relative reliability of social, cultural, material, embodied practices. What performers and teachers of performance mean when they talk about doing something “technically” is exactly this: to focus on correctly accomplishing those aspects and elements that are established and formalized, rather than on the unknown potentials that doing so might afford. Essentially, to do something technically is to attend to your tools, readying them for work; to focus for a moment on the finger rather than the moon to which it points. In *What a Body Can Do*, I used technique to name the entire trajectory I am tracing here. There is merit in such an approach: We can say that an object is technique seen from the outside; a threshold is technique in the moment of recognizing possibility; a principle is technique automatized; a field is the fabric woven by threads of technique. But technique in the present sense refers to that which is conscious and explicit, the crest of the wave. Conscious technique alone does not make a new field. Technique must be trained to the point of automaticity, woven together, before the field of its weave opens up. This is what is meant by the common idea of “transcending” technique—not that the technique goes away, but that it becomes submerged, sedimented, allowing something grander to appear: the field.

In this section, I begin with a relatively concrete text and then consider a more expansive philosophical treatment, reversing the order established so far. Having provided many examples of technique in *What a Body Can Do*, there is no need to dwell on the basic idea.⁷⁶ Instead I want to focus on some of the problems and paradoxes that arise when emphasizing the technical moment of things. Part of my aim is to explain why a theory of technique is not enough. Despite its crucial place in this onto-epistemology trajectory, and despite my own commitment to technical thinking, a technique-oriented ontology is ultimately no more sufficient than an object-oriented or threshold-oriented one. The problem with technique is that it is too consuming, too complete in itself. Technique is immersive: It brings one all the way inside its domain and forgets everything else. Technique pays no heed to a common world and therefore ignores matters of basic justice. This is the material force of techniques: they work, just as weapons work, the same for everyone. But this is also their extreme danger. If technique is the moment when knowledge becomes transmissible, it is also the moment at which appropriation and decontextualization become possible.⁷⁷ In this sense, it is no coincidence that my two companions in this section speak from varieties of whiteness. That whiteness is not primarily defined by their personal identities, but by the way they conceptualize training and technics—two cognates of technique—in a broadly universalist mode, without overt concern for the relation between knowledge and power. Training and technics thus appear here as pure grain, pure capacity, foregrounding both the necessity and the danger of technical thinking.

John Matthews offers a fairly simple introduction to embodied technique through the idea of training. In *Anatomy of Performance Training*, he investigates the contexts of physical culture and performing arts to which I referred in the previous section, although without Preciado's focus on subjugated or marginalized techniques. In an early passage, Matthews defines training as follows:

[T]raining is and always has been a response to the problems experienced as a result of having a body and being in the world; training is not something that some of us do, it is something that we all do, although some of us do it and talk about doing it in a particularly self-conscious and organized way; seemingly paradoxically, training arises because of our humanness but training also exists to produce and reproduce specific values about humanness; because of the specific problems posed by being a body-in-the-world today, training has achieved a new currency as a global ideology.⁷⁸

Here are many of the central tensions and paradoxes related to the idea of technique. On the one hand, as I argue in *What a Body Can Do*, all practice is structured by technique. It therefore makes no sense to refer to some practices as containing more technique than others. On the other hand, as soon as we take explicitly specialized forms of training as our starting point, we are already importing into our theory some particular values related to those forms. For example: All practices are in a sense embodied, yet “embodied practices” direct our attention to embodiment as the primary affordance with which certain kinds of technique and training grapple.

This tension in the definition of technique is related to the universalism that I suggested above can be understood in relation to whiteness. Although we all have bodies, “the problems experienced as a result of having a body and being in the world” depend as much upon the social and cultural classification of our bodies as on their material affordances. Of course, “problem” should be read here not as something aversive but in the sense of a research problem. Nevertheless, if training is not the only possible kind of response to such problems, then what type of response is it and what alternatives to training might there be? Similarly, if training is “co-constitutive of being human,” then how must the history of training be interwoven with the history of how some bodies are legally and politically constituted as less than human or not human at all?⁷⁹ For whom is training a “global ideology” and how are individuals differently positioned and interpellated by it? Matthews’ approach aims to be “meta-disciplinary,” sitting “within a field of work that sees aesthetic performances as one subspecies of performance per se.”⁸⁰ In the present context, our chief concern is not with any of his specific examples but with the structure and organization of his *Anatomy*. If the concept of technique has a politics, this lies not in technical description itself, which is always profoundly contextual, but in the way it is defined, which must be done through some kind of mapping or catalog of exemplars.⁸¹ What does it mean to produce an “anatomy” of training? What kinds of training are highlighted by such an approach?

Anatomy of Performance Training is indeed organized anatomically, according to a “first cut” of the body into parts: hand, foot, mouth, heart, ear. It ends by gesturing toward a future volume that would offer a “second cut”: lung, eye, skin, nails and hair, spine, tongue, rib.⁸² Matthews himself acknowledges some of the risks associated with an anatomical method, insofar as “anatomical parts imply a whole”; “anatomy is a science of uniformity and totality and human bodies are not, as each of us knows and experiences, uniform or total.”⁸³ Are we then to be taken through a laundry

list of body parts? In fact, Matthews analyzes the anatomical body parts themselves—the biomedical hand, foot, mouth, heart, and ear—only in passing. His real interest is in the specialized zones of technique that these body parts either afford or symbolically represent. This to some extent makes up for the obviousness of both his first and second cuts. After all, why choose such a schoolbook list of body parts when testosterone, atherosclerosis, and even cognition might be seen as much more interesting “parts” of the body? Why make such a dull anatomical cut? It seems that the obviousness of the selection is intentional, since Matthews wants only to use each body part as starting points for more specific considerations:

The overflowing of actions, such as touch, across parts of the body means that actions will elude the anatomist who looks for all causes and consequences in one place. Accordingly, the subjects of my chapters are not the body parts in isolation but some of the actions and uses made of that part, or exemplified and represented by it. My anatomy is as much about holding, walking, speaking, hearing and feeling as it is about hands, feet, mouths, ears and hearts.⁸⁴

This is why, in the trajectory developed here, Matthews belongs under the heading of technique rather than object. “Accepting the fact that bodies and body concepts will overflow the anatomical scheme” means that, although the chapter titles (and their associated woodcut prints) evoke a body made of organs or objects, each chapter treats those parts as thresholds across which numerous specialized practitioners have already crossed. The focus is not on *the hand* (object), nor even on *having a hand* (threshold) as a gateway to possibilities, but on *handed technique*: established forms and procedures for training that are available to those who have hands. While Matthews’ anatomical table of contents suggests the rhetoric of lists we saw in OOO, the focus of each chapter is on the internal dynamics of something much more complex.

We also know we are dealing with technique rather than thresholds because Matthews takes care to acknowledge both the new possibilities that training opens up and the prior worlds it renders inaccessible—although he describes this as a trade-off in which “proficiency leads to increased effectiveness within a closed system and to a decreased ability to innovate.”⁸⁵ A wider view of training would not necessarily see it as leading to a closed system, but it is undeniable that every kind of training closes as many possibilities as it opens. Technique is the crossroads, the crux of the journey. While theorists of the threshold emphasize the terror and exhilaration of

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what lies beyond, theorists of technique take a more restrained approach, acknowledging that whatever lies beyond will inevitably have its own structure and form. There is no pure excess in an ontology of technique, as the excess of one zone may always be the structure of another. Technique emphasizes the malleability of the body, but not in the sense of a potentially infinite capacity. The material changes that training brings to embodiment may lead to new capacities, but always at the expense of something lost:

The callusing of expert hands fits them to given tasks, promoting efficiency and inhibiting innovation. As expertise is handed on, practice ossifies, like thickened, hardened skin on a callus, and this helps to ensure the continuation of training institutions and values while simultaneously threatening them with obsolescence.⁸⁶

This brings us to the main point I want to make here, namely how technique enacts a separation, or as Matthews calls it, a “hygiene,” which “keeps certain questions out of the studio and protects those practices held within it.”⁸⁷

The separation enacted by technique differs from the distancing move accomplished by object-oriented ontologies. Object-oriented ontologies gain distance on things by stepping outside them, as evoked by the rhetoric of lists. Technical ontologies take distance not by trying to view things from afar but by stepping out of them and into other things. Through immersion in what reveals itself as the internal world of closely related technical details or technics, everything unrelated is externalized and at least temporarily forgotten. No view of external worlds arrives here, no map or theory of objects. One disappears into a technical world, which unfolds to reveal a complexity no lesser than any other. We are talking here not about distancing but separation, even to the extent of separatism. While the act of separation is implicit in Matthews’ examples, it is examined much more extensively in Peter Sloterdijk’s theorization of “anthropotechnics.” As this term suggests, Sloterdijk addresses some of the same tensions and issues already mentioned, in particular the relation of technique to the human (*anthropos*) and its power to remake worlds. Perhaps for this reason, while athletics are again a central example in Sloterdijk’s *You Must Change Your Life*, his main claim is about religion: namely, that “no ‘religion’ or ‘religions’ exist, only misunderstood spiritual regimens” or “misinterpreted anthropotechnic practice systems.”⁸⁸ *You Must Change Your Life* is a massive tome to which I cannot give fully adequate consideration here, yet responding to certain threads within it may allow us to grasp how a focus

on technics can enact a kind of separatism and what might be the implications of this.

It is easy to recognize a theory of technique in Sloterdijk's statements that "the future should present itself under the sign of the exercise" and that "the key term for everything" in his book will be the word "explicit." These points are developed through a now familiar spatial metaphor according to which novelty or newness "stems from the unfolding of the known into larger, brighter, more richly contoured surfaces." The development of technique presents "what was great yesterday as smaller, and passes off the greater of earlier times as normality only a short time later. It transforms the insurmountable difficulties of yesterday in paths on which, soon afterwards, even the untrained will advance with ease."⁸⁹ As we can see already in these quotations, the imperative to train is more provocative here than in Matthews because, while Sloterdijk recognizes training as an ideology linked to modernity, he also wants to claim for anthropotechnics a kind of ethical force that corresponds to Foucault's work on the ancient Greek "technologies of the self." This is the sense in which Sloterdijk directs our attention to something he calls "the practising life," or in more fantastical terms, "the planet of the practising."⁹⁰ Yet he also defines human beings as "the creature that cannot *not* practise."⁹¹ We are then faced with the same problem: What counts as a practice here? If "embodied practices" include "languages, rituals, and technical skills, in so far as these factors constitute the universal forms of automatized artificialities," embracing also "education, etiquette, custom, habit formation, training and exercise," then what are we to make of Sloterdijk's central imperative, borrowed from a poem by Rilke: "You must change your life!"⁹² Is there anyone who has not been trained in the technics of language, ritual, skill, custom, habit, and education? If these are all part of the "planet" of practice, then what kind of change is demanded?

Sloterdijk defines practice as "any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not."⁹³ This is a purely technical definition of practice, based on repetition itself, which neatly sidesteps the question of agency. Yet practice is also linked for Sloterdijk to some of the most charismatic and ideological lineages of training, namely, athletics and monasticism. Rilke's poem, after all, responds to a statue of Apollo, raising the specter of "a dominant system of physical and mental kinship between gods and athletes," in which "the athlete's body, which unifies beauty and discipline into a calm readiness for action, offers itself as one of the most understandable and convincing manifestations of authority."⁹⁴ At other

times, the ideal of practice has been monastic life, which if not quite athletic shares certain characteristics—Sloterdijk calls them “virtues”—with professional sports, namely the following of explicit rules, a strict separation from the outside world, and the exclusion of sexuality and parenting.⁹⁵ Are we not here in the presence of explicit masculinism, racism, and ableism, all formulated along the lines of the fascist’s violent desire for uncontested bodily power? Perhaps. But Sloterdijk summons these examples only as starting points, in order to advance a wider vision of anthropotechnics that can also include *negative exercises*, “exercises in negation” or “anti-exercises,” which have the aim of taking one down “the path of uselessness.”⁹⁶ What he wants to take from athletic and monastic practices is the ideal of self-training as a mode of ethics, not their specific ideologies.

Certainly spiritual practices, which range from asceticism to decadence and from hierarchical to mystical, do not fall simply within athletic, muscular, or masculinist paradigms. Even for Nietzsche, according to Sloterdijk, “training, discipline, education and self-design” are not linked to racism but to creativity and artistry. If in some places Sloterdijk seems to fall into a rhetoric of the threshold—exulting the practicing life as a “crusade against the ordinary,” a “secession from the habitual world,” or even a binary split that “divides humanity asymmetrically into the group of the knowing, who leave, and unknowing, who remain in the place of vulgar doom”—what is most significant here are the “spaces created by the secessionists”: monasteries, academies, and other “ascetic-meditative” sites, or “heterotopias” in Foucault’s sense. Even if Sloterdijk cherishes the image of the “pilgrim” or “world-leaver” who carries their own “pocket desert” with them, the primary mode of world-leaving is collective, or what we might call separatist in a politically radical sense. Anthropotechnics in this meaning is not a single ethical decision point that we must each take individually, but rather an infinity of possible ways of living that we might develop together. This is what Sloterdijk defends through his useful concept of *non-dominatory verticality*, a way of describing “the tendencies of cultural life to form internal multi-storey structures” that are not equivalent to—although they may be appropriated by—political hierarchies. Reacting against but also incorporating the Foucauldian analyses of knowledge as power, Sloterdijk proposes a “critique of the vertical” that does not do away with verticality but instead attempts to draw finer distinctions within it. Accordingly, “each individual discipline possesses a vertical tension that is unique to it and only comprehensible from within it. The status of an achiever in a given field does not tell us anything about their ranking in other areas.” In contrast to object-oriented ontologies,

which collapse epistemic depth in order to promote horizontality, Sloterdijk's technique-oriented ontology emphasizes the multiplicity of depths as "non-dominatory gradations."⁹⁷

Sloterdijk is not suggesting that technique is unrelated to social power, a neutral territory in which hierarchy is irrelevant. Rather, he praises and explores a kind of verticality that obtains *within* technique, as in "the differences between teacher and pupil, or trainer and athlete, possibly also between rider and horse, which have nothing to do with dominance in the usual sense."⁹⁸ The point is not to get rid of hierarchies but to recognize their multiplicity. This pertains to both "the indispensable figure of the trainer"—also called "master, guru, father, healer, genius, demon, teacher, or classic," with all the patriarchal implications of those terms—and to the way in which hierarchy or verticality is internalized within the self, as

an asymmetrical self-doubling in which the inner other has the association of a superior partner, comparable to a genius or an angel, who stays close to its charge like a spiritual monitor and gives them the certainty of being constantly seen, examined and strictly assessed, but also supported in case of a crisis: "the inner witness."⁹⁹

The separateness and world-leaving generated by this kind of verticality is very different from the distancing enacted by those who stand outside of technical fields and assess their value. For Sloterdijk, "The only authority that is still in a position to say 'You must change your life!' is the global crisis."¹⁰⁰ But what is the global crisis and who can hear it speaking? We know of it through messages raised from a thousand technical practices; but other technical practices, such as those discussed in the following section, tell us that the global crisis is not new. It began in the nineteenth century, with industrialization; or in the fifteenth century, with European colonialism. Focusing on technique does not answer any of the big questions. It can only help us recognize the need to coordinate knowledges at a higher level than that of the individual.

Although the tone of Sloterdijk's "General Disciplinics" too often flirts with ableism, masculinism, and neoliberalism, he is right to foreground anthropotechnics as an "inconceivably wide landscape of disciplines" which "forms the basis for the routines of all cultures and all trainable competencies."¹⁰¹ We do need to recognize the depth or vertical dimension of knowledge and the extent to which diversity in training generates substantive onto-epistemic separations, not just between individuals but between cultures, or rather between worlds. And we do need to combine critical,

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historical, and power-focused analyses of the social with forward-looking, experimental, knowledge-generating, anthropotechnical research.¹⁰² As Sloterdijk suggests, this would require a radical transformation of academia in particular, in order to support—through both training and research—a much wider range of anthropotechnics. Those of us advocating for political, ecological, and methodological change in the university system might even recognize what we call practice research, artistic research, and embodied research in Sloterdijk's proposal for a new university in which acrobatics, therapeutics, and applied arts are taught alongside "meditation systems," "ritualistics," and "the study of sexual practices," as part of a "spectrum of ability systems composed of knowledge and practical acts" and topped off by an "open list of cultivatable activities."¹⁰³ Before we get too excited about such curricular change, however, we should take stock more clearly of the present situation, in order not to underestimate just how much would need to be unearthed before such a dream could be realized.

Principle

What was once new is now established, not only individually but across bodies and infrastructures. The technique we spent so long developing is now taught both formally and informally; trained to the point of automaticity. The border over which we boldly crossed has receded into the distance. It is forgotten in the sense that we no longer think about it, but it is not gone. On the contrary! No longer an object, threshold, or technique, that very thing is now omnipresent as principle, constantly assumed and reiterated in daily actions. What have we done?

With the threshold we saw a politics of resistance and excess: the exhilaration of transgression. With technique we saw a more moderate approach, recognizing that the opening of some worlds requires the foreclosure of others. When technique is trained to the point of automaticity, it becomes sedimented as principle, bedrock upon which further technique can be constructed. The process of automatization is the focus of much work on training.¹⁰⁴ However, approaching principle from the side of technique assumes that automaticity is desirable: We have discovered how to do something and now want to make that doing automatic, so as to open up new vistas of possibility beyond it. But what if we find ourselves trapped in a field that is violent, exploitative, and unethical? The idea of the sedimented principle can also be approached from the other side. In that case we are not asking: *How do we train and sediment newly discovered technique?* But rather: *How do we unearth and excavate the hidden principles that structure the fields in which we find ourselves living?* The focus shifts from automatizing desired

principles to unearthing and deconstructing undesired ones. We can only rid ourselves of a bad principle once we have recognized it. Then it might gradually become possible to render that principle in technical terms; to extricate ourselves from it by crossing back over the threshold it defines; and finally to look back at it as an object that we can choose to reject. This process begins with recognition.

One of the key moves in embodied research / practice research / artistic research is to announce the insufficiency of language to capture embodiment and practice. This is weakly formulated when the nonverbal or non-linguistic is figured as a threshold over which we might cross, for then we are still situated within the field of language. More effective is the recognition of specific principles, such as *logocentrism*, that structure the fields in which we live.¹⁰⁵ In this section, I want to unearth a further principle, related to logocentrism but distinct from it in crucial ways. My investigation starts from the idea of whiteness, which as noted in the previous section is not a matter of personal identity alone, and certainly not of skin color, but of knowledge and practice. Above I located whiteness in a universalist approach to training or technique that examines the differential capacities and affordances of embodiment without situating these in relation to social and political power. Universalism and logocentrism are both part of the historical project of whiteness and European colonialism.¹⁰⁶ However, there are also many applications of universalism and logocentrism outside whiteness. What then is whiteness? In *What a Body Can Do*, as I began to consider how technique works outside the confines of specialist training, I mentioned the possibility that technical thinking could be applied to categories of race as well as gender.¹⁰⁷ There I referred to the work of Sara Ahmed, who has written on “whiteness as a phenomenological issue”: “how whiteness is lived as a background to experience” and how we might understand it as an “orientation” in the world.¹⁰⁸ Of course, the term “orientation” is part of the spatial metaphor for knowledge. In phenomenology, “orientations are about starting points,” they “are about how we begin, how we proceed from ‘here’”; and “they involve unfolding.”¹⁰⁹ What kind of orientation is whiteness?

Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* is devoted to an exploration of the spatiality of knowledge, addressing both gender and race in terms of embodied technique. For example, she writes: “Compulsory heterosexuality shapes what bodies can do. Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force.”¹¹⁰ This is why Ahmed belongs here under the sign of principle rather than technique. Indeed, she helps us recognize the implicit whiteness of technical approaches that

neglect the sedimented contexts in which a willing subject like Sloterdijk's "world-leaver" can choose to submit themselves to a promising discipline and its attendant separatism. When considering racial embodiment, what Matthews calls "the problems experienced as a result of having a body and being in the world" go far beyond what any biomedical or anatomical concept of the body can chart. In this context, as Frantz Fanon showed,

attending to the corporeal schema is not sufficient as it is not made up of the right kinds of elements. Where phenomenology attends to the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character of embodied reality, Fanon asks us to think of the "historic-racial" scheme, which is, importantly, "below it." In other words, the racial and historical dimensions are beneath the surface of the body described by phenomenology.¹¹¹

Whiteness here is "a form of bodily inheritance," which is "both bodily and historical" and has to do with "the reachability of some objects." Whiteness is explicitly not an "object" in Ahmed's account but rather "an orientation that puts certain things within reach."¹¹² Whiteness in this sense is not a variety of training or anthropotechnics insofar as, with few exceptions, one does not explicitly train to be white. In racist and white supremacist discourse, whiteness is figured as an attribute inherent to certain bodies and bloodlines. However, when an explicit form of training or education such as academia is described as a training in whiteness, this is a critical move designed to alienate and make newly visible the hidden principles at work.

Whiteness, then, is a field in which we find ourselves:

I look around and reencounter the sea of whiteness. Whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or for those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it.¹¹³

But how did we get here? And how do we get out? Extricating oneself from an onto-epistemic field is never only a matter of enacting a technical program, precisely because there are always sedimented principles in place that subtend and define the field, making some kinds of technique inaccessible from within it. In order to develop substantial technical alternatives or antidotes to whiteness, in order to escape the dominant field of whiteness, we will have to unearth its principles. Ahmed reminds us:

“The institutionalization of whiteness involves work.” To de-institutionalize whiteness requires not just work, but a better understanding of what the work of whiteness has always been. A technical analysis here will be insufficient, because it is too narrow. Whiteness can be partially located in the everyday actions of white people, of course, and in statistics that demonstrate contemporary racism through the grossly unequal distribution of resources and corresponding inequalities in state violence and imprisonment. But naming and quantifying whiteness in this way will never be sufficient to unmake it. Indeed, rendering whiteness in technical terms can be a way for white people to avoid a more serious confrontation with racism. Thinking of whiteness or racism as specific techniques can allow these to appear as exceptions, as anomalies that need to be corrected, as figure rather than ground—as if avoiding microaggressions were the secret to antiracism.¹¹⁴ This kind of avoidance is no longer possible if we confront racism, and antiblackness in particular, as *principles* of contemporary social life.

Confronting antiblackness as principle is the work undertaken by Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Like more than one recent work on blackness, it begins with a litany of deaths, in the case, deaths in the family: “a deathly repetition” that initiates the book’s unflinching account of “living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery.”¹¹⁵ The central image of the wake is Sharpe’s evocative image for what I am calling a principle: a socially constructed material reality that is so deeply sedimented as to be at work in every moment, while remaining for the most part unspoken. To call antiblackness a principle is to recognize that its invisibility in contemporary white society is a function of its omnipresence rather than its obsolescence. It is not an object that may be rejected or a technique that can be avoided. If we cannot see the principle, that is because we are inside it, inside the field that it creates. This realization includes but goes far beyond the concept of implicit bias, which points to the unconsciousness embodiment of racism. Racism here is not only unconscious at the individual level, it is deeply sedimented in the onto-epistemic and material foundations of society. It also goes beyond what Ahmed calls the “phenomenology of ‘being stopped,’” the experience of blackness in an antiblack world, as in the infamous stop-and-frisk, one of the techniques that defines “the radically and racially restricted spaces in and through which Black men and women, girls and boys [...] can live and move unimpeded.”¹¹⁶ Above all, Sharpe refuses the impulse to locate in embodied experience any kind of refuge from the structural violence of antiblackness. Other recent works theorize

more positively what we might call black objects, black thresholds, black techniques, black principles, and black fields.¹¹⁷ Here Sharpe confronts the other side: the antiblack objects, antiblack thresholds, antiblack techniques, antiblack principles, and antiblack fields that structure virtually all major social institutions in the United States and elsewhere.

At stake in this approach is the risk of “not recognizing antiblackness as total climate,” as weather: “the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and the climate is antiblack.”¹¹⁸ So many white and mainstream articulations of antiracism continue to operate as if antiblackness were an error to be corrected—whereas, in fact, “The ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people are normative and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we walk on.” The question for Sharpe is less *what to do* given this reality than how to adequately recognize, name, and sit with it. “What happens when we proceed as if we *know* this, antiblackness, to be the ground on which we stand, the ground from which we attempt to speak?”¹¹⁹ How can a fundamentally violent principle like antiblackness be unearthed and exhumed? What long-buried techniques, instructions, and exercises got us here? What thresholds were crossed and how can the long-sedimented pathways that followed be folded back into themselves and returned to the status of objects, so that one might eventually be able to reject them? The analysis of principles of injustice does not offer a clear way forward. It does not point, except perhaps obliquely, to alternative futures.

This is why recent black theory has been called “Afro-pessimism”: because it points not forward, into unfolding futures, but backward, into a past that we cannot escape.¹²⁰

Afro-pessimism admits to none of the exhilaration demonstrated by Anzaldúa or Preciado in charting alternative thresholds, and certainly not to the object catalogs or technical landscapes described by Harman and Mol, Matthews and Sloterdijk. There is a door in Sharpe’s book, but it is not one seen in the moment before its crossing, when excitement mixes with fear of the unknown. No, this door can only be seen from the other side. It is a threshold crossed many years ago, at the greatest cost, which is now separated from us by so many layers of technique that we can never return to it. This door blinks at us through centuries of violence, as we recognize in it a threshold that should never have been crossed and which cannot be un-crossed. This is the “door of no return,” the “mythic and real location” of the initiation of slavery.¹²¹

Whiteness, as Ahmed also shows, allows one not to see that devastation. It is the privilege not to notice the weather, not to feel the storm.

Turning to face it can feel as if everything that is beautiful in your life has turned to ash—until you remember that, for everyone outside the white bubble, this is just reality. To avoid the popping of that bubble, white people react with a range of affects, from fragility to rage.¹²² These operate differently but alongside outright white supremacy, to prevent the recognition of the weather of antiblackness. And so it must be stated and restated again: “We are positioned in the knowledge that we are living in the afterlives of slavery, sitting in the room with history, in a lived and undeclared state of emergency.”¹²³ This knowledge prevents us from offering mere technical solutions, alternative thresholds, or changes in object choice, all of which are helpless to bring us back through that door of no return. There is much to do, but not yet on the order of solutions. Instead what we need is

a kind of blackened knowledge, an unscientific method, that comes from observing that where one stands is relative to the door of no return and that moment of historical and ongoing rupture. With this in mind, I’ve been trying to articulate a method of encountering a past that is not past. A method along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are. I’ve been thinking of this gathering, this collecting and reading toward a new analytic, as the wake and wake work.¹²⁴

This is a long work, as long as the distance back to the door of no return. “These are questions of temporality, the *longue durée*, the residence and hold time of the wake.” From this perspective, the premature offering of solutions—formulating antiblackness as technique, as threshold, as object—could in fact be kind of violence. Perhaps one day it will be possible to define antiblackness in technical terms, to step through a threshold of justice, or to catalog racial histories in a flat ontology indicating material equality. But this will only be possible if we wake, finally, to a genuine consciousness of the wake in which we live. To do so, we will need “a theory and praxis of the wake; a theory and praxis of Black being in diaspora”: a “Black annotation” and “Black redaction” affecting all archives and leaving no body untouched.¹²⁵ Only then might we begin to trace new pathways, outside the thresholds through which we crossed long ago and against the ways in which our violently differentiated lives are still structured today by that crossing. Only then might we see our way to another field.

Field

We find ourselves in a field again, but it is a different field. How did we get here? What is the relationship of this field to the one we left behind? Are we still inside that field—a field within a field? No, it is not possible to say that one is inside the other, or even that they are contiguous in a geometric sense. There is no mode of coherency that can hold these fields together, because each field is a world of its own. And yet they are connected. Incommensurability is never absolute. Only the paths are not yet traced, not yet available. The paths must be found. No calculation can guarantee the route, for mathematics itself is a field. No theory can take us all the way, for philosophy is also a field. No practice is universal, for every discipline is founded on its own limitations. The question is: Where is that field in which we can live?

If there is any sense of progress suggested by the onto-epistemic journey I have traced so far, it is that of moving from a unified field to a manifold of fields. Although the examples I have used may also suggest a narrative of coming to grips with whiteness, there can be no ranking or progressive evaluation of the central concepts themselves. Objects, thresholds, techniques, and principles are all necessary onto-epistemological formations, tools in an onto-epistemic toolkit for living in a “world of many worlds.”¹²⁶ However, I cannot deny that I hold a special place for thinking the relation between fields, especially to elaborate upon embodiment as first affordance. Embodiment, we might say, is neither an object nor a field but a *field of fields*, a manifold, out of which individual fields sometimes rise up and poke out, sharp as objects, and sometimes remain hidden as earth, sedimented as rock, implicit as principle. We could say that knowledge *feels like this*: sometimes harder, sometimes softer, boundaries between known and unknown shifting in ways that implicate and reconstruct the knower. But how do we understand the relationship between fields? If we are not dealing with a body that is made up of organ-objects (or even system-objects), but rather one that is made up of fields, then where can we gain any purchase? Where can we get a grip or handle on embodiment? Does this vision of untold fields dissolve embodiment into something vague and ungraspable, an excess with which we can never practically work?

What distinguishes a field from an object is not that it cannot be grasped at all but that its grasping puts one in touch with a community. To speak of a photon is to refer to something that is everywhere and nowhere, omnipresent but untouchable, mathematically precise but subjectively incomprehensible. To speak of particle physics, on the other hand, is to name a network of researchers, a community of practitioners, a cohort of students, an archive of curricula and journal articles, a set of professional associations, a collection of laboratories, an array of departments. If we take

“field” in its academic sense, then there is already a robust literature that analyzes relationships between fields through the concept of *interdisciplinarity*. Closely related to social epistemology and science and technology studies, studies of interdisciplinarity are an important starting point from which to consider the horizontality and verticality of relationships between fields with varying types and degrees of institutionality. Contemporary interdisciplinarity studies, for example, recognizes the absurdity of arguing for or against either disciplinarity or interdisciplinarity in general, since “what were once interdisciplines may themselves become progressively established as distinct disciplines.” To understand such relations, we need “to attend to the specificity and the history” of disciplines, “rather than assume that there has been a generalised movement from a disciplinary to an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary mode of knowledge production.”¹²⁷

Attending to histories of interdisciplinarity sometimes involves attending to power, but this is usually secondary to an epistemological analysis that understands academic disciplines primarily in terms of knowledge.¹²⁸ In several of the sections above, I have gestured toward a power analysis of disciplines by noting that many of the cited thinkers, despite their great differences, have in common a desire to question or overturn the prevailing hierarchy according to which mathematical physics is thought to have maximum explanatory power, with the social sciences in an intermediary position and the humanities in the precarious position of describing inherently unreliable phenomena. (The “arts” do not figure in this hierarchy at all, not being recognized as generating knowledge of any kind.) However, the academic sense of “field” is too limited for the present context. It is precisely logocentric—academic fields being, at least until very recently, those in which knowledge is defined through the circulation of written documents—and thus “white” in the sense developed above. We saw in Sloterdijk that academic disciplines are just a small subset of a much wider and wilder landscape that he calls “general disciplinics.” But Sloterdijk, emphasizing the radical independence and unique verticality of each discipline, does not give us tools to grapple with their relations, either epistemologically or in terms of power dynamics. We need a theory of fields that offers better grip on both power and knowledge in their mutual interdependence. My provisional suggestion here—and the note on which I will conclude this essay—is that, to examine relations between fields of knowledge both within and beyond academia, what we require is something like an *intersectional interdisciplinarity* or an *interdisciplinary intersectionality*.

Following Ange-Marie Hancock, I understand intersectionality as a “path-breaking analytical framework for understanding questions of

inequality and injustice.”¹²⁹ By invoking intersectionality here, I hope to contribute neither to the “erasure of Black women as quintessential subjects of intersectionality” nor to the “theoretically bankrupt practice of name-checking intersectionality” of which Hancock warns. Instead I want to honor “the development of intersectionality from an idea into a field,” and a particular kind of field at that: a meta-field, a field that studies fields. In doing so, I hope to participate in the “interpretive community” mobilizing around this term, a commitment that requires me to “disavow ownership of intersectionality” and to “remember that while I am permitted to use it, I must do so ethically.”¹³⁰ Following on the previous section, I situate intersectionality in the wake of the histories of violence that constitute the present, although in the context of intersectionality these must include the indigenous genocides, as well as intra-European and non-European colonialisms, alongside trans-Atlantic slavery. Hancock carefully traces a range of precedents for intersectionality, including notions of the “double bind” and “multiple jeopardies,” the center/margin metaphor, and feminist standpoint theory. In the present context, I use intersectionality to name a commitment to a *power analysis of knowledge*. This is emphatically not equivalent to what has been called a “hierarchy of oppressions” or “Oppression Olympics,” in which different types of oppression are compared.¹³¹ Rather, it is a move “away from additive models of inequality and injustice” toward a more complex framework in which power is understood as woven through and around knowledge in complex ways.

When it is equated with a power analysis alone, intersectionality can be critiqued as a form of narrow identity politics.¹³² However, intersectionality as Hancock understands it is a two-pronged power/knowledge analysis, involving two distinct and interwoven intellectual projects: The first, which she calls “the visibility project,” is an “inclusionary project designed to remedy specific instances of intersectional stigma or invisibility.” The second, which she calls “the ontological relationships project,” is an “analytical project designed to reshape how categories of difference are conceptually related to each other.”¹³³ The first of these, which I will call the *power analysis*, is essential if we are to examine relations between fields outside the context of a basic epistemic equality maintained by academic institutions—situations in which mere interdisciplinarity will be insufficient. For example, despite the real power differences that exist between theoretical physics and dance studies, as academic disciplines they are able to meet as relative equals within the epistemic structure of the university. The same cannot be said for disciplinary formations outside the university, where no relatively powerful social institution guarantees such an even

playing field. What I mean by “interdisciplinary intersectionality” is that the *power analysis of knowledge* must be linked to a *knowledge analysis of power* if we are to understand not just how knowledge enacts power but also how power enacts (and is vulnerable to) knowledge.¹³⁴

If intersectionality is primarily a theory of identities and power, while interdisciplinarity is primarily a theory of disciplines and knowledge, then an *intersectional interdisciplinarity* would be an analysis that keeps power in mind while talking about knowledge. Vice versa, to call for an *interdisciplinary intersectionality* means that we need to analyze identities as formations of knowledge and not just power, recognizing the epistemic depth that underpins and at the same time destabilizes “identities” conceived as fields rather than objects.¹³⁵ If interdisciplinarity and intersectionality are two sides of the same power/knowledge coin, then there may be something important to gain by applying them to each other’s conventional contexts: analyze academic disciplines as intersecting fields of power; examine cultural identities as interdisciplinary fields of knowledge. Among other benefits, this has the effect of demolishing the subject/object split according to which academic disciplines study cultural identities from above—or, on the other hand, cultural power struggles and activism validate academic fields. If fields are identities and identities are fields, then perhaps we can approach all of these in a way that does not prioritize either power or knowledge at the expense of the other. The key to this will be an analysis of power-knowledge that integrates or oscillates between an interdisciplinary lens, which respects diverse fields of knowledge as epistemically equal, and an intersectional lens, which foregrounds the power imbalances and injustices between them. At the very least, thinking of identities as disciplines allows us to apply the tools of social epistemology to relations that are sometimes counterproductively overdetermined by analyses of power alone.¹³⁶

Hancock actually proposes an “interdisciplinary history of intersectionality-like thought” for which she selects and enlists the help of ten academic disciplines.¹³⁷ In my view, such a list should also include emerging methods and methodologies in artistic and embodied research. Social science methods are crucial, but a sociology or even a critical theory of identity will never forge the solidarities we need unless it embraces a more radical interdisciplinarity. I suggested in *What a Body Can Do* that “Disciplinarity maps reality and in this sense could be said to determine what kinds of projects, institutions, and social movements are thinkable.”¹³⁸ To conclude this essay, I want to return again to the matter of academic institutionality, this time through Roderick Ferguson’s study of the rise of critical “interdisciplines” in U.S. academia during the 1960s and 1970s. Ferguson aims similarly “to revise a reigning

assumption about the academy,” namely “that as a social institution, it is always secondary to and derivative of state and capital.”¹³⁹ To do so, he traces the onto-epistemic power of the university back to the strategic maneuvers of Immanuel Kant, who suggests in a work that helped found the modern university that “the academy—as a laboratory that produces truth and political economy’s relation to it—is a primary articulator of state and civil society.”¹⁴⁰ As such, the university is at least as important a factor in the “distribution of the sensible” as any other social institution.¹⁴¹

With Derrida, Ferguson asserts that “institutions are not simply things that are embodied externally in the form of buildings and paperwork,” but also “modes of interpretation that are embodied materially, discursively, and subjectively, modes offering visions of community and communal engagement.” To think about the past and future of the university, therefore, is to think “the simultaneity of institution-building and hermeneutical practices.”¹⁴² This simultaneity, which parallels the two-sided power-knowledge analysis I have just proposed, is demonstrated by the development of the interdisciplinary fields or interdisciplines in U.S. academia—“African American studies, Asian American studies, Chicano studies, American Indian Studies, Women’s studies, and so on”—which Ferguson sees as enacting nothing less than “a thorough transformation of the character of institutions and a radical assertion of the importance of minority culture.”¹⁴³ Ferguson does not ignore the power of capitalism and other exploitative systems to reincorporate difference. He points to “canon formation as the ironic repetition of disciplinarity” and foregrounds an “analyses of the limits of institutionalizing and archiving minority difference and culture *even as we promote them as levers for institutional change*.”¹⁴⁴ But there is nothing necessarily ironic in the formation of new canons, except insofar as the rate of technological change implies a transformation of both form and content.¹⁴⁵ As long as new canons are not treated as permanent edifices, they can be wielded as activist interventions.

Practices of exclusion and measurement are built upon and make use of techniques of thought and calculation. Even something as apparently logistical as an admissions process, which is often treated as a “demographic matter related to a university population,” is also “an epistemological proceeding necessitating the reorganization of knowledge.” By the same token, the movement for open admissions is not only “a rebellion against institutional forces” but also “a desire for institutionality.” The question is therefore not whether to institutionalize but *how* to institutionalize. The critique of the quantification of minority subjects as part of explicitly anti-racist measures cannot be taken as a general critique of either antiracism

or institutionality. Rather, it is a critique of the limitations of *quantification* and hence of the principles that underpin the sciences and social sciences as fields—principles that do not necessarily underpin research in either the humanities or the arts. It therefore matters a great deal just how universities institutionalize philosophy, history, economics, and literature; how they institutionalize postcolonial studies, women’s studies, black studies, queer studies, trans studies, and crip studies; how they institutionalize artistic research, practice research, and embodied research. It matters whether “the academy’s transformation of minority cultures and differences into objects of institutional knowledge” stops at the level of object or proceeds through new thresholds to found new techniques, principles, and fields.¹⁴⁶ It matters whether things like queerness, blackness, and decoloniality are institutionalized as *objects* of study within earlier disciplines, as *thresholds* to undisciplinable futures, as *techniques* to be implemented (as research methods, for example), or as *principles* underpinning substantive new fields.

Ferguson points to a 1969 social movement, led by black and Chicano internationalists, to found a new school within the University of California at San Diego. “Lumumba-Zapata College,” as it would have been called, was an attempt “to reconceptualize the very possibility of institutional life and practice,” requiring “epistemic transformations” and “imagining new forms of community and new ways of producing and disseminating knowledge.” This would entail a redesign of the curriculum, which we can compare to Sloterdijk’s: Here the proposed areas of study were to include “Revolutions,” “Analysis of Economic System[s],” “Science and Technology,” “Health Sciences and Public Health,” “Urban and Rural Development,” “Communication Arts,” “Foreign Languages,” “Cultural Heritage,” and “White Studies,” each presuming “powerful challenges to the canonical orders of academic knowledge.”¹⁴⁷ Many today are attempting to imagine the transformation of universities and other institutions in the name of justice and sustainability. In doing so, we would be well to have recourse to earlier radical and revolutionary histories of reimagining the university, such as those described by Ferguson.

What I want to promote here is an engagement with institutionality from the perspective of embodied difference, including both historically embodied differences and the continually emerging differentiations generated by embodied research within and outside academia. Although my own professional situation locates me within the international university system, I argue not in support of academia itself but for an engagement with social institutions including academia. Given that there is no pure, “noninstitutional environment” that could “guarantee our radical

innocence,” it falls to us to develop a “desire for alternative institutionalities” as a way forward.¹⁴⁸ Of course, none of us can grasp more than a tiny fraction of the situation in which we find ourselves: as individuals, as communities, as species. If nothing else, the onto-epistemological toolkit proposed here could be a way to think through the complexity of institutions, including the university and the objects, thresholds, techniques, principles, and fields that define them. Where racism is a principle, anti-racism at the object level will be ineffective. Where critical theory continues to posit new thresholds, the establishment of alternative methods is an essential step toward new principles and new fields. These are not fields as in territories or frontiers that might be “won over” through a neocolonialism of knowledge.¹⁴⁹ By field here I mean a place to live, with or without the university as we know it.

The interdisciplines that Ferguson discusses bring new forms and communities of knowledge into the university in attempts to reshape it. The dominant (white, heteronormative, capitalist) university pushes back not only against this content but also at the level of method, requiring these other forms of knowledge to squeeze themselves into the forms and methods of existing disciplines. Radical fields of identitarian knowledge are then closed back up into objects, so that racial and sexual differences (for example) are not recognized as ways of knowing—which would imply radically different fields and institutions—but are treated instead as objects to be known. Ferguson does not examine the parallel rise of theater, dance, and performance studies in the same period and since, yet a parallel history could be written. Today the “blackened knowledge” that Sharpe calls for undoubtedly requires us to demolish the walls that keep the university in Europe and North America so predominantly white across its fields. At the same time and in close alignment with this, it also requires us to dismantle the methodological assumptions that exclude dance, song, kinship, sexuality, illness, parenting, and other embodied realities from the scope of what counts as knowledge. This means that embodied methods, artistic methods, practice methods, affective methods, and the like can be—if critically grounded—among the onto-epistemic tools upon which we might call, to help make the future more just and livable.

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

2 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 1.

- 3 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 141. I discuss this passage further in “Colors Like Knives,” this volume.
- 4 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015): 44. See also Cetina on “The lateral and angular branching off of strands of practice,” in Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn in Social Theory*: 195; and the description of nature-culture interfaces as fractal in Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 148.
- 5 See “Embodiment as First Affordance,” this volume.
- 6 Rebecca Schneider, “New Materialisms and Performance Studies,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 59.4 (2015): 8.
- 7 Bruno Latour, “How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies,” *Body & Society* 10.2–3 (2004): 213.
- 8 A body made up of epistemic lines and lineages is what I intended to evoke with the cover image on *What a Body Can Do*. This choice has been criticized for its centering of a normatively shaped and gendered body, a critique I accept.
- 9 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 124.
- 10 *Ibid.*: 65.
- 11 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 151–6. This argument continues in Stengers, “The Challenge of Ontological Politics,” in Cadena and Blaser, *Many Worlds*: 83–111.
- 12 Moreover, in contemporary nanotechnology and biotechnology, researchers working with atoms and molecules “are interested in their performances, in what they can do, rather than in what they are made of.” Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, “Which Focus for an Ethics in Nanotechnology Laboratories?” in *Ethics on the Laboratory Floor*, eds. Simone van der Burg and Tsjalling Swierstra (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 28–9.
- 13 For example, see Bruce McConachie’s scientific argument for cognitive studies as a “framework for understanding the potential truth value of many theories and practices that we presently deploy in theatre and performance studies” in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, eds. Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart (London: Routledge, 2006): ix. See also John Lutterbie, *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 14 Shaun Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 38. Gallagher’s work exemplifies the embodied or enactive turn in cognitive theory, incorporating “enactivist, embedded, and extended or distributed cognition approaches” (26). As some have suggested, “The most exciting idea in cognitive science right now is the theory that cognition is *embodied*”—see Andrew D. Wilson and Sabrina Golonka, “Embodied Cognition Is Not What You Think It Is,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013): 58, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00058.
- 15 Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*: 1, 6.
- 16 *Ibid.*: 41–3.
- 17 *Ibid.*: 163.
- 18 *Ibid.*: 12.
- 19 In *What a Body Can Do*, I argued that language is not opposed or complementary to the body; rather, what we call mind or rationality is simply one

- area of embodied technique (48–50). To a certain extent, Gallagher agrees: “Thinking, like movement, is an embodied performance” (Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*: 204). See also Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): Chapter 4. Today I would argue that cognition as a bodily element or object is an artifact of the technology of writing—see “The Video Way of Thinking,” this volume.
- 20 Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*: 121–5, 150–5.
 - 21 On neurorealism, see Eric Racine, Ofek Bar-Ilan, and Judy Illes, “fMRI in the Public Eye,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 6.2 (2005): 159–64, doi:10.1038/nrn1609; and David R. Gruber, “Three Forms of Neurorealism: Explaining the Persistence of the ‘Uncritically Real’ in Popular Neuroscience News,” *Written Communication* 34.2: 189–223, doi:10.1177/0741088317699899; as well as Gruber’s amusing work of “Critical NeuroArt,” the “Neuro News Generator”: www.neurohuman.com/criticalneuroart (accessed 14 May 2019).
 - 22 For divergent understandings of what the dissected corpse reveals, see Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).
 - 23 On songs as fractional habitus, see “Colors Like Knives,” this volume.
 - 24 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 149–66.
 - 25 For example, consider how the Body Mass Index (BMI) measurement folds up the body, applying the same logic of quantification to everyday life, which is then figured as inherently competitive.
 - 26 OOO has many problems—more than I can address here—and my use of Harman’s work should not be taken as an endorsement. For relevant critiques of Harman and OOO, see Stacy Alaimo, “Thinking as the Stuff of the World,” *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies* 1 (2014): 13–21; Nathan Brown, “The Nadir of OOO: From Graham Harman’s Tool-Being to Timothy Morton’s Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality,” *Parrhesia* 17 (2013): 62–71; and Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy,” *Lateral* 5.1 (2016).
 - 27 Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018): 54.
 - 28 Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 39. For an important critique of Bogost and the rhetoric of lists, see Alaimo, “Thinking”: 14. The eclecticism of these lists is intended to demonstrate their randomness and flexibility, but, of course, what they also demonstrate is the power held by the person who gets to assemble any given list. “Asian swindlers”?!
 - 29 Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*: 41.
 - 30 *Ibid.*: 41, 51.
 - 31 *Ibid.*: 46. It may be relevant here to observe that Harman was a sports journalist before becoming a philosopher. Social epistemologists like Rheinberger and Karen Barad were first trained as scientists; their philosophical inquiries are dedicated to explaining the depth dimension of knowledge. Harman, on the other hand, is committed to the collapsing of expertise, the folding up of knowledge, which as I suggest above is an essential principle of sports as well as journalism. See Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010): 1.

- 32 Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*: 49.
- 33 Ibid.: 47–8.
- 34 Ibid.: 9.
- 35 Harman offers a superficial and erroneous reading of Mol (*Object-Oriented Ontology*: 188–9), putting her on the side of epistemology and relativism when she clearly frames her argument in ontological terms.
- 36 Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): xii. Related to Mol’s “multiple object” is the “boundary object,” which in its name combines two of the moments described here—see *ibid.*: 138; and Susan Leigh Star, “This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 35.5 (2010): 601–17.
- 37 Mol, *Body Multiple*: 36, italics original.
- 38 Mol states that “we should no longer leave the study of ‘disease’ to biomedicine,” as “leaving ‘disease’ in the hands of physicians alone is a political weakness” (*ibid.*: 21–22). Further: “In the daily hospital dealings with patients with atherosclerosis, pathology is not foundational, because it cannot found action”; “In hospital practice, the clinical way of enacting atherosclerosis is more important” (39–40).
- 39 *Ibid.*: 55. The problem of how to link diverse practices together arises for “practice theory” as soon as the unified field model has been abandoned, as I have previously noted (*What a Body Can Do*: 39).
- 40 Mol, *Body Multiple*: 46.
- 41 *Ibid.*: 37, 83, 84, 51.
- 42 Mol, also influenced by Latour, has her own rhetoric of lists, invoking “knives, questions, telephones, forms, files, pictures, trousers, technicians, and so on” (*ibid.*: 143); “molecules and money, cells and worries, bodies, knives, and smiles” (170).
- 43 In its commitment to praxiology without a historical analysis of the relations between fields, Mol’s *topography* of the hospital differs from the abstract onto-epistemic *topology* of knowledge that I am proposing here.
- 44 The theorization of the threshold here is my own. I later came across the “Thresholds Project” at Utrecht University and their discussion of this concept in Gilbert Simondon’s work. See Iris van der Tuin et al., “The Thresholds Project at Utrecht University: New Materialist Rethinkings of Subjectivity and Objectivity,” in *Teaching with Feminist Materialisms: Teaching with Gender: European Women’s Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms*, eds. Peta Hinton and Pat Treusch (Utrecht: ATGENDER, 2015): 23–35.
- 45 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987): Preface.
- 46 *Ibid.*: 37.
- 47 *Ibid.*: 46.
- 48 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 28, and see xxxiv, 245.
- 49 *Ibid.*: 133, 3. On the embodiment of writing, Anzaldúa declares:

For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought.

(Ibid.: 5)

50 Thresholds

I am particularly struck by the resonance between the cover image I selected for *What a Body Can Do* (see note 8 above) and Anzaldúa's drawing of "a woman's body veined like the map of a country" (ibid.: 70, 232n11). Both images depict a body made up of lines, visualizing a spatial or geographical metaphor for embodied knowledge.

50 Ibid.: 137.

51 Ibid.: 140.

52 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 56–60.

53 See Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*: Chapter 3. The place of decolonization and/or cultural appropriation in Anzaldúa's work is discussed in Keating's introduction (xxix–xxxvii). See also "Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment," this volume.

54 One of my own experiences of "standing in a threshold" is described in "The Door is Open," this volume.

55 I am thinking here of how Anzaldúa sometimes contrasts "boundary crossers" and "thresholders" with those who remain committed to narrower identity-based politics. At one point she asks

how much of a mestiza person must become before racial categories dissolve and new ones develop, before committing to social concerns that move beyond personal group or nation, before an inclusive community forms. You wonder when others will, like las nepantleras, hand themselves to a larger vision, a less defended identity.

(*Light in the Dark*: 152)

Here Anzaldúa makes the dissolution of racial categories and racism sound like a personal quest, as if a certain degree of individual awakening can break someone through to a raceless world. Given her own positionality as a relatively light-skinned Chicana woman, it is hard not to recognize antiblackness in her evocation of nepantla and mestizaje as beyond race.

56 For a recent example of the trope of excess that demonstrates both its strengths and its limitations, see Erin Manning's discussion of "the more-than" in "Me Lo Dijo Un Pajarito: Neurodiversity, Black Life, and the University as We Know It," *Social Text* 36.3 (2018): 6 and passim.

57 Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*: 64.

58 Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013): 11.

59 Ibid.: 12.

60 Ibid.: 143.

61 "Sniffing cocaine. Ingesting codeine. Injecting morphine. Smoking nicotine. Taking Prozac. [...] Applying Testogel..." (ibid.: 231). For Preciado, these are all various kinds of "molecular doors."

62 Ibid.: 143.

63 Preciado changed his name from Beatriz to Paul in 2015 (see "Paul B. Preciado," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed 24 May 2019). I use masculine pronouns here, although "About the Author" in *Testo Junkie* uses "s/he." On the conventional FTM trajectory as "consolidating a transsexual identity," see Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003): 114.

64 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*: 138, 250, 58, 61, 55, 133.

65 Ibid.: 123, 61, 41, 43, 230, 35.

- 66 Ibid.: 348, 351, 352.
- 67 Although it does not come with a method, Preciado's vision for an "integrated multimedia laboratory-brothel" (ibid.: 50) resonates in some ways with my proposal for a queer audiovisual embodied laboratory, as described in Ben Spatz, *Making a Laboratory: Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video* (New York: Punctum Books, forthcoming).
- 68 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*: 364, 369.
- 69 Preciado references "the workshops of Diane Torr, Annie Sprinkle, and Jack Armstrong; the performances of Moby Dick, Dred, Split Britches, and the Five Lesbian Brothers; and the photographic work of Del LaGrace Volcano" (ibid.: 369).
- 70 Ibid.: 371, 372, 373. On nonbinary gender, see "soft butch," this volume.
- 71 I am referring here to Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: Chapter 4, "Gender as Technique."
- 72 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*: 396, 397.
- 73 On the "thin band of consciousness," a term I borrowed from Nigel Thrift, see Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 55. The term "explicitation" comes from Maryse Maurel, "The Explicitation Interview," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16.10–12 (2009): 58–89. Thanks to Deb Middleton for sharing that text with me.
- 74 For a striking example of such a process, consider how a political impasse in Canada was partially resolved by "translating *atiku*-hunting protocols into policies that could be enforced by the Innu Nation." In this process, "rather than striving to discover or enact a common ground, we sought to enable a set of actions that were homonymic: they addressed different things simultaneously." The crucial shift here is from the incommensurability of worlds (indigenous "protocols" and state-authorized "common ground") to a technical negotiation around concrete "policies" and "actions." Mario Blaser, "Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible?" *Cultural Anthropology*, 31.4 (2016): 564–5.
- 75 The term "exercise" is used throughout performing arts and physical culture, and this is often the form in which a principle is rendered technical in teaching. But when we encounter new form, it does not immediately appear as exercise or instruction. Those are later, pedagogical steps. Likewise, "training" is the work you do to automatize a technical task, not the form of the task itself. Although *task-oriented* and *task-based* are important ideas in late twentieth-century performance, the concept of "task" is not weighty enough to carry this meaning. "Definition" works well for mathematical research (thanks to Ben Blum-Smith for discussing this point), but it is too discursive for embodied research, even if embodied technique also has definition in the sense of clarity and form. Similarly, while the development of a new lexicon is usually a sign of technical creativity (see Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 206, 214n13; and "A Thousand Tiny Viewpoints," this volume), the lexicon we invent to name emerging forms is not equivalent to those forms. "Form" itself is too general, having no necessary link to knowledge.
- 76 I define technique as the structure or knowledge content of practice—see *What a Body Can Do*: 38–48.
- 77 There is not scope in this chapter to discuss intellectual property issues and the matters of knowledge ownership that are central to the digital era. For my thinking on IP in embodied research, see Ben Spatz, "Molecular Identities: Digital Archives and Decolonial Judaism in a Laboratory of Song," *Performance Research* 24.1 (2019): 66–79.

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- 78 John Matthews, *Anatomy of Performance Training* (London: Methuen Drama, 2104): 7.
- 79 Ibid.: 157. On the racial critique of the human category, see “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment,” this volume.
- 80 Matthews, *Anatomy*: 13.
- 81 This is why, in *What a Body Can Do*, I felt it essential to chart a trajectory across physical culture (postural yoga), performing arts (actor training), and everyday life (gender). Matthews also looks at sports, dance, postural yoga, and actor training, including some of the same examples that have informed my work, but he does not cross over into a consideration of everyday identities such as gender and race as forms of training.
- 82 Matthews, *Anatomy*: 167–71. The term “cut” in Matthews seems inspired by his use of woodcut images to illustrate each chapter. For an onto-epistemological theory of cuts as fundamental to research, drawing on the work of Karen Barad and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, see Spatz, *Making a Laboratory*.
- 83 Matthews, *Anatomy*: 22, 23. For an alternative approach to anatomy, see Kuriyama, *Expressiveness*.
- 84 Matthews, *Anatomy*: 27.
- 85 Ibid.: 44.
- 86 Ibid.: 48–9. This is a process of literal, physical sedimentation. I make a similar point in *What a Body Can Do*: 55–6.
- 87 Matthews, *Anatomy*: 103.
- 88 Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity, 2013): 3, 84. It is actually from Sloterdijk that Preciado borrows the term “auto-guinea pig” (*Testo Junkie*: 348n12).
- 89 Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 4, 6, 7, 122. The English version unfortunately contains a number of confusing typographical errors. In this crucial reference to “the word ‘explicit,’” the German “Wort” is misprinted as “world”; cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern: Über Anthropotechnik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009): 17.
- 90 Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 11, 17.
- 91 Ibid.: 406, italics added. Here and on the next page, this phrase is misprinted as the creature or being “that cannot practise,” cf. “Das Lebewesen, das nicht nicht üben kann,” Sloterdijk, *Du mußt*: 642, italics added. The error is reprinted in *Practice*, eds. Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018): 167.
- 92 Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 21.
- 93 Ibid.: 4.
- 94 Ibid.: 26–7. Sloterdijk’s recourse to Nietzsche and his proposal to resurrect an ethics based on “the opposition of healthy and sick” (ibid.: 36) does not give us confidence, although he later holds up “cripples” (ibid.: 40; “Krüppel” in German) as a further model for anthropotechnics. For a non-athletic approach to the “shining” body in training, see “Acts without Organs,” this volume. For a genuine politics of disability, see Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 95 Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 135–6.
- 96 Ibid.: 79.
- 97 Ibid.: 112, 219–22, 223, 225, 113, 157, 131.
- 98 Ibid.: 166.

- 99 Ibid.: 216, 233, 237. I examine precisely these kinds of non-dominatory power relations in “This Extraordinary Power,” this volume. There is also a connection here to the grammatical “middle voice” of the verb (“having-oneself-operated-on,” Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 377; “Sich-Operieren-Lassen,” Sloterdijk, *Du mußt*: 596), which Tim Ingold discusses in my interview with him, this volume.
- 100 Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 444.
- 101 Ibid.: 155.
- 102 Sloterdijk’s *anthropotechnics* is essentially the counterpart to Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*: “the habitus theory in the form propounded by Bourdieu needs to be turned around to release its stimulating potential for a general theory of anthropotechnics” (ibid.: 186). For my related critique of Bourdieu, see *What a Body Can Do*: 50–6.
- 103 Ibid.: 156–7.
- 104 See John Matthews, *Training for Performance*, and the well-known work of K. Anders Ericsson on expertise.
- 105 I pursue this argument in “The Video Way of Thinking,” this volume.
- 106 My understanding of whiteness and racialization here is informed by settler colonial studies, for example, Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). For additional sources, see “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment,” this volume; and Spatz, “Molecular Identities.”
- 107 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 171–5.
- 108 Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 150, 152.
- 109 Ibid.: 150, 151. This term is also invoked by Sloterdijk, when he states that the landscape of anthropotechnics “does not have values, norms and imperatives at its centre, but rather elementary orientations in the ‘field’ of existence”: Subjects then “are ‘always already’ immersed in a field or milieu that provides them with basic neighbourhoods, moods, and tensions in certain directions.” Sloterdijk, *You Must*: 161.
- 110 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*: 91.
- 111 Ibid.: 110. Consider again how greatly this account differs from Gallagher’s discussion of “cultural factors” (Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*: 121). In cognitive science, race is an object within the field of embodiment. In Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, the topological relation between fields is reversed: Here “the body” is the surface of a sedimented embodiment underpinned by race as a principle. I have also attempted to expand upon phenomenology by integrating a richer account of the sedimented layers of embodiment, although not in terms of racialization, through the concept of “phenomenotechnique”—see “Colors Like Knives,” this volume.
- 112 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*: 121, 125, 126.
- 113 Ibid.: 133.
- 114 In *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, Reni Eddo-Lodge quotes her earlier blog post of the same name: “I can no longer have this conversation, because we’re often coming at it from completely different places. I can’t have a conversation with them about the details of a problem if they don’t even recognise that the problem exists” (London: Bloomsbury, 2018): xi. Recognizing this as an impasse of epistemic incommensurability allows us to imagine futures in which it could be surmounted, without minimizing the depth of the change required.

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- 115 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 2. Ta-Nehisi Coates begins his open letter to his son with a listing of antiblack murders in the United States—a very different “rhetoric of lists” than that we have seen above. *Between the World and Me* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2015): 9. Coates emphasizes the same point I want to highlight via Sharpe, namely, that “In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage” (103); “The plunder of black life was drilled into this country in its infancy and reinforced across its history, so that plunder has become an heirloom, an intelligence, a sentience, a default setting” (111). On blackness and antiblackness in British history, see Eddo Lodge, *Why*. Denise Ferreira da Silva, offering nothing less than a global theory of antiblackness, also begins with an image of death: “That moment... between the release of the trigger and the fall of another black body, of another brown body, and another... haunts this book.” Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): xi.
- 116 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*: 139; see Sharpe, *In the Wake*: 83–7.
- 117 For a work that draws on some of the same sources as Sharpe but has a greater focus on reclaiming embodiment and flesh against antiblackness, see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). For theories of blackness in performance, see Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, eds., *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). I describe a beautiful and playful theater piece also “galvanized by the intimate relationship between black people and death around the world”—Kaneza Schaal’s *Go Forth*—in “Choreography as Research,” this volume.
- 118 Sharpe, *In the Wake*: 21, 104.
- 119 *Ibid.*: 7.
- 120 “Unlike the solution-oriented, interest-based, or hybridity-dependent scholarship so fashionable today, Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability.” Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 58–9. Afro-pessimism can also be contrasted with Afrofuturism, popularized in the recent *Black Panther* film but developed in a much longer arc of cultural practice, which I mention in “The Electronic Heart,” this volume.
- 121 Sharpe, *In the Wake*: 17.
- 122 Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- 123 Sharpe, *In the Wake*: 100.
- 124 *Ibid.*: 13.
- 125 *Ibid.*: 22, 13, 19, 113.
- 126 Cadena and Blaser, *Many Worlds*.
- 127 Andrew Barry and Georgina Born, eds., *Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2013): 4, 6. For a wilder take on interdisciplinarity, see “A Thousand Tiny Viewpoints,” this volume.

- 128 For example, in Barry and Born, *Interdisciplinarity*, the chapter contributed by Born and Barry (247–72) considers relations between “art” and “science” fields, which in many cases do not have equivalent institutional power; while the chapter by Simon Schaffer (57–81) reveals a hidden hybridity of European disciplinarity in its incorporation of colonized techniques, such as a Tamil pedagogical system that seems to have inspired Bentham’s panopticon.
- 129 Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016): 16. I could equally have taken as my companion text here another book with the same main title that came out in the same year: Anna Carastathis, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016). Hancock expands intersectionality through a widening of historical and transnational contexts involving what she calls “intersectionality-like thinking”; Carastathis undertakes a close reading of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s major texts in order to defend and advance intersectionality theory.
- 130 Hancock, *Intersectionality*: 3, 4, 23.
- 131 These terms were coined by Audre Lorde and Elizabeth Martínez respectively (*ibid.*: 97).
- 132 The most significant recent critique of intersectionality on these grounds is Jasbir Puar, “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” *philoSOPHIA* 2.1 (2012): 49–66. My call for an interdisciplinary intersectionality has some commonalities with Puar’s proposal to augment intersectionality with a theory of assemblage. However, following Deleuze and Brian Massumi’s work on affect and intensity, Puar defines assemblage through the trope of excess: intersectionality is “that which retroactively forms the grid and positions on it,” while assemblage is “that which is prior to, beyond, or past the grid” (50, and see 63). I prefer interdisciplinarity to assemblage because it offers more critical grip: Grounded in social epistemology, interdisciplinarity refers us to the multiplicity of existing fields of knowledge rather than to a general notion of excess. For a defense of intersectionality that responds to Puar, see Carastathis, *Intersectionality*: 150–5.
- 133 *Ibid.*: 122, 34. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Leslie McCall affirm that “intersectionality is best framed as an analytic sensibility”: “what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term ‘intersectionality,’ nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations,” but rather “its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.” Cho et al., “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs* 38.4 (2013): 795.
- 134 I intentionally do not rely upon Foucault here, although the concept of power-knowledge is indebted to him. Hancock directly challenges the assumed theoretical primacy of Foucault, arguing that “intersectionality-like thinking about how power is relationally constituted predates and anticipates Michel Foucault’s well-known arguments about power” (*Intersectionality*: 164). I do not see much value in trying to determine whether intersectional or poststructuralist approaches came first, but we should acknowledge the Eurocentric gaps in the latter. At the same time, I see the trajectory traced here as a necessary extension to the genealogical project undertaken by Foucault, whom we are wrong to read as having demonstrated the subservience

- of knowledge to power. If Foucault mapped the social power dimensions of knowledge, then this essay could be said to undertake a complementary mapping of the epistemic dimensions of power.
- 135 This can be understood as an extension of Crenshaw's proposal to understand identities as "coalitions"—see Carastathis, *Intersectionality*: Chapter 5.
- 136 With this in mind, we should not be surprised to read, in a founding work on scholarly interdisciplinarity, the assertion that "Complications of individual identity are related to disciplinary complexity." Julie Thompson Klein, *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity, and Interdisciplinarity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996): 53. For my own next steps in theorizing identities as fields, see "Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment," this volume; and Spatz, "Molecular Identities."
- 137 These are "American studies, English or literary studies, ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, history, legal studies (particularly critical race theory and human rights advocacy), feminist philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology." Hancock, *Intersectionality*: 24, 25.
- 138 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 220.
- 139 Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 8.
- 140 *Ibid.*: 11. Ferguson finds in Kant's description of the "lower faculties" (as being concerned merely with truth rather than policy) a strategic "deception," "ruse," or "trick," by which criticality is smuggled into the university and of which we are the inheritors. This narrative almost invites us to see Kant as a forerunner of today's "undercommons." Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe and New York: Minor Compositions, 2013). The same work by Kant is a touchstone for Henk Borgdorff's defense of advanced research in the arts, which he half-jokingly calls the "lowest faculty." Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012): 26.
- 141 Ferguson, *The Reorder*: 186. This phrase comes from Jacques Rancière.
- 142 *Ibid.*: 15–16.
- 143 *Ibid.*: 32, 33.
- 144 *Ibid.*: 34–5, italics original. With Stuart Hall, Ferguson also "begs the American reader" in particular "to denaturalize the innocence and exultation that so often attends institutionalization," as this in itself can be a colonizing move (36).
- 145 For example, consider the relatively new appearance of digital, open-access, alt-academic syllabi such as Matt Chrisler, Jaskiran Dhillon, and Audra Simpson's "Standing Rock Syllabus Project," Public Seminar, www.publicseminar.org/2016/10/nodapl-syllabus-project (accessed 30 May 2019), and many others.
- 146 Ferguson, *The Reorder*: 97, 102, 106, 214.
- 147 *Ibid.*: 52, 53.
- 148 *Ibid.*: 130, 108.
- 149 *Ibid.*: 229.

1

CITY: FRAGMENTS

Sky Gold (1995)

At birth my feet were unusually formed, in a way that would have made it difficult to walk. The condition is called clubfoot. Treatment involves a series of plaster casts that gradually reshape the feet and ankles. After several months, the Achilles tendon is cut. Then, more casts. I don't remember any of this, but I have always had a strong need to go without shoes. As a teenager I used to walk barefoot in the halls at school, which was against the rules, and sometimes on the street as well. This fragment—the oldest collected in this volume—is from a semi-fictionalized account of an afternoon spent wandering in the city with a friend. I read it now through the lenses of disability and urban embodiment.¹

The day was young and school just out, when the two of them set off in search of treasure. It was a desire each had always possessed, in some form or another, but its fulfillment had ever been unreachable for lack of a partner in the quest. Each found that ideal mate in the other, and the companions sometimes considered themselves to be one traveler, on one path.

Gathering their belongings and packing away their shoes into their backpacks (for both knew that a journey done in shoes is no real journey at all), they lifted these satchels onto their shoulders and stepped out of the field and onto the sidewalk, their bare feet coming into contact with the

world in what they knew to be too rare a juxtaposition. It seemed to both of them that it was a terrible inconsistency: the way people fretted and fussed so damn much about the state of affairs in the world and what the whole place was coming to, and then proceeded to wear shoes. How could one hope to live in a beautiful country when one constantly went about “protecting” one’s feet from the warm Earth itself?

The cement seemed to them to greet their toes gleefully, as if it too seldom had the pleasure of entertaining such stark and natural guests. “What do you think?” it seemed to be asking them. “What do you think?”

1 Excerpt from “Sky Gold,” unpublished story (1995).

The Electronic Heart (2001)

“The Electronic Heart” was a project that took the form of practice research long before I encountered that term. The project’s theoretical part, excerpted first below, drew on Afrofuturism, cyberfeminism, and the precursors of accelerationism to explore the interpenetration of bodies and technologies. The distinction it proposed between “tech” and “tool” is the origin of my thinking on technique. The second excerpt is from *The Dark Ages*, a techno-dystopian solo performance written and performed as part of the same project. In this monologue we meet the Monitor, a human being embedded within a city-sized computer, his cyborg (dis)ability mirroring the precariously balanced, climate-engineered world outside. *The Dark Ages* was the last theater project in which I attempted to depict and amplify modern technological reality rather than develop alternatives to it.¹

Ribofunk mongrel mermaids

A fascistized mermaid is like two solids brought together, so that their surfaces touch without genuine interpenetration.² A genuinely cyborgized mermaid, on the other hand, is more like two liquids poured together: the result is complete integration. The two original liquids are still present, but their essences are dissolved. There is no resistance on either side—no violence—only surrender. This is the sense in which Donna Haraway advocates “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries.”³ The true cyborg is a *mongrel*, an integration of systems so smoothly blended that they can no longer be distinguished from each other. There is no hierarchy of

dominance among the different liquids that combine to form a mongrel. Thus, according to Kodwo Eshun, *funk* is the opposite of *cool*. “As an emotional anaesthetic, cool crowns the head king of a body organized into a poised corporation of one.”⁴ The cool body is what Deleuze and Guattari call the organism, the nemesis of the body without organs.⁵ Reynolds writes that the organism is “oriented around survival and production,” whereas the funky body, or the body-without-organs, “is composed out of all the potentials in the human nervous system for pleasure and sensation without purpose.”⁶ Of course, survival and reproduction are not the only use vectors that can be assigned to the organism.

Reynolds cites the musician Tricky as a prime example of mongrelization:

Racially, stylistically, sexually, Tricky is one slippery fellow. [His first album] is an unclassifiable hybrid of club and bedroom music, black and white, rap and melody, song and atmospherics, sampladelic textures and real-time instrumentation. It sucks you into the polysexual, transgeneric, mongrelized mindspace inside Tricky’s skull. How did he get into such a state? It’s the drugs/technology interface—boundary-blurring, connection-facilitating, but also fucking with stable identity, letting the id come out to play.⁷

A member of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit likens “the violence of the sounds in techno” to “being turned inside out, smeared, penetrated.”⁸ Eshun goes even further: Martina, another artist,

and Tricky are not so much singers as fluxes, perpetually transmitting abrupt bursts, human aerials resonating with the low-frequency oscillations of the city in tremulous sympathy. Tricky’s not interested in narrative as much as psychogeographical textures that blur the subject = object divide into a hazy continuum.⁹

It is impossible to exaggerate what is at stake here. The human being, the fundamental unit of moral responsibility and value, the subject, the ego, that which acts and experiences, is being replaced by a distributed, mongrelized pattern which cannot be essentially or ontologically distinguished from the rest of the universe. The human being becomes a *tech* and agency undergoes a phase transition to become a slippery, shifting fluid. This is what Paul Di Filippo was trying to imagine when he predicted that a “ribofunk” genre of science fiction would succeed that of cyberpunk.¹⁰ Ribofunk calls for an intensification of disassembly in two parallel ways.

First, the vision of technology shifts from “cyber,” which implies the digital technologies of the information age, to “ribo,” which suggests biology, the “dirty” science of the body. Second, the “punk” or agent is vaporized into “funk,” which is gaseous and distributed, an atmospheric element, a mood.

One hundred and fifty years before cyberpunk, the culture of Gothic Revivalism celebrated disassembly in a similar way. Victor Hugo’s 1831 description of the poorest part of Paris reads like a cyberpunk warzone without the technology:

In this city, the boundaries between races and species seemed to have been abolished, as in a pandemonium. Amongst this population, men, women, animals, age, sex, health, sickness, all seemed communal, everything fitted together, was merged, mingled and superimposed, everyone was part of everything.... It was like some new world, unknown, unprecedented, shapeless, reptilian, teeming, fantastic.¹¹

Hugo goes further than many of the writers discussed here, because he does not stop his disassembly at the level of the human. By bringing animals, sex, and sickness into the mix, Hugo crosses the boundary that separates human from object. His “darkside” is not a place of mongrelized human beings, but rather a “shapeless” and “fantastic” swarm of animal, vegetable, and mineral.

Reynolds likens audio sampling to the creation of Frankenstein’s monster, and writes that certain music “feels like it’s designed for the asymmetrical dancing of creatures with an odd number of limbs.” An internet post imagines the DJ transformed by the art of spinning:

I figure in the future that the DJs will have extremely developed fingertips, because they’re super-sensitive, like lily pads, like frogs. Their heads will be fused to their necks, and I think in about twenty years time their legs may well have withered away, ‘cause they never dance.¹²

The artist Stelarc, who believes that the structure of the human body is obsolete, seems to go back and forth between straight functionalism and a more “funktionalist” approach. In some projects he aims to alter the body according to obvious guidelines: “Now, do we accept the evolutionary status quo? Do we accept the arbitrary design of the body? Or do we evaluate the design of the body, and come up with a strategy of reconstructing,

redesigning, and rewiring the body?”¹³ Another partly functionalist example of body tech is Rammellzee’s “Gasholeer,” which is

a 148-pound gadgetry-encrusted exoskeleton inspired by an android he painted on a subway train in 1981. Four years in the making, Rammellzee’s exuberantly low-tech costume bristles with rocket launchers, nozzles that gush goutts of flame, and an all-important sound system.¹⁴

The Gasholeer is functionalist in that it does not have any clear purpose beyond its own complex structure. However, like the art projects of Stelarc, the Gasholeer is donned for a time and then removed. The artist and the work of art together still form a “fascitized mermaid.” With nanotechnology, we may one day be able to make ourselves even more wildstyle bodies: abstract architectural projects that could include steel and stucco, moving parts, mirrors, video screens, holograms, patterns, and optical illusions. But the “designer” body is still designed by *someone*.

The Monitor

(Yellow light through a vent. Man plugged into machine. Spasms.)

Climate control problem hex 3BB. Solution: Alter locking mechanisms at Panama to drop ocean level by three point oh nine centimeters. Submerge twelve centimeters Pacific Northwest. Alter flow of gulfstream according to code following: Push pop one, location hex 4A3BEA. Push pop two, location hex 5BA3FF. Push pop three, location hex C7CCA2. Hello Africa. This is California. Prepare launch F71B2. Now transferring data.

I always take the mask off when they’re transferring data. I don’t know if you’re supposed to do that. The machine keeps playing you movies to keep you entertained. You can have anything you want I think: Westerns, mysteries, action, porn. But I always take the mask off anyway. It’s good to breathe a little even if this isn’t really air. I don’t know what the other monitors do.

It’s about half and half, I guess. In a ten-hour shift you get about five hours down time while the machines are transferring data. That’s a lot of movies to watch! The rest of the time you have to be very alert. It’s important, what the monitors do. We’ve seen what happens when a monitor drops a command. Troublespots can go haywire and lead to widespread massive catastrophe.

Sections of continents submerged as oceans rise. Earthquakes and such. The whole thing is in a very delicate balance and with current population levels we can't afford the risk. I'm proud to be a part of it, really. It requires concentration. Not everyone can do this job, especially these days with the big ten in competition over who is going to run the major programs. In my opinion all the smaller systems get in the way. And things are hanging in the balance right now, especially with the southern Atlantic troublespot.

My system, California system, we're the best. When things go wrong the other systems come to us to have our machine process the information. We can usually solve the event and run the right correctives or whatever's necessary. We're very proud of our frame here. I think of her as my mother, actually, because she speaks to me in a female voice and she oversaw my incubation process. She's pretty much the closest thing to a mother that I'm going to get! Heh. In any case we're all better off with frames like California system running the show. After all, it's people who fucked up the whole thing in the first place. That's the reason why things are the way they are now. At least now somebody's always watching. Of course sometimes the systems crash. No system is perfect. Sometimes even whole cities go down. But there's always pretty much always another system ready to take over and reboot the city or whatever. And I don't think California system could ever crash. It's too well made.

I think there might be another war soon. There are places outside the systems. I've heard about them. But I wouldn't want to go there, it's too dangerous. I've heard stories. People do terrible, terrible things to each other. Human experiments. Slavery. Besides, what if one of your implants crashes in a place like that? They don't have surgery stations out there. If one of your brain systems crashes, you're dead. That's it. And you can't be restarted because there's no backup tape. Frankly, I think those places would be lucky if they got taken over by a big system like California. Then at least they'd be protected.

I was contacted by one of those groups about two years ago. A terrorist group, outside the systems. They started sending me messages on the personal channel while the machines were transferring data. They asked me if I'm satisfied with my life. What kind of question is that? So I reported them to the machine, and that was that. They were trying to sabotage California system. Do you know what would happen if they succeeded? I would die. They would die. Probably everyone on the planet would die. There's no way to survive without the systems anymore. It's such bullshit, what they say. "Down with the systems! Return to the earth! Trust in nature!" Nature is dead, okay? The systems are all we've got.

And I am satisfied with my life. I mean, I get nostalgic sometimes when I look back at old movies and stuff. Like Cary Grant movies. I love old Cary Grant movies. But that stuff is dead. It's over and done with, like ancient Greece. And you can whine about it and throw a temper tantrum, but you're not gonna bring it back. Know what I do when I get too upset about that stuff? I listen to old music. I love that stuff. Rock and folk. I love James Taylor. You can listen to anything you want on the machine. And anyway next week I'm getting a fix-up and they're going to fix these spasms. It's the oxygen processor in my shoulder, crashed about a month ago and now I have these muscle spasms and it messes up my voice. But she'll fix it, and then everything will be all right. At least there's enough food in California system right now. Things could be a lot worse. Hold on a minute.

Surveillance report: Unknown activity in Kyoto system. Scout at sector 13A. Video and sonar report streaming in parallel. Please identify. Please identify. This is California system, please identify. Request research squadron. Start time oh one hundred point nine nine two. Suggest outline of backup surveillance project. Prepare for tactical maneuvers in area 13A. Now transferring data.

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- 1 Excerpts from "The Electronic Heart," undergraduate thesis, Wesleyan University (2001). *The Dark Ages* (Wesleyan University, 2001) was a solo performance composed of monologues that alternated between the story of a young man named Monty and a series of increasingly wild visions of the future: the Kid (2005), the Futurist (2020), the Monitor (2050), and the General (2101). This is a slightly revised version of the Monitor from 2003. The full thesis is available online: urbanresearchtheater.com/archive/urt07/old/junkriver/anagnorisis/eh.pdf
 - 2 Anja Klöck, "Of Cyborg Technologies and Fascitized Mermaids: Gianina Censi's 'Aerodanze' in 1930s Italy," *Theatre Journal* 51.4 (1999): 395–415.
 - 3 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991): 150.
 - 4 Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun* (London: Quartet Books, 1998): 142.
 - 5 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 158.
 - 6 Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998): 246.
 - 7 *Ibid.*: 330.
 - 8 Simon Reynolds, "Renegade Academia: CCRU": members.aol.com/blissout/ccru.htm (accessed 2001).
 - 9 Eshun, *More Brilliant*: 59.

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- 10 Paul Di Filippo, “Ribofunk: The Manifesto” (1998): www.streettech.com/bcp/BCPgraf/Manifestos/Ribofunk.html
- 11 Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1978 [1831]): 100–101.
- 12 Chris Flor Ulrich Gutmair, “futurhythmachine—Kodwo Eshun on DJs and Dancers in the Primusical Soup,” Crash Media (1998): www.yourserver.co.uk/crashmedia/utn/8.htm
- 13 Stelarc quoted in Tilman Baumgärtel, “Art on the Internet” in *Read Me! Read Me! Read Me!: ASCII Culture and the Revenge of Knowledge*, ed. Josephine Bosma (New York: Autonomedia, 1999): 234.
- 14 Mark Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1996): 183–5; and see Rammellzee, “Iconic Treatise on Gothic Futurism” (1979): www.afrofuturism.net/Text/Manifestos/Rammellzee01.html

Vermilion’s Text (2001–2003)

These fragments appeared in a blog that I kept while living in New York City just after the turn of the millennium. Inspired by Mimi Thi Nguyen’s blog *Slander*, it mixed anecdotes from my life at the time with critical theory and popular culture, seeking meaning and connection through what was then still a relatively new form. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Twin Towers, the deaths of my maternal grandparents, and the struggle to find employment, my encounter with the city careened between the practical and the mythographic. The writing here is of its time, both culturally and in my own development, but I have selected a few excerpts that still resonate. The blog ended when I moved to Poland in 2003.¹

18 December 2001

Sometimes I imagine jumping out of a window or in front of a train, or putting my hand on the tracks when a train comes so that the metal wheels roll over my flesh, breaking muscle and tendon and ruining my most vital organ of outreach to the world. It’s not that I want these things to happen. It’s not about punishment. It’s just that I am fascinated by the idea of an irrevocable decision, an act that cannot be undone, and the schizophrenic difference between the whimsical, curious self who steps out of the window and the terrified, betrayed self who realizes a split second later what irreparable damage has been done. Is this what masochism is?

Tonight I wore blue sunglasses on Canal Street and I realized that the future of *Blade Runner* is already here. You can already buy illegal animals from old men in the backs of tiny shops. The neon signs are already up, advertising life-changing trips to virtual moons. Everyone is already concerned only with survival. Money is already the only Real. Meanwhile, high above, men in business suits already determine the fate of humanity while sipping imported champagne and getting blowjobs from synthetic whores. And these men, they already know our dreams, because they have manufactured our minds. Their minds are manufactured too, only they don't know it. Their dreams are the same as ours, from the same stock footage. The only difference is the color scheme. They dwell resplendent in gold, while we suffer through an eternity of electric blues. I could see that as soon as I put on the glasses. I've taken them off now, but the vision won't go away. I'm surrounded by metal, glass, and plastic. It is already impossible to tell the replicants from the replicators. Even the pedestrians are becoming-synthetic. There is nothing Real in sight.

21 December 2001

The Temporary Autonomous Zone² is a party against the darkness, a New Year's Eve bash in someone's loft while the world ends, a festival in the woods while the cities burn, a carnival at the outskirts of town while life disintegrates, a rave in a warehouse while capitalism turns to fascism, a few queer punks in Times Square trying to de-capitalize Christmas, a radical anarchist collective formed while the government bombs foreign lands, a joke told in a concentration camp, masturbation while the world fucks itself. All of these are only moments, they fade, they disappear, they change nothing, they are in vain. At the same time, these are the threads that hold us together, the quickly-dying embers that warm us in the night, the bits and pieces that keep us going, the stuff that dreams are made on.

The Village Voice informed me today that there are 103 operational nuclear power plants in the United States, and if the planes of 9/11 had been crashed into one of them instead, then millions would be dead and vast stretches of land would be uninhabitable and everyone I know would be dying of cancer. Meanwhile, my grandmother and grandfather, who remember the days before cars and television, are in the other room dying, perhaps from cancer, perhaps just from old age. But still I sit here and I write this, still I care if people read it, still I rejoice that I can finally do

a headstand, and I talk about math and slang with B., and I talk about queerness and economics with C., and all of this seems to have meaning. Sometimes it feels as though every moment of pleasure is a Temporary Autonomous Zone, a little spasm of life in the wilderness, a little flicker of something in the nothing.

3 December 2002

Working on the street all day you understand in a new way how cold it is out there. What can I say, except thank fucking god I am not homeless. The cold is brutal, and people kick you out of anywhere warm unless you're buying something. How can it be that we have built a civilization in which some people just don't get to come inside?

Today me and J. went up to the top of the Empire State Building and looked out across New York City. The view up towards midtown was especially surreal: All those buildings with their tiny square lit windows made it look strangely flat, like a computer-generated image. It was even colder up there. When we finally left I felt as though I were plunging down into a new city, entering it in a new way: from above. We live in a city. Sometimes it's hard to understand what that means.

2 May 2003

What I find strange about this city is how no one is watching. I am on the downtown 4 train and we stop at 42nd Street. If I get out and transfer to the 6 to go down to 14th, no one will notice that I have wasted time. No one will tell me it was a stupid thing to do. There is no one watching the movie to ask: "Why did he do that?"

Not to say anonymous. Not to say lonely. Because yesterday I gave a man \$2 to get back to Queens, and today I found a book on the subway subtitled *Alternative Strategies for Working Artists*, and after that I gave away my lighter to a man who couldn't light his cigarette. And this is also part of New York.

I am an usher. I ush. The wealthy and upper-middle of New York City pass through me as they file on into the gaudy and brilliant world of Cirque du Soleil. They leave behind mostly repeated items, items bought that night and discarded after a couple of hours: popcorn, sodas, licorice, ice cream, and \$12 program booklets. But sweeping up after them, if you keep your eyes peeled, sometimes you find other things.

Today I found a round pressed talisman encircled with writing in a script I do not recognize. On the other side, in English, it reads: COMPASSION—JOY—EQUANIMITY—LOVE. It is a totem from a foreign land, a religious ornament, a secret of some kind. It is a list of instructions.

I also found a cheap ring with eight plastic rubies. I will be rich if they turn out to be real. I also found part of a necklace, three cubic beads, and a flattened torus of wood.

I place the items at my bedside, next to the cut-up protest photos I found at a feminist bookstore. I will carry them in my bag where the lighter used to be. I got the lighter from M. I've had the bag since high school. I stole the pens from an office where I worked. I lost my queer pin on the bus. I found a quarter. I dropped a penny. I got tipped a dollar. I gave it away.

16 August 2003

Blackout.

Thursday 4:11 pm to Friday 2:40 pm.

It's surprising which aspects of the city are immediately dependent on electricity and which are not. The lights go out, but this doesn't matter until the sun goes down. The A/C stops working, but things are far hotter than when you simply don't have an A/C or it breaks, because fans don't work either and there's nothing cold to drink. There is a period of running down, when cars and cell phones and laptops still work that were "filled up" before power was lost. And of course the city changes. Our technology isolates us so much from each other and from natural forces that it takes a very rare event, like a blizzard or a blackout, to bring neighbors together in a common experience.

I remember being surprised at first that all the buildings were still here. Just the realization that if all human activity ceased suddenly, if all biological and technological electrical impulses stopped, the buildings would still be around for a long time without us.

1 Excerpts from *Vermilion's Text* (2001–2003). The complete blog is still available, underneath more recent layers of design, at urbanresearchtheater.com/archive/urt07/old/junkriver/anagnorisis/v/varc.html

2 Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

Another City (2009)

After living in Poland for two years, I returned to the United States and began to lead urban expeditions in New York City. Inspired by the expeditions of the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices and following my own “Urban Animal” manifesto (2004), they were called “Another City” (2007), “Another City: Heart of Winter” (2008), and “Another City: Joyful Days” (2008). Each lasted a few days and combined studio-based training with time spent outdoors, including in the North Woods of Central Park, where we would sometimes gather just before dawn. The following excerpts are from an interview with Lane Pianta, a theater-maker who participated in one of these sessions and hosted another in Washington, DC.¹

Describe the Another City project.

“Another City” is the name of a particular kind of work session. I originally envisioned a session of five days, or even seven days, like an Outward Bound program for urban singing. The participants would spend all day with me from dawn until dusk, sunrise to sunset, and we would spend some of that time in the studio and some of it out in various parts of the city. In this way, the participants could experience a change in their relationship to the city. A kind of ecological change. Because they would be spending all their time during the day working on embodied contact, on singing, on listening to the human voice, on group perceptivity, and on the kind of searching-for-meaning that I’ve been describing. And we would live this process for about a week. It’s a kind of para-theater.

I also related this idea to vegetable co-ops that bring organic food into the city, and to rooftop gardening, and to urban bicycling projects—and also to martial arts studios, yoga studios, and dance studios. All of these are places where people are asking: What kind of ecologies—food ecologies or body ecologies—or in my case perhaps ecologies of song—what kind of *human ecologies* can we have in the city? In a city which currently is so dominated by cars, by recorded music and video screens, printed imagery, and buildings. What kind of place can we find for these other things, which are also part of human experience—such as people singing together in a group, people walking, people not being inside buildings all the time... I envisioned that the presence of our small group, in the Another City

workshop, could somehow alter urban space—even just slightly—by having a different relationship to it. So we are looking for a different way to *be* in the city. Like a rooftop garden, but through embodied action rather than actual landscaping.

In the literature for Another City, it says: “to discover another city, another self.”

Yes. To discover—or rediscover—the city as it is ecologically. Because we don’t live in that perception of the city. We live inside a lot of illusions and falsehoods about the city. By which I only mean that the city as it stands is completely unsustainable—in terms of the amount of garbage that it exports, for example. And we don’t navigate the city, on a daily basis, in a way that acknowledges that profound unsustainability. We don’t think about the city as a wild, irresponsible, kind of adolescent escapade. Just think: To build these ridiculously unsustainable cities, to produce thousands of tons of plastic, and just throw it out and put it in a big hole. It’s this wild party that we’re throwing, and we sort of know it is going to collapse and become impossible to maintain. But we can’t admit it to ourselves. We don’t act like: “This is so wild, oh my god! I have indoor plumbing on the fourth floor! That’s certainly not going to last, so I’d better enjoy it for now!” We act as if the city is sustainable, and as if the whole system that built it is sustainable.

So the “other city,” for me, is the city where you stop and say: Wait! From the perspective of the ecology of the planet, which is the ecosystem in which the human organism evolved—what is this thing that we’re in? Who built this? Why did they build it like that? What is this material? Will this building still be here in 200 years? Will it be functional? Or will it be totally derelict, and everyone is gone? Or will it have been knocked down to make a new building, in which case where did all the trash go? What could it mean to look from the place of the organism—to be in the city the way a dog or a cat, or a rat or a roach, is in the city. What is all this stuff? What is this Coke can? What is this piece of metal? What does it smell like? Who made it and where is it going?

1 Excerpts from Lane Pianta, “Changing the Space: An Interview with Ben Spatz of Urban Research Theater,” *New York Theater Review* 5 (2009): 45–64. The “Urban Animal Manifesto” (2004), which I wrote just after founding Urban Research Theater, is available online: urbanresearchtheater.com/2004/10/20/urbananimal/

EMBODIMENT AS FIRST AFFORDANCE (2017)

This essay proposes another way of defining embodiment: as first affordance. What this means is that when we sing, when we dance, when we train, when we practice, what we are doing is returning to grapple again and again with the primary site of living and being. The essay starts by asking why theorists of practice have so often skipped over the body when thinking about craft and skill. It ends by arguing that embodiment is an ethically and politically necessary concept in the current historical moment because of the pressing need to redraw distinctions between ecology and technology. Through the image of the city, I suggest that embodiment as a concept may no longer be relevant if and when human society becomes ecologically sustainable. There is then an essential and urgent relationship between the climate crisis and the idea of embodiment.¹

What is embodiment?

In a diverse range of recent research activities, I have worked to develop productive distinctions between embodied *knowledge*, embodied *practice*, embodied *technique*, and embodied *research*; but I have settled for a brief gloss of the crucial descriptor “embodied.”² In this essay I offer a critical and philosophical approach to embodiment, explaining why we continue to need this concept and what I believe it can still do for us.

Thomas Csordas wrote more than twenty-five years ago that embodiment can be “a paradigm for anthropology”: that is, a “consistent methodological perspective that encourages reanalyses of existing data and suggests new questions for empirical research.”³ Summarizing the work of Marcel Mauss, Csordas indicates the centrality of embodiment as a zone of mediation or junction between various dichotomies and material distinctions:

Mauss anticipated how a paradigm of embodiment might mediate fundamental dualities (mind-body, sign-significance, existence-being) in his statement that the body is simultaneously both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out, and the original tool with which that work is achieved. It is at once an object of technique, a technical means, and the subjective origin of technique.⁴

Arguably, we are still some distance from the implementation of embodiment as a paradigm within performance studies, performance philosophy, and artistic research. I suspect this is because our understanding of embodiment—which like that of Csordas is most often based on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology—fails to adequately develop themes of difference, materiality, epistemology, and practice, tending instead toward a more general or unitary understanding of embodiment. In this essay, I look again at embodiment with an eye toward these themes and attempt to develop further the kind of paradigm toward which Csordas gestures. My aim is to create spaces of possibility for *experimental* approaches to anthropology and performance (as) philosophy.

My argument begins from a discussion of philosophical realism and the turn toward close analysis of skilled material practices that characterizes many recent critical interventions. I examine the roots of this turn and suggest that skilled practice is a privileged site for the enactment and testing of realist ontologies. However, I question the extent to which realist thinkers have emphasized practices in which materials outside the body are central over those in which embodiment itself is the primary medium of practice.⁵ Thinkers of realist ontology, I argue, have neglected embodiment as the primary site of engagement with the fine-grained detail of the world. In fact, realist ontologies developed through reference to technological and “machinic” worldly engagements not only apply equally well to embodied practices, but actually find their original and primary manifestation there. The body itself is the first affordance and the site at which questions of realism and objectivity are first encountered and resolved in practice. I illustrate this point by considering how three modes of material engagement—*tinkering*, *tuning*, and *tracking*—manifest in embodied

practices ranging from dance and sport to those of everyday life. From quotidian enculturation to virtuosic performance, skillful embodied practice is neither more nor less than a precise and intimate engagement with the problematic of realism in its most fundamental form. I therefore propose a return to embodiment for realist thought: one that passes through the phenomenological modes of *perception* and *sensation* to the epistemic mode of *technique*. I conclude by articulating the continuing political importance of embodiment as first affordance and its crucial place as a “fragile junction” between ecology and technology.

Artisanal ontologies

Two types of encounter with the emergent granularity of the material world have been seen in recent critical and philosophical writing as privileged sites for the investigation of ontological realism: artisan craft and scientific experiment. Examples of the former include Tim Ingold’s poetic descriptions of the “synergy of practitioner, tool and material” and Richard Sennett’s paean to craftwork as a “dialogue with materials.”⁶ The latter are found throughout sociological studies of science such as those undertaken by Andrew Pickering and Karin Knorr Cetina.⁷ Both artisanal crafts and scientific experimentation involve a subtle and complex interplay between skilled handicraft and the emergent properties of materials. While craftwork aims to produce well-made objects of a known type or style, the objects produced and encountered by scientific research are by definition unknown at the start of the experimental process. What unites the two domains is the dynamic process of material engagement through which the fine-grained texture of reality emerges. This kind of continuous grappling or negotiation with ever-unfolding layers of detail is equally far from pure mentality or cognition as it is from the play of immaterial signs. In skilled practice, one knows that something is real in the sense of being *out there* (not just imaginary) through the sensation of differential resistance or push-back and also because, rather than shrinking as it becomes known, the area of focus rapidly expands as deeper engagement reveals ever-greater levels of detail.⁸

According to such analyses, the world “talks back”⁹ to us most articulately not when we step away from it to contemplate its totality but when we dive into it to accomplish a specific material task: to pick up a batch of seeds we have dropped on the floor; to construct a tool out of wood or metal; to harness the power of a protein or a proton. The stubborn independence of the individual bits and pieces in such material

interactions compels us to recognize a reality that exists beyond our own sensations, perceptions, and thoughts. This kind of realism has no truck with the long-standing mind/body “problem” that still seems to bother philosophers of cognition.¹⁰ That apparent problem only arises if one starts with a disembodied, language-based mind and then asks how to bridge the gap between this mind and reality. If one begins instead from practices as concrete doings, that disembodied mind never appears. The care with which an artisan craftworker or scientist grapples with their chosen material substrate thus incarnates a particular approach to ontology. Instead of asking whether reality exists, the artisan takes the principle of existence for granted and works with the productive problems and questions that arise from its complexity, stubbornness, and only-ever *relative* reliability. Theorists of skilled practice articulate realism in terms of dynamic relations rather than static beings: as a “coupling of perception and action”; a “dialectic between resistance and accommodation”; or an “intimate, fluid join between problem solving and problem finding.”¹¹ Such approaches are quite different from those armchair philosophies that attempt to theorize the real in general, often by rendering invisible their debt to the emergent and relational ontologies of practice.

Despite these advantages, the cited works share a common assumption that is rarely questioned. All of the dynamic interplays just mentioned are incarnated in practices that rely upon a clear physical distinction between human agent and nonhuman material substrate. By taking scientists, inventors, and artisan craftworkers as their examples, these thinkers continually reinscribe a basic division between practitioner and materials. A significant territory of ontological experimentation is in this way bypassed: that of embodiment itself as the primary site of any encounter with reality. To be sure, the actual material practices investigated by the cited authors vary greatly, from biochemists and particle physicists to carpenters, glass-blowers, and goldsmiths. But all of these cases present a clear image of human beings working with materials outside their bodies. Time and again, the careful action of the artisan or scientist is figured in relation to an external material: wood, metal, stone, glass, water, protein, quark, etc. Laurent Thévenot even goes so far as to define realism as “the relation between human agency and material environment.”¹² I read this as a welcome ontological reframing of James Gibson’s notion of “affordances,” those possibilities that a given physical environment “offers,” “provides,” or “furnishes” to an “animal” that lives within it.¹³ But this ontological step is incomplete if it remains locked within a dualist image that juxtaposes an agent or animal with its environment. Rarely has the kind of analysis

outlined above been applied to the first and most essential material factor in human *being*: embodiment itself. Yet before wood, glass, metal, or any other external material substrate, embodiment itself is the first affordance.

The negotiated relationship between organism and environment is an extension of a relationship that develops internally within an organism and which may later be articulated in terms of mind and body, will and habit, or knowledge and practice. Why then have recent turns toward philosophical realism not engaged more thoroughly with embodiment as first affordance? Why do thinkers like Thévenot render the body invisible with phrases like “human agency and material environment,” which skip over the essential channel of *human materiality* through which agency and environment interact? I suspect that the invisibility of the body in passages like this one reveals an unconscious prejudice against—or perhaps more simply a lack of understanding about—the nature of skilled embodied practices. This lack is apparent even in philosophical approaches that seek to foreground embodiment, such as phenomenology. While the thinkers cited above emphasize the complexity and specificity of material processes, phenomenology has tended to treat the body as functionally uniform in its materiality. Even when thinkers attempt to ground mind and cognition in materiality by calling them “embodied,” their account of embodiment as a largely “postural and static” phenomenon is “emaciated” in comparison with the actual complexity of any “animate organism.”¹⁴ Sara Ahmed has done important work to challenge the assumed uniformity of the embodied mind by pointing to ways in which the “repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken,” gradually leads to the development of “a specific ‘take’ on the world, a set of views and viewing points, as well as a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours.”¹⁵ Ahmed’s evocation of these historical processes of differential sedimentation, and how they congeal in bodily compartment, suggests the need to examine embodiment as a complex, multidimensional space. “It is important that we think not only about *what* is repeated,” she writes, “but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions.”¹⁶ But Ahmed only gestures toward the possibility of a fine-grained queer and critical-race-oriented analysis of embodiment; she does not provide readings of concrete practices to rival those mentioned above.

In the wake of phenomenology’s “anthropocentric antirealism,”¹⁷ philosophers still tend to think of the body as more unitary or transparent than the kinds of external materials with which artisans and scientists grapple. While lip service may be paid to the diversity of bodily experience along various lines, there is nothing comparable to the appreciation of fractal

disciplinarity that one finds in the sociology of science or the anthropology of skilled practice, where depth of practice is valorized because of how it reveals the emergent complexity of the real. The body, philosophers seem to think, is a poor starting place from which to grasp the emergent diversity and multivocality of the material world. Although some diversity in embodiment may be recognized, the body affords nothing comparable to the vast territories of biology and physics, or the many artisan crafts, that attract philosophers of skilled practice. The apparent commonality of embodiment, when contrasted with the kaleidoscopic variety afforded by the subatomic bestiary or the liquid flows of craftwork, tempts thinkers of realism to skip over the body as an essential site for understanding the real. But this gets embodiment wrong. In fact, our relationships with our bodies—more accurately, with ourselves as bodies—are characterized by exactly the same kind of fine-grained engagement and dynamic interplay with materiality as artisanal and technoscientific practices. Just as every chunk of wood or metal has both relative reliability as an example of that substrate and also a unique individual structure of resistance and density with which the artisan or scientist must work, so too does each human body. There is a kaleidoscopic unfolding of embodiment; it merely remains to be theorized.

I take embodiment to be the zone of ontological engagement in which the dynamic interplays mentioned above—between perception and action, resistance and accommodation, and problem-solving and problem-finding—occur in the absence of any clear physical distinction between agent and substrate. Examples like carpentry illustrate these interplays with great clarity, but in doing so they risk a problematic reification in which the two sides of each equation are easily distinguished: on one side, a human agent; on the other, a material substrate. In fact, both sides of each equation also exist in fluid and indiscernible mixture within human embodiment itself. We see this clearly in ritual and theatrical performances, a topic studied in depth by anthropology and performance studies but which rarely commands the attention of philosophers. Philosophers tend to think of embodied performance as merely cultural, a representational layer of activity enacted by an essentially uniform substrate of bodies, and therefore irrelevant to ontological questions about the real. If that were true, then it could make sense to jump directly from consciousness, perception, and experience, on the one hand, to external worlds of materiality, objects, and ecologies, on the other. On the contrary, embodiment itself is as much a hard-won negotiation with material possibility—and therefore a privileged site for the concrete manifestation of realist ontologies—as any engagement with wood, glass, or proteins. Moreover, as Ahmed shows,

the diversity and complexity of embodiment applies not only to practices framed as ritual or performance but also to those of everyday life. I will go further and claim that the affordance of embodiment is logically prior to that of any external physical environment, not because embodiment is synonymous with perception—it is not—but because it is the first site at which the dialog between agency and materiality takes place. In the next section I unpack this claim through a series of illustrative examples. In the final section I argue that the concept of embodiment, as first affordance, still has important ethical and political work to do.

Tinkering, tuning, tracking

To demonstrate the extent to which both everyday and virtuosic embodied practices incarnate the ontological realism implied by skilled practice, I will borrow three terms from three major theorists of artisanal ontology. As early as 1979, Karin Knorr Cetina described scientific laboratory work as a kind of “tinkering.” Science is not primarily about ideas, she explained, but about practices. Its goal is not the production of propositional truths or facts but successful interaction with material reality. Hence “the mechanisms ruling the progress of research are more adequately described as successful ‘tinkering’ rather than as hypothesis testing or cumulative verification.”¹⁸ Some years later, Andrew Pickering proposed a shift from “tinkering” to “tuning.” Whereas the former “immediately invokes the otherness” of the materials encountered by the scientist, the latter suggests a kind of mutual resonance between them.¹⁹ For Pickering, the scientist does not so much *tinker* with materials as *tune* them, or perhaps *attune* to them—more like a musician than a mechanic. Between these two publications, Manuel DeLanda wrote his extraordinary history of war from the perspective of its varied technologies, which he described as arising from the expert “tracking” of material singularities.²⁰ To *track* the melting or combustion point required in the production of a particular weapon, DeLanda writes, involves a “sensual interplay with metals” in which the artisan/inventor works with care to “follow the accidents and local vagaries of a given piece of material.”²¹ In each of the cases studied by these authors, the sensitive relationship between practitioner and material suggests a revised notion of realism in which the reality of the world becomes manifest through the painstaking labor of craft and experimentation. The terms *tinkering*, *tuning*, and *tracking* suggest three different qualities of engagement with materiality.²² In this section I apply them each, in turn, to practices that are specifically *embodied*—in the sense defined above—rather than

technological; that is, situations in which tinkering, tuning, and tracking take place not between a human agent and a material substrate but within human embodiment itself.

Tinkering suggests a process of combining and recombining bits and pieces almost at random in order to see what works. The smaller elements in a tinkering practice are individually functional; the pertinent question is in what way they can best be combined. We encounter this kind of approach often when structuring embodied practice in time and space, as in both pedagogy and choreography. How should participants be arranged in space—in a line or in a circle? What should be the sequence of events? What happens if this activity comes after that one? What if an activity drawn from another context is inserted here? How do the different elements interact? What occurs when two elements are switched around in space or in time? What if one section is removed? As we tinker, we encounter expected results. *Oh, that's interesting. Now let's try something else...* A structure of practice is articulated and enacted, adjustments are made, the whole thing is repeated, one part is dismantled, the order is reversed, chunks are taken apart and reassembled in a different way. The teacher, choreographer, theater director, or ritual leader tinkers with the structure of repeated doings. The outcomes of such tinkering acts are rarely measurable in quantitative terms. Because the smaller elements are taken for granted rather than being broken down or opened up, tinkering is primarily a matter of composition. For this reason too, it is often not clear when tinkering whether the situation is getting better or worse. And even when there is clear improvement, one may wonder if the situation could be made better still. Tinkering may continue indefinitely.

Acts of tinkering are no less prevalent in everyday life than in professional and vocational contexts. Think of the kinds of adjustments we make to our own persons as we sit in an empty office just prior to an important interview: *Sit up straighter. No, that's too straight, I will seem tense. Try to relax—don't slouch—I'll blink my eyes to wake up. What should I be doing when they come in? What kind of person do I want to appear to be? Close my legs—no, that looks awkward—maybe I should try standing up?* Many of the same instructions are given to children as we teach them the body techniques that are considered socially acceptable for their age, gender, or race. There is an aspect of randomness in tinkering—we might also say *futz*ing or *fidd*ling—which is nevertheless constrained by our own learned skills and habits. We are not quite sure what we are aiming at or which standards apply, so we try out different possibilities within a particular range of behavior, looking for one that feels right. In doing so, we receive continual somatic and

perceptual feedback. Rather than having total control over our embodied presence, we find ourselves negotiating with embodiment: coaxing or guiding ourselves in particular directions, holding intrapersonal conversations, and sometimes producing the desired effects through indirect means. For the professional actor or dancer, embodiment is the central material tool or instrument of craft. But even for untrained performers in everyday life, embodiment is the site of an encounter with material reality that exceeds consciousness and will. The tinkered body reacts, sometimes in unexpected ways, and this feeds back into the tinkering process.²³ The same phenomena that arise when interacting with external substances characterize skilled and mundane interaction with the materiality of embodiment.

If those are examples of *tracking*, then *tuning* suggests a qualitatively different, but no less materially grained, mode of engagement with embodiment. The obvious example is the literal one: vocal tuning. Voices tune, both to themselves across time (melody) and to each other across space (harmony). Tuning offers more immediate positive and negative feedback than tinkering. The harmonic relationship of tuned voices produces an alignment that is more mathematically precise and more sensually resonant. One feels it viscerally when voices slide in and out of tune. The out-of-tune voice is perceptually jarring, as is a dancer who does not keep up with unison steps, or a guest who speaks too loudly at the dinner table. These examples of disattunement suggest that tuning is more narrowly aimed than tinkering: one can be “out of tune” but not “out of tinker” because tinkering has no clear state of success. Other uses of the breath, such as breathing slowly and deeply in order to calm oneself down, might also be understood as varieties of tuning. (A good voice teacher tunes a student’s breathing patterns; a bad voice teacher tinkers with them, perhaps making the situation worse.) In psychotherapy, attunement refers to the resonant alignment of a therapist’s body, voice, and affect in relation to a client or patient. In performance studies, the science of mirror neurons has been widely cited as evidence that interpersonal attunement can take place even when one of the parties is apparently passive.²⁴ In popular science reporting, brain scans of meditating monks and virtuosic musicians have led to an increased interest in the quantification of embodied states of intrapsychic attunement.²⁵ Elsewhere, Mel Y. Chen refers to the need to reject a history of “racial tuning” in response to racism.²⁶

Tuning, as in the search for a radio station amidst bands of static, affords multiple possible successful realizations. There is not just one harmony or state of attunement to be found but a number of possible harmonies, even though most randomly selected simultaneous pitches will be disharmonic.

While tinkering evokes the randomness of explorative practice, tuning suggests the search for one of several possible states of resonance. Our third term, *tracking*, promises in contrast a singular goal to be seized; the hunt for a particular desired outcome. In processes of tracking, the desired state is out of reach, out of reach, out of reach, and then suddenly within our grasp. Just as DeLanda's metalsmith tracks the flash point of a particular metal, so a martial artist searches for the singular dynamic alignment of muscle and bone to pierce an opponent's defense. The correct execution of a pirouette, a gymnastic flip, or a goal in football cannot be achieved through the more patient methods of tinkering and tuning. No matter how long the period of preparation and training, such feats must be conquered in a single moment, a leap of faith, which means that their potential execution must be tracked with the same care as a hunter tracking an animal. This kind of care is as evident in the healing work of a bone-setter or chiropractor who tracks the delicate geometry of the human musculoskeletal system; and in that of a teacher who tracks the learning process of a struggling student, searching for the elusive question or comment that will unlock a particular insight. In everyday life, we track embodied possibilities when we wait for the right moment to ask a question, search for the right person with whom to collaborate, call forth the courage to undertake a difficult action, or direct intimate gestures of touch and sensation to provoke orgasm in our own body or another.²⁷

These examples are poetically illustrative, but they are no more metaphorical than the original applications of these terms by Cetina, Pickering, and DeLanda to artisanal processes in science and technology. As these examples suggest, embodied arts—including those that structure the practice of everyday life—are in no sense merely social or cultural forms imposed upon an invariable material substrate. Rather, they are concrete ways of *grappling with*, getting a *grip upon*, and *coming to know* the materiality of human embodiment through processes of direct and detailed material negotiation. Engaging such materialities—which every embodied creature must do, not only humans—involves the same kind of fine-grained tinkering, tuning, and tracking that animate artisanal practices and scientific research, even if the objects being handled are at once more intimate and less quantifiable. Embodied arts should therefore equally be understood as privileged sites for practical encounters with the real and for the concrete enactment of ontological inquiries.²⁸ It is not enough to see dance, song, and sport as things we do “with” our bodies, or worse as illustrations of philosophical claims. The varied disciplines of embodied technique must be recognized for their epistemic engagement with reality, which is neither

more nor less than a sophisticated and precise negotiation of the basic problem of realism. Moreover, these fields of epistemic engagement are not limited to expert practitioners but occupy each of us throughout our lives, as we continually adapt our embodied habits and skills through processes of tinkering, tuning, and tracking.

As infants, we tinker, tune, and track basic principles of motion and balance. This developmental process is sometimes mistakenly described as that of learning to “use” our bodies, as if a separate mind made use of a separate body as tool. More accurately, we encounter material reality first of all through embodiment as we discover movement itself. I recently watched my one-year-old child learn to crawl and then to stand. As of this writing, they are on the cusp of taking their first step. There can be no denying that this process of discovery—although it involves no words or rational conceptualization—is based on the same type of intimate searching that define the artisanal and scientific practices of adults. Of course, the embodied research of infants is not research in the stronger sense of extending a field of knowledge. My child’s developmental pathway repeats a discovery that has been made countless times before. Nevertheless, for each new human, coordinated movement is a discovery that must be made in practice. Here is the tinkering with fingers and toes, learning what shapes they can make, what movements they can and cannot perform. Here is the tuning of muscles and skeletal alignment, gradually allowing the child to increase their range of motion and control. Here is the tracking of concrete embodied possibilities: to sit, to stand, to walk. My one-year-old is also playing with objects: blocks, fruits, clothing, etc. But their first and most immediate encounter with the practical truth of ontological realism comes in and as embodiment itself.

The “western” philosophical tradition has largely passed over embodied practice as a necessary but trivial aspect of human being that has nothing much to say to serious questions of ontology. While phenomenology is rightly recognized as having brought everyday embodiment into the heart of philosophy, it does not apply to embodiment the kind of fine-grained attention that recent theorists of practice have given to science and craftwork. Certainly we have yet to see—in continental or analytical philosophy—the specialized embodied practices of martial, healing, and performing arts treated as substantive ontologies alongside those produced by discursive thought or material science. But if the tinkering, tuning, and tracking of fine-grained material practice is a privileged perspective from which to envision new realist ontologies—as the work of Cetina, Pickering, DeLanda, Ingold, Sennett, Gibson, and many others suggests—then we can no longer afford to dismiss embodiment as a primary site of such

engagement. From the theatrical choreographer to the nervous interviewee to the infant learning to walk, our never-ending negotiation with embodiment through various modes of engagement constitutes our primary experimental engagement with reality. Through such engagement we not only learn how to do things but also continually rediscover the emergent contours of what exists. It is no paradox that we encounter ontological realism first of all through our own embodiment, for embodiment is in this sense nothing more than the primary affordance: the first site of that negotiation which makes possible all other negotiations and affordances.

The fragile junction

We now have a working definition of embodiment that does not limit it to the biomedical body, the anatomical body, the socially constructed body, the skilled or expert body, or any other particular mapping, but instead leaves it radically open as an epistemic object: *Embodiment is first affordance*. Embodiment in this sense is a zone of engagement in which the sediment of relatively reliable pathways (technique) interacts with the emergence of fractally complex material potential. This definition engages with recent critical moves to emphasize the agentic capacity of matter, but it retains a distinctly normative perspective. Embodiment is not just another example of material affordance; it is *first* or *primary* affordance, ontologically and epistemologically prior to other affordances. Why take this normative stance? Embodiment is primary affordance in a trivial developmental sense: We must learn to negotiate embodiment before we can “come to grips” with objects and substances outside our own bodies. But do not the first months of every human’s embodiment take place within the matrix of gestation, where it is entangled with and reliant upon another body? And is not even the simplest infant negotiation of embodiment, such as learning to eat or suck or crawl, predicated upon a material environment that includes other bodies and substances? Why mark embodiment as *first* affordance, when it is clearly inseparable from the living ecology of earth and air, food and water? Why draw a conceptual line around embodiment, when it is evidently a gradient, a gradual zone of transition between that which is part of us and that which moves around and through us? Does not this claim to priority reinstate the “onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic”²⁹ against which recent materialist theory has railed?

Paul Rekret has warned that recent theories of realism and materialism may collude with a wider ongoing destabilization of the material

grounds for ethical and political mobilization, even when those theories claim to derive from ethical or political sentiments.³⁰ As Rekret suggests, there is a risk that dissolving the human as a category can lead us not toward a deepening and expansion of ethical sensibility but rather into the flat ontologies of techno-capitalist fantasy, in which the “human” disappears precisely insofar as it attains the magical, frictionless status of the commodity.³¹ Such fantasies are based upon forgetting or suppressing the supply chain: the means of production that bind apparently clean technologies to their dirty origins and the massive division of labor that separates “start-ups in San Francisco, microchip manufacturing plants in global export processing zones, coltan mines in the Congo,” and “the externalities of these processes through the bioaccumulation of industrial chemicals in food chains, atmospheres, and waterways.”³² It is therefore crucial to distinguish between *posthuman-ism*, which critiques the anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, and heteropatriarchy of humanism; and *posthuman-ism*, which offers techno-capitalist fantasies wherein human beings are increasingly severed from our ecological tethers and freed to design ourselves without material limits.³³ The posthuman (or transhuman)³⁴ in this sense takes little interest in embodiment and embodied practice, seeing these as mere steps along a pathway leading to a superhuman technological future. In contrast, the emergent complexity of embodiment can be a crucial resource for posthumanist critique, highlighting the difference between *humanity* and *embodiment* as possible grounds for action at every scale.

As a species, we are no more independent of natural ecology than we ever were. It is just that, for some of us, direct engagement with those ecologies has been hidden behind layers and layers of technology. There is then an increasingly urgent need to articulate a meaningful and life-sustaining distinction between technology and ecology, and it is in this context that the ontological and epistemological priority of embodiment as a concept proves important. Urban populations today live inside the massively constructed machine of the city. Into this machine are pumped attenuated lines of biological substance: water, food, medicine, pets. Out of the city are pumped corresponding lines of waste. When city-dwellers go to see “nature,” it looks like an extension of something we have previously encountered in much narrower, more concentrated forms in the city. We recognize this connection and realize that our bodies and their organic fuels are not produced in the same way as buildings, cars, or computers, but derive from an altogether different order of ecology. At the same time, our bodies are intimately linked to the city and its technologies because

the urban infrastructure is designed to accommodate and support our bodies. (Some bodies more than others.) Our bodies, in other words, are an intermediate zone—a hinge, pivot, or junction—between the ecological and the technological. Theories that do not support a distinction between ecology and technology have no particular interest in embodiment, which becomes merely one among myriad affordances. It is only in recognition of the urgent disbalance between ecology and technology that we have cause to prioritize embodiment as the fragile junction between these domains. In light of this disbalance, embodiment is not just any affordance but *first* affordance, the affordance from which it might be possible to reorganize the relationship between technology and ecology. It is even worth asking whether embodiment as a concept has developed precisely in response to and in order to cope with this disbalance.

Perhaps, with great optimism of the will, we can imagine a future in which ecology and technology are once again balanced in the sense that no tool or machine is created without an understanding of how it both emerges from and returns to prior ecologies. In this world without waste, where technology operates “cradle to cradle,”³⁵ there would be no need to distinguish between ecology and technology, no grounds for such a distinction, and therefore no concept of embodiment. Technology would then be merely a kind of “fold”³⁶ in ecology, a particulate that emerges from and returns to its ecological foundations. Human embodiment in this world would be part of that fold, requiring no particular ontological primacy to survive. It is only when technology stands in a profoundly destructive and exploitative relationship to ecology that a concept is required through which to distinguish the two and from which to mobilize on behalf of a more balanced technique of living. A vantage point is required from which to understand what “balance” means, for it is never the “planet” as a massive object that is in danger but only specific ecologies upon which we as living organisms are dependent. If we are to feel more connected to a forest than to a city, more similar to a coral than to a car—if, in other words, we are to become ecologically sane—then we need to recognize these connections as owing to our embodiment. Not “the body” as a known thing, but embodiment as an affordance that is both ecological (because it predates technology and can live without it) and technological (because we reconstruct our embodiment when we construct our machines).³⁷ Embodiment is ecology technologized, but not in a way that renders the distinction irrelevant. Rather, the intersection or junction of technology and ecology in embodiment is the only perspective from which we might be able to develop a more sustainable *ecotechnological* practice.

Much work remains to be done if we are to theorize and practice embodiment in ways that promote a livable relationship between ecology and technology. As theorists of embodiment, we might start by working our way through the philosophy of technology and applying its insights, point by point, to the technique of embodied arts.³⁸ This would give us some starting points for a philosophy in which embodiment is not sharply distinguished from ecology or technology but rather prioritized as the standpoint from which that crucial distinction can be drawn. It would also give us an entirely new philosophy and politics of performance.

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- 1 Originally published as “Embodiment as First Affordance: Tinkering, Tuning, Tracking,” *Performance Philosophy* 2.2 (2017): 257–71. This item is licensed under a CC-BY-NC-SA: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
 - 2 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015): 11–14. These activities include that book; a new Embodied Research Working Group within the International Federation for Theatre Research, which held its first meeting at the 2017 conference in São Paulo; and the peer-reviewed, video-based, open-access *Journal of Embodied Research*, launched in 2017 from Open Library of Humanities: jer.openlibhums.org/
 - 3 Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18.1 (1990): 5.
 - 4 *Ibid.*: 11.
 - 5 My thinking here begins from a focus on human embodiment, but its implications are not limited by any substantive definition of the human. By suggesting that embodiment is prior to the question of the human, I displace the question of what counts as human—with all its hierarchical and historically racist connotations—onto embodiment as the grounds of all actions and experiences. This point is clarified in the final section, where I define embodiment as historically contingent and ontologically distinct from the category of the human.
 - 6 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011): 56; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books, 2009): 268.
 - 7 Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
 - 8 See Cetina, “Objectual Practice” in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001): 64–82.
 - 9 Sennett, *The Craftsman*: 272.
 - 10 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
 - 11 Ingold, *Being Alive*: 58; Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice*: 22; Sennett, *The Craftsman*: 33.

- 12 In Schatzki, Cetina, and Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*: 58.
- 13 James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979): 127.
- 14 Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Embodiment on Trial: A Phenomenological Investigation," *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (2015): 28.
- 15 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 16–17.
- 16 *Ibid.*: 41, 56.
- 17 Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
- 18 Karin D. Knorr, "Tinkering Toward Success: Prelude to a Theory of Scientific Practice," *Theory and Society* 8.3 (1979): 350.
- 19 Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice*: 14n22.
- 20 Manuel DeLanda, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, Swerve Editions (New York: Zone Books, 1998): 26.
- 21 *Ibid.*: 30.
- 22 Thanks to Stephen Purcell for suggesting that I consider the distinct connotations of these three terms.
- 23 Unexpected feedback in response to bodily tinkering might today be analyzed under the rubric of affect.
- 24 Bruce A. McConachie, *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 65–120.
- 25 Matt Danzico, "Brains of Buddhist Monks Scanned in Meditation Study," *BBC News*, 24 April 2011: www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-12661646/; see also Catherine E. Kerr and Laura Schmalzl, *Neural Mechanisms Underlying Movement-Based Embodied Contemplative Practices* (Frontiers Media, 2016): www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/1899/neural-mechanisms-underlying-movement-based-embodied-contemplative-practices/
- 26 Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 199.
- 27 Perhaps the whole realm of embodied engagement with materiality can be mapped onto sexuality. Awkward play feels like tinkering. Greater intimacy is found when sexual contact is a kind of tuning. Prioritizing orgasm, for better or for worse, marks a shift from tuning to tracking. Sexuality should not be underestimated as a site of practical ontology.
- 28 The "art" invoked in the phrase "embodied arts"—as well as in terms like *martial arts*, *performing arts*, *healing arts*, *ritual arts*, *sexual arts*—refers not to the unique and ephemeral art-event of romanticism, but rather to art in the sense of craft or technique. It is *techne* extended to include the ways we work with and through embodiment and in recognition that this domain is as large and as important as that which now goes by the cognate label "technology."
- 29 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): x.
- 30 Rekret's criticism is aimed at the "speculative realism" school of philosophy proposed by Graham Harman, Levi Bryant, and others, as well as at the apparently more politically aware theories of Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad. Each of these thinkers deserves further consideration and in the present context I can only outline a general concern with posthuman materialisms. I think it is important to consider these new and speculative realisms alongside those of Schatzki, Cetina, Pickering, DeLanda, Ingold, and others who articulate material agency through detailed studies of artisanal practice.

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- 31 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 51.
- 32 Paul Rekret, "A Critique of New Materialism: Ethics and Ontology," *Subjectivity* 9.3 (2016): 234–5.
- 33 Thanks to Christopher Morris for pointing me toward this distinction.
- 34 See Max More and Natasha Vita-More, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 54–5.
- 35 Michael Braungart and William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002).
- 36 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- 37 It may be pointed out that tool use dates to the beginning of the species. But it is not necessary to draw a strict line around technology in order to claim the priority of embodiment.
- 38 For example, Robert C. Scharff and Val Dusek, eds., *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

2

SONG: FRAGMENTS

Sweat (2003)

I grew up singing popular folk songs and musical theater, but eventually singing was no longer part of my life. I think this happens to a lot of people. A pivotal moment in my return to song came in 2003, when my partner took me to a sweat lodge ceremony on Long Island that was run by Charles “Red Hawk” Thom, a Karuk elder from California. Thom sang throughout the ceremony. Just when I felt my lungs would burst, I left the lodge and went out into the cold night air where I started singing loudly and wordlessly. The next day I found myself singing to a group of actors before an improvised performance that I had directed. These two moments are described in the following journal excerpts. In sharing them, I do not wish to repeat the trope of a white person finding spiritual meaning in an encounter with indigenous tradition while remaining oblivious to the colonial politics that underpin such moments. Nevertheless, given the importance of song in my life and work since then, it seems important to acknowledge this debt and to recognize the embodied transmission that took place.¹

2 June 2003

And then there was a sweat, in the lodge, and we went in, in and out, three times, each time hotter as the red stones came in on pitchforks. And we sat next to one another and held hands and put each other's hands on our bodies to feel the outpouring of sweat.

The first round was easy, I thought too easy, I thought I was bored, I was intellectualizing the experience, but it felt good after. The second time I was pushed farther, went to the edge, and it became spiritual. And and and there's too much to say. I found song, I let loose, I ran outside and lay on a picnic table and SANG to all god and creation like a shaman, the song the medicine man had sung, so it felt to me, and I thought: song is the power I have been missing. I had been thinking before, I have so much power, why do I not use it? And when M. came to rehearsal and saw me direct, she told me I sounded distant when I gave direction. Why do I deliberately take the passion out of my voice? Why do I always think that singing is less important than dancing? Connotations. The word "sing" cannot hold up to the word "dance," but the word "song" can. I found, I learned, a song. And now I carry it. All answers are within it. I must continue to study it. There is so much power in my song, in breath. I can only dance when I can breathe with it. Why don't I let myself? Why do I turn the song off? I want to come in to that power.

The third time, I felt like I was dying, I almost threw up and I pissed all over myself. I let go of everything and put my face down to the cool earth until my back was on fire. I couldn't deal and I ran outside and leaned against this huge climbing tower and found the song again...

3 June 2003

Before the show today, I sang the Song that I learned this weekend for the company and gave them red dirt from the Arizona desert. I don't know what it meant for them but for me it was a terrifying and courageous thing to do and it totally changed the mood—though it did not help the performance. I felt the truth of my own power, that if I have the courage to take something seriously then others will too.

1 Unpublished journal entries (2003). On the referenced performance, see *the desert* (this volume).

Vessels (2008)

The search for song led me to Poland and to Gardzienice. The first academic article I published examines similarities and differences between two of the best known institutions linked to Jerzy Grotowski's para-theatrical and post-theatrical periods. In this excerpt I begin to articulate what for me is still the essential power of song: its ability to structure embodiment in subtle ways, which may initially be experienced as restrictive but can eventually become a container for unexpected openings and forms of encounter.¹

Why do performers in both the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices and the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards identify primarily as actors despite the central role of singing in their work? This point may seem trivial, but it indicates an important aspect of their approach: namely, that song functions for each of them as a kind of vessel for something else that pours into and is expressed through singing. In neither case is the production of music an end in itself. This is part of what separates their work from the genres of opera and musical theater, and it has everything to do with the kinds of songs they choose to work with and the particular balance struck, in their work, between technical rigor and the performer's freedom to act.

For the sake of comparison, we might consider the relative balances of constraint and freedom placed on a performer by the enactment of text, narrative, choreography, a martial art, or a substantially different kind of song. One basic distinction is that singing is not a visual phenomenon and does not require the body to be held in any particular shape. The act of singing does sculpt the body, but it does so from the inside out, through the demands of sound production and the need to create precise pitches, dynamics, and resonances. In this way, singing is less like a choreography that determines the visible shape of the body and more like a martial art that requires the precise direction of energy and force. Singing calls for the singer to produce a specific sequence of vibrations in the air; in doing so, it constrains the body more tightly than do textual or narrative structures, but far less so than a visually oriented choreography.

The result is a unique balance of form and flexibility that paradoxically engages the whole body of the performer while leaving it relatively free. The effort required by the performer to produce the song without breaking

its rhythm, melody, or resonance means that the interplay between song and performance, though it may be flexible, cannot be just a matter of collage. Some movements and actions will block the song, others will support it—and these body-voice relationships can be tremendously complex. Song places the performer inside a rigorous structure of time (rhythm, duration, dynamics) as well as other qualities (pitch, vibration, resonance), but it also leaves a significant degree of freedom. In this way, physical and other performative elements can be seen to pass through the *precisely carved, hollow vessels* of the songs used by Gardzienice and the Workcenter. These song-vessels are precisely carved in their musical precision, but they are hollow in that they do not strictly determine the position of the body, the emotions of the actor, or the meaning of a given action. The songs shape, but do not strictly determine what flows through them; this relationship is complex, neither random nor predictable. To master the kinds of singing done by Gardzienice or the Workcenter takes many years, but not because of the melodic or rhythmic complexity of the songs themselves—rather, because of all that which passes through them.

1 Excerpts from Ben Spatz, “To Open a Person: Song and Encounter at Gardzienice and the Workcenter,” *Theatre Topics* 18.2 (2008): 205–22.

Burning Up (2009)

The work of Thomas Richards, artistic director of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, has been a touchstone for me since 2005. In this selection I discuss two of the events that took place in New York City during the UNESCO-designated “Year of Grotowski” (2009), including a pair of video documents produced by the Workcenter and another pair screened by Maud Robart. Then and now, these videos remain generally unavailable, giving them a sense of aura that is unusual in the digital age. My wish to obtain them—a desire for the unique combination of intimacy and distance that the audiovisual medium affords—was a precursor to my later work on the epistemology of video.¹

Maud Robart was one of the few guests who had her own, separate event, as opposed to being part of a panel. This was a wise choice, since Robart began by rejecting the terms of the meeting and initially refused

to answer questions posed by the moderator. In the absence of a talkative panelist, the event slowly developed into a more informal meeting in which many voices were heard, including from the audience. For those of us who stayed past the meeting's scheduled end at 9 pm, this event became a unique and unexpected kind of encounter. By 11 pm, the atmosphere had completely shifted. People were sitting in irregular formations, many on the floor, rather than in chairs and rows as at the beginning. Robart showed two short films and a lively discussion followed. Of all the Year of Grotowski events in New York, this was the only one after which I felt that those who had attended had been forged into a community by the experience.

The two videos shown were Marc Petitjean's *La source du chant* (the source of the chant) and Michel Boccara's *Le silence du chant est un chemin vers le silence du cœur* (the silence of the chant is a path toward the silence in the heart). Each was about twelve minutes long. Robart informed us that both videos documented past work and should not be confused with her current research. However, since virtually nothing has been written about Robart's work in English, I will make a few remarks here on my recollection of the videos. Each showed Robart at work with a small group of people, in beautiful spaces with wooden floors. The intensity of the participants' focus and the evocative qualities of the singing were very striking. There were undeniable similarities between this work and that which Thomas Richards leads at the Pontedera Workcenter; as well as significant differences. Immediately after the screenings, Richard Schechner remarked that the videos had reminded him of the Workcenter and of *Downstairs Action* in particular. He went on to suggest that Robart's influence on Richards and the Workcenter has been seriously under-recognized.² Robart's only response to this was to clarify that she sees her work as part of a long tradition that cannot be owned by individuals.

The significance of Robart's work should not be overlooked. Even if we are only interested in Grotowski and his legacy, we have to take Robart's impact on Grotowski and Richards into consideration in order to understand the genesis of the Workcenter. However, if we are really to be respectful of Grotowski's memory, then we must not only study his own work but also ask the same questions he was asking. In approaching such questions, we do ourselves a disservice if we do not pay close attention to Robart's ongoing research—as Grotowski himself did. The same can also be said for a number of artists who were present at these events: Rena Mirecka, Ang Gey Pin, James Slowiak, Jairo Cuesta, and

others.³ Nevertheless, the events with the Workcenter at Lincoln Center were clearly the culmination of the New York program. The first day of screenings covered Grotowski's early and middle periods. I will not describe these here since they can relatively easily be obtained for private viewing. The films screened on the second day, however, are unavailable at the present time. These are the films of the Workcenter, covering the last period of Grotowski's work as well as the Workcenter's activities since his death.

In *Art as Vehicle*, Richards leads a group of five doers: himself, Mario Biagini, Piotr Borowski, Nitinchandra Ganatra, and Nitaya Singsengsouvanh. The work takes place in a small room, the downstairs space of the Pontedera Workcenter (hence the designation *Downstairs Action*). The first twenty minutes of the hour-long film show preparation and a few moments of highly precise rehearsal. After that, the opus itself is enacted. *Downstairs Action* is a work in which song, movement, and action form a unity—a “totality” in the sense of what Grotowski called the “total act.” The songs, drawn (with some exceptions) from African and Afro-Caribbean traditions, provide its main structure and the fountain of its force. There are also several elements that seem to be the remnants of past rituals: texts spoken in English, a walk derived from the Haitian *yanvalou*, candles, a bowl of water, rice, a censer. These elements do not carry the life force of the work, which comes through the songs and in the bodies of the doers themselves. Instead they frame the work, surrounding it and supporting it psychologically and semiotically rather than viscerally.

The immediately striking aspect of *Downstairs Action* is the utter devotion and commitment of the doers to each and every action. This is especially true of Richards, who is plainly at the center of this work—its unique axis—leading its progress from start to finish. Richards is active and engaged in *Downstairs Action* in a way I have never seen any other performer be. My colleague said: “He is burning up.” But this quality also appears in the others, each of whom comes forth and takes the lead for a moment. Of these, Singsengsouvanh is the most compelling, as strong a presence as Richards when she takes focus. In one fragment, early on, she leaps wildly through the space like a young girl, with astonishing grace and freedom. In a later fragment, she sings alone and then to Richards, her voice and presence utterly that of an old woman in mourning. Both moments are impressive in their realness and truth. Together, in contrast, within the space of an hour, they are extraordinary. Long after seeing the

film of *Downstairs Action*, it is the songs that linger in one's memory, or rather it is the singing, the intensity and depth of the songs and their resonance in the bodies of the doers and the space of the doing. In the vibration of the voices—especially Richards'—there is something extremely emotional and real, like the voices of people speaking just after a traumatic experience. In *Downstairs Action*, the doers have managed to capture an enormous flow of emotionality inside a precisely repeatable structure. In documenting this, the film *Art as Vehicle* puts forth an irrefutable challenge to the performing arts.

Action is a later opus. Since this work is described in detail by Lisa Wolford in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, I will limit myself here to mentioning just the most salient differences between *Downstairs Action* and *Action* as they are documented in the two films shown at Lincoln Center.⁴ To begin with, the primary axis now exists between Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini rather than in Richards alone. The alignment of the space has also changed, so that there is a clear “front” and “back”; and a number of guests have been invited to witness the work. This particular film shows *Action* taking place not at the Workcenter's home base but in the beautiful, vaulted space of the Aya Irini church in Istanbul. The quality of energy is different as well. In *Downstairs Action* one perceives the burning energy of a group of people who seem to be living out their whole lives in that small downstairs room. The dynamics of *Action* are gentler, more open and subtle, and in some places more theatrical. This is still not a theater piece, but it is less wholly a ritual than *Downstairs Action*. In fact, it seems to be some kind of bridge or hybrid of the two: a ritual that was made to be witnessed.

1 Excerpts from Ben Spatz, “A Series of Openings: The Year of Grotowski in New York City,” *Slavic and Eastern European Performance* 29.3 (2009): 18–25. On video epistemology, see “The Video Way of Thinking,” this volume.

2 Robart led one of two working groups in Pontedera for several years, until funding cuts required a major reduction in staff. However, no work in English discusses Robart's relationship with Grotowski and/or Richards in any depth.

3 This series of events was organized by NYU and the Polish Cultural Institute.

4 *ACTION in Aya Irini* was filmed by Jacques Vetter of Atelier Cinéma de Normandie—A.C.C.A.A.N. The “doers” of *Action* in this film are Thomas Richards, Mario Biagini, Marie de Clerck, Souphière Amiar, Francesc Torrent Gironella, and Jørn Riegels Wimpel. This team has changed over time, as a comparison with Lisa Wolford's description makes clear—see “*Action*, the Unrepresentable Origin” in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (New York: Routledge, 1997): 409–31.

Topology of Song (2015)

I have tried on several occasions to learn European musical notation and always stopped because of what felt to me like a serious disjunction between the premises of the form and my experience of the act of singing. While I have mostly tried to explain this disjunction in terms of orality and embodied practice, I have also been intrigued by alternative modes of abstraction and formalization. In recent years I have been lucky to work alongside some of the most innovative experimenters in the field of Western musical notation at the Centre for Research in New Music in Huddersfield. Inspired by some of these encounters, I took my interest in mathematizing song as far as it would go in this excerpted conference paper, using Manuel DeLanda's post-Deleuzian topology to analyze singing as an act of symmetry breaking.¹

Setting aside the assumptions that underpin European musical notation, what kinds of events make up a given song? What types of embodied action cause a song to arrive in a given space? I want to propose that songs are made up of *symmetry-breaking events*. In other words, the structure of a given song—that which allows us to conclude that two people in different times or spaces are singing the “same” song—is best understood not as a composition of sounds with specific pitches and durations but as a sequence or cascade of nested events that successively break the implicit symmetry of silence. Songs therefore have fractal and not linear structure. The simplest songs are thresholds into genres or areas of vocal technique and every song, no matter how complex, can be used as a starting point for additional complexity. Songlines are lines in a musical space with dimensions corresponding to the possible symmetries of the voice: all the ways in which vocal phenomena can be transformed and varied. Any given song can be conceived of as a point along such a line or pathway, which defines its specific qualities and its ability to transform time and space in particular ways. In order to sing a particular song, a practitioner or ensemble must break the relevant symmetries in order to arrive at that point. In some cases there are multiple routes to the same song; in other cases, the relevant symmetries must be broken in a particular order.

For DeLanda, a key metaphor of symmetry-breaking processes is the development of an egg or seed into an organism. He writes:

Metaphorically, an egg may be compared to a topological space which undergoes a progressive and qualitative differentiation to become the metric space represented by a fully formed organism... In

this sense, the fertilized egg, defined mostly by gradients and polarities, as well as the early embryo defined by neighbourhoods with fuzzy borders and ill-defined qualities, may indeed be viewed as a topological space which acquires a rigidly metric anatomical structure as tissues, organs and organ systems become progressively better defined and relatively fixed in form.²

The egg is initially symmetrical in that its contents are relatively uniform. Gradually polarities emerge, including one that will form the main axis of the organism from front to back or top to bottom. Additional polarities will distinguish additional axes of differentiation and eventually “neighborhoods” composed of specific cell types will coalesce and solidify through their own symmetry-breaking processes to form specific organs. According to DeLanda, this process of “progressive differentiation” is “achieved through a complex cascade of symmetry-breaking phase transitions.”³ Each transition “breaks” a particular symmetry of the previous state, rendering the organism more differentiated and eventually giving it a stable and measurable structure in space.

This is how I would like to think about the cascade of events that define a song. Beginning with the undifferentiated egg of silence, the pure potential of the unactivated voice, let us ask what kinds of symmetry can be broken by the voice. Of course, the egg of silence is not entirely undifferentiated. The spectrum of pitch is inherently asymmetrical because of the range of human hearing and the distinctive qualities of different vocal registers. Hence a sense of low and high pitch already exists before any note is sounded. Likewise, looped rhythm has roughly maximum and minimum durations, hence even in silence there is already an implicit sense of what is fast and slow. However, within those general cognitive spaces afforded by the organism, there remains a large range of symmetries to be broken by specific vocal actions. Rather than catalog the various symmetries that can be broken in the practice of a given song, my aim is to suggest how an alternative ontology might be developed with which to understand the complexities of embodied singing technique as distinct from notation-based composition. Rather than treating a song as a linear structure of specific notes (or sounds) and durations, this ontology sees a song as a layered montage of broken and retained symmetries.

Among the implications of this shift is the sense that one can enter and dwell within a given song or song fragment for a potentially unlimited amount of time. A song no longer has strict beginning and ending points but instead is built up out of layers, each of which can be enacted independently (although, as I noted above, some layers may depend upon other layers and

hence the order of enaction may not always be entirely open). One can “enter” the rhythm of a song without its melody and vice versa. However, one cannot work with harmonic intervals unless there is already a melody in the space. One can decompose a song into shorter loops, develop alternate versions of a song that break the various symmetries in different ways, and create larger-scale compositions out of these elements. I do not think that any of the technique I am describing here is new. On the contrary, I think that working with song in this way is among the most common of human practices. The musical space I am describing here is that of folk and ritual song. It is the space of mantra and chant. Unfortunately this musical space has rarely been granted the same ontological status as that of written notation. Historically, many attempts have been made to raise folk and ritual music to the level of notated musical works by transcribing it. Only relatively recently has the reductive nature of transcription been acknowledged. But audio recording is also reductive; it too fails to capture song as flexible embodied technique. For this we need a different ontology, a vocal ontology, an ontology of song that begins and ends with the iterative structure of embodied practice.

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- 1 Excerpts from “Out from the Egg of Silence: For a Topology of Song,” Conference Paper Presented at the Orpheus Institute, Ghent, Belgium (2015). A video of this talk is available online at www.researchcatalogue.net/view/238587/238588 (accessed 3 August 2019).
 - 2 Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2002): 51–2. My usage of topology and set theory is based on DeLanda’s and I am not concerned here with how far these analogies can be pushed mathematically.
 - 3 *Ibid.*: 19.

COLORS LIKE KNIVES (2017)

This is the most academically dense article reprinted in the present volume, with numerous footnotes that help to lay groundwork for the onto-epistemological trajectory I outline in “Thresholds” (this volume). It contains my first attempt to analyze my own embodied research through a close reading of a video recording: in this case, the 2011 solo performance of *Rite of the Butcher* at Movement Research / Judson Church in New York City. These eleven minutes of documented practice are examined here in a mode I call “phenomenotechnical,” borrowing this concept from historical epistemologist Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and carefully distinguishing it from phenomenological, semiotic, and cognitive approaches to performance analysis. In addition to exploring the area of post-Grotowskian inquiry I call “song-action,” this article makes the case for a specific type of *contestable first-person privilege*, applying ideas from (trans)feminist standpoint theory to artistic/embodied research.¹

Eleven minutes

Conversations about the epistemology of embodied practice continue unabated across the arts and humanities. Recent disputes over the epistemological status of musical compositions—and whether these in themselves may or may not constitute research—revisit and reframe, in a different context, many of the same issues raised over the past decade in theater, dance, and performance studies. Very often the objects of analysis in these discussions

are varieties of the classically conceived artistic “work”: a repeatable score, either well-trained or notated, that remains distinct from any particular moment of performance. Individual performance events, in contrast, are still more often celebrated on the grounds that they are too fleeting and ephemeral to be captured by the documentary mechanisms of academic research. After more than a decade of Practice as Research, Performance as Research, Artistic Research and related concepts and coinages, there is still little consensus as to the basic methods or terms according to which such research should be framed, disseminated, and assessed.²

This article offers a mode of analysis in which embodied practice is taken seriously as a way of knowing. It applies a rigorous epistemological framework to an eleven-minute video document from 2011.³ By analyzing the research content of that video in technical terms, I attempt to move the above-cited conversations forward in several ways: first, by emphasizing the validity of *embodied research* in contrast to less coherent notions of “practice” or “performance” as research; second, by taking the relative stability of an audiovisual recording as an essential component in sharing and evaluating such research; and third, by using a conceptual vocabulary drawn from social and historical studies of laboratory science to clarify what exactly constitutes research in embodied practice. I do not claim that the approach offered here is the only way to establish greater precision in framing and articulating performing arts practices as research. Rather, I offer this micro-analysis as a modest contribution to a complex, multidisciplinary debate, in the hope that its particular approach will prove useful or suggestive to others.

The eleven-minute performance in question was presented as part of Movement Research at Judson Church, a long-standing “high visibility, low-tech forum” in New York City that “supports experiments in performance rather than finished products.”⁴ This context is important, as Movement Research is one of the few organizations in the United States that provides direct and explicit support for embodied research. Carrying forward the legacy of the Judson Dance Theater, Movement Research at Judson Church provides what Randy Martin calls a space “just outside the market for spectacle.”⁵ I want to suggest here not only that the framework of Movement Research is positioned outside the market for spectacle, but also that its invocation of “research” pointedly emphasizes the epistemic dimension of embodied practice as distinct from its instrumental value in the creation of artworks. Like Martin, I am interested in reconsidering “what would constitute a unit of meaning” in live performance, in part through a shift from “representation”—the circulation of signs in

an imagined public sphere—to “participation”: the circulation of practices across bodies.⁶ However, I want to postpone for now the question of how practices circulate between performers and audience in the complex whole of a live event in order to focus instead on the iterative elaboration of new technique through practice. In this essay I take the term “research” in the name Movement Research literally, testing it against social and historical studies of experimental research in the sciences. In doing so, I am pursuing a hunch that the methodologies of laboratory science may be more applicable to embodied research than those of the humanities or social sciences.

The risks and difficulties associated with writing critically about one’s own practice are of urgent concern for many today who occupy hybrid identities like “artist-scholar” and “practitioner-researcher.” In previous publications, I have used social epistemology to analyze practices from which I can claim varying degrees of critical distance.⁷ Now for the first time I apply the same strategy to a practice of which I am the sole author and practitioner. My claim is that an eleven-minute video can be analyzed as a research document, a trace or record of concrete discoveries made through embodied practice. To substantiate this claim, I need to show that a distinction can be meaningfully drawn between the established knowledge that structures the documented practice and the new, still-inchoate knowledge that the practice makes possible. In the terms developed by a historian of science, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, I must trace the boundary that separates the *experimental system* of the documented practice from the *epistemic objects* that emerge from it. Let me clarify here that, in borrowing terms and concepts from Rheinberger, I am in no way reducing embodied research to the scientific method. Rather, it is precisely the historicizing destabilization of science accomplished by critical epistemologists like Rheinberger that allows us to get beyond a binary division between science and art. In Rheinberger I find a surprisingly precise account of my own embodied research. This is not because my practice is scientific but because both scientific and embodied research are epistemic endeavors. What Rheinberger offers is much more than an account of science: It is a *general* account of how new knowledge arises out of existing knowledge, and it is this that I apply here to a specific example of embodied research.

My presentation at Movement Research on 21 February 2011 was merely a point along the way in the development of a project called *Rite of the Butcher*, neither the first nor the final incarnation of that work. Yet I consider that showing to be one of my most significant, precisely because it was a public demonstration of research rather than a private rehearsal or a public performance. The institutional frame of Movement Research

implicitly suggests a set of questions related to this third type of space. What is the difference between watching performance and watching research? How should research presentations be analyzed and assessed? Is a research presentation primarily a place for sharing results or can it also involve live experimentation? My own answers to these questions provide the motivation for this essay. While later versions of *Rite of the Butcher* embedded its core research content within a theatrical frame, this version hews more closely to the notion of “pure” (non-instrumental) research. To understand those later versions one would have to examine them as theatrical works, considering aspects of performance that are manifest in the perception of spectators more than that of the practitioner, such as visual imagery and narrative. This moment of public research demonstration invites something different. Below I will suggest that what is needed is a mode of analysis that combines or synthesizes aspects of the technical and the phenomenological. But first I begin from a methodological challenge: How can we focus analytically on the epistemic dimensions of a document of embodied practice? This is the task for which I enlist Rheinberger’s help.

Embodying the technical

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger offers a scientifically, historically, and philosophically informed analysis of how the sciences produce knowledge through what he calls their “experimental systems”:

Within these complex, tinkered, and hybrid settings of emergence, change, and obsolescence, scientific objects continually make their appearance and eventually recede into the technical, preparative sub-routines of an ongoing experimental manipulation. As a result, there is again a continuous generation of new phenomena, which need not have anything to do either with the preceding assumptions or with the presupposed goals of the experimenter. They usually begin their lives as recalcitrant “noise,” as boundary phenomena, before they move on stage as “significant units.”⁸

Rheinberger’s language is dense and requires some unpacking. At first glance there is a fairly simple relationship between the “experimental system,” which includes the physical laboratory and all of its technology and personnel, and the “scientific object” or “epistemic thing” that emerges from that system. Yet these are merely specific instances of two more general, quasi-philosophical categories: the technical and the epistemic. In

some very clear-cut examples, such as a microscope examining a cell, the boundary between technical and epistemic can be as simple as that “between an organic and an inorganic entity,” an encounter in which “the living entity is wet and soft and the technological one is dry and hard.” In other cases, however, organic entities such as cells or model organisms may function as “organic tools” in biological experiments, so that the technical/epistemic boundary is found within the “wet and soft” domain of organic matter.⁹ This boundary then is not a matter of different substances but of how various substances work in the context of a given experiment: “The difference between experimental conditions and epistemic things ... is functional rather than structural.”¹⁰

The question at hand is whether embodied technique—such as that of song, movement, and imaginative association—can be understood as setting sufficiently coherent boundary conditions to produce meaningful epistemic objects. Clearly we should not expect from such technical conditions the kind of quantitative repeatability upon which experimental physics or biology relies. Instead we should look for what I call a “relative reliability” sufficient to allow for the development and transmission of embodied technique.¹¹ Specifying relative reliability in this sense would allow us to locate the border between technical and epistemic within embodied practice itself, independent of technological supports, by distinguishing within a given practice between technique that structures it (the technical) and technique that is generated by it (the epistemic). We might then look to see whether, as Rheinberger predicts, the new technique produced by a practice, which at first is fuzzy and unclear, can later be routinized and incorporated into the technical, thereby advancing the whole experimental system along a particular epistemic pathway. In Rheinberger’s terms: “The epistemic things that ground the experimental sciences emerge from the deposit of the technical and its potential for tinkering. Whence it follows that time and again they lend themselves to becoming reincorporated in that deposit.”¹²

Rheinberger himself has been asked to reflect upon the application of his epistemological framework to the arts and in particular to the idea of artistic research. He has responded with genuine interest, recognizing the importance of repetition in painting and music and suggesting that “an artist like Cézanne, who painted hundreds of apples in his countless later still lifes, must have been caught in a kind of experimental system.”¹³ Moreover, Rheinberger emphasizes the deep engagement with materiality that unites scientists and artists: “[T]he interaction of the experimenter with his or her material lies at the centre. If one is not immersed in, even overwhelmed by,

the material, there is no creative experimentation.”¹⁴ With this in mind, we can turn to the documented practice mentioned above and try to distinguish an iterative experimental system that might allow for the production of specifically new epistemic things. This system would be composed of layers of embodied technique, equivalent to the bodily skill of experimental scientists but without the support of technological instruments.¹⁵ In addition, we can attempt to locate this experimental system within a broader context of related embodied experimentation. For as Rheinberger notes, “Experimental systems don’t come in isolation. As a rule, they are part of broader landscapes or cultures of experimentation. They form ensembles with a patchwork structure.”¹⁶ If the documented practice is indeed a research practice, then the landscape of experimentation of which it is part will not be identical to the landscape of cultural performance in which it appears. From an epistemological perspective, the important context is not in the minds of witnesses—for example, other performances to which they might compare it—but in the flows of technique that structure it and the communities of knowledge that are invested in these flows.

The documented practice explores an epistemic territory I call *song-action*. The epistemic objects it seeks to realize are *song-actions*. In order to produce these elements, the practice iteratively enacts an experimental system comprising a number of technical flows. As with any experimental system, it is impossible to characterize all the layers of the technical that undergird its epistemic engagement. The best one can do is to enumerate those technical structures that are most active and influential at the point where something new emerges. Whether I was aware of these structures at the time is irrelevant to my present analysis, which aims to articulate the technical structure of the experimental system at work in the documented practice using a combination of embodied memory and reference to video and photo documents. A first step in this analysis would be to enumerate the main areas of embodied technique that structure the practice as follows: physical action, spoken text, *song-action*, and movement improvisation. In distinguishing these areas, I am not attempting to create a divisive typology of technique but rather to articulate the technical patterns that structure the practice. In another context, words like “action” and “song” might refer to significantly different areas of technique. The meaning of these terms as I use them here emerges not only from the discursive context of this article but also in reference to the cited video.¹⁷ In the documented practice, these areas of technique are explored separately, for differing lengths of time and with differing levels of expertise. Taken together they gesture toward an epistemic territory (*song-action*) that I have been exploring for more than a decade.

The present analysis leaves aside the use of spoken text and pure movement improvisation in *Rite of the Butcher* in order to focus on the embodied technique of action and song-action, for it is in these areas that I consider the main research outcomes and epistemic objects of this practice to be found. When we attempt to define an area of embodied technique such as “action,” ambiguity often arises between historical and technical frames of reference. Historically, the kind of action I am talking about can be traced through a lineage of practice from Konstantin Stanislavsky to Jerzy Grotowski to Massimiliano Balduzzi to me. This does not mean that I claim any particular legacy or authenticity deriving from those names. Clearly there are many lines of practice that could be charted, using these reference points or others, which might employ the term “action” differently or not at all. By invoking these names, I am seeking not to authenticate but to specify my practice. While “action” can refer to many different kinds of technique, in this context the operative meaning is that specified by the sequence of names Stanislavsky-Grotowski-Balduzzi.¹⁸ If one wanted to apply even greater historical specificity, one could refer to particular periods of practice, or—even better—to documents arising from those periods. But I am more interested here in technical than historical specification. Elsewhere I have defined physical action as corporeally precise movement that is “determined by reference not to a future audience but to the organic reactions of the actor.” In other words, the physical details of a particular movement are set because they are “expected to provoke a fuller organic engagement on the part of the actor.”¹⁹ Grotowski extended this notion into a search for organicity within a wide range of physical and vocal expression. In the work of Massimiliano Balduzzi, these precedents have led to the development of “exercise-actions” that combine a high degree of movement precision with a dynamic flexibility designed to support personal associations and intentionalities. What we have here are a series of historically and technically linked epistemic objects, all exploring in different ways the relationship between externally perceptible movement specification (e.g. position of the spine and extremities, tempo-rhythms, opposing forces within the body) and the landscape of imagery and association that these evoke in the practitioner. The extent to which the movement specification and the landscape of association are inseparable is what defines the presence of Stanislavsky-Grotowski-Balduzzi actions in the sense I have described.

Like the brief genealogy of “action” just traced, the approach to singing in the documented practice has its own technical and historical context, centering around Grotowski’s increased engagement

with folk and other traditional songs in his later work as well as the post-Grotowskian practices of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards (Italy) and the Centre for Theatre Practices Gardzienice (Poland).²⁰ In particular, the documented practice explores what Thomas Richards has referred to as a “spiral” phenomenon in his practice of singing traditional songs from the folk and ritual traditions of Haiti and other Afro-diasporic cultures.²¹ A spiral is an open circle with linear directionality perpendicular to its curve. The circular form in this case is a short repeating refrain, melodically simple by the standards of European musicology. The complexity of the singing process is then found not in extended melodic development but rather in a linear process that cuts across multiple iterations of the refrain. According to Richards, traditional songs in his practice function “through repetition, and the way in which the vibratory qualities of the song are affecting the doer through this repetition. The melody stays the same, but the resonance is changing, the vibratory qualities develop along with the repetition.”²² As Richards suggests, repetition of this kind structures embodied practice on multiple scales, from small to large.²³ I would argue further that such repetition should be understood as a literal instantiation of research in Rheinberger’s sense. Thus we should take Richards literally when he asserts that “traditions are research” and describes the advancement of such research in terms that closely echo those of Rheinberger.²⁴

The practice analyzed here is based on precisely this kind of iterative process, or repetition-with-a-difference, across a number of scales or levels. On a macro scale, one can analyze the development of song-action across a variety of practices and contexts. On a middle or “meso” scale, one can examine the different ways in which song-action is used in different projects created by the same ensemble or individual. Finally, on a micro scale, one can examine a particular moment or document of practice to see how an iterative or cyclical approach produces particular epistemic objects or locations in epistemic space.²⁵ The macro scale has evident links with social and cultural history and allows for a broad consideration of how embodied technique relates to larger-scale movements. The meso scale is roughly that of the artistic work or project when viewed from an embodied perspective, not as a written score or script but as an epistemic object that is differentially realized by multiple performances. While both of these perspectives are important, I have chosen to focus here on the micro scale of analysis in order to expose the development of new technique in detail.

Epistemologica

I will now describe and analyze three examples of what Rheinberger variously calls epistemic objects, epistemic things, epistemata, or epistemologica.²⁶ In each case I will attempt to trace the boundary between the repeatable technique that gives the practice its identity and the zone of unpredictable, emergent differentiation out of which new technique arises. As further discussed below, I am attempting to combine technical and phenomenological perspectives in a way that would allow another person with sufficiently similar skills to travel along analogous epistemic pathways and encounter some of the same epistemic territories and objects.

Seated martial dance

The practitioner is seated in a chair with their weight and balance grounded primarily through that point of contact.²⁷ Some weight may be distributed through the feet, but the legs are held free to move lightly and quickly. The arms are raised to the sides, outstretched, and poised. The action involves a series of sharp gestures, initiated in the core of the body and grounded through the seat, in which the hands come together in front of the body.²⁸ The shape into which the arms and hands arrive is improvised, but the hands never touch. The fingers may be open or closed and the gestures may invoke associations such as cutting, pressing, squeezing, slicing, squashing, slamming, or joining. Successive impulses pull the hands away from each other and then forcefully back together. The legs alternately open and close as part of the same whole-body impulse. The effort quality of each movement is strong and direct, but there may be more or less resistance at the beginning and end of each gesture. The overall rhythm is irregular: Whenever a regular rhythm appears, it is quickly broken so that the arrival of each successive impulse remains unpredictable. Each impulse has a bouncing quality, with the tempo-rhythm of the bounce depending on how far the hands move and the duration of the moments of suspension (when the hands are extended out) and compression (when the hands are almost touching). All of this movement in the limbs is initiated from the core of the body and flows out through the fingertips and back. If the movement is copied without finding a deep source of initiation through the core, the arms and shoulders may become sore (this happened when I attempted to teach this action to a group of professional dancers and performers).

The “seated martial dance” appears from a synthesis of the *cheironomia* or gesture technique developed by Gardzienice—inspired by the

iconographies of ancient Greece—and the approach to irregular rhythms in physical action developed by Massimiliano Balduzzi.²⁹ Both of these areas of technique were once epistemic objects, both in the strong sense as genuinely new discoveries (when they were created by Gardzienice and Balduzzi respectively) and in the weaker sense of being new to a specific individual (when I trained in them). But by the time of the documented practice, they had both sedimented in my body to the point of being technical in Rheinberger’s sense: I no longer experienced them as objects to discover but instead as tools to work with. However, while I was consciously aware of how I was wielding Balduzzi’s irregular rhythm in that moment, I was not aware of the influence of Gardzienice’s *cheironomia*. The “martial dance” action had emerged the previous summer during an improvisational session and at the time I had no sense of any strong historical precedent. It was not until almost a year later, while re-watching videos of Gardzienice’s training practice, that I realized with a shock how my “martial dance” adapted the overall quality of the *cheironomia* while jettisoning its specific gestural vocabulary. Hence what I had taken to be a relatively pure instance of elaborating new physical technique out of improvisational practice instead turned out to be an example of how two different technical flows can come together to produce a new epistemic object. In this case, technical pathways that had been ingrained in my body during my 2003–2004 apprenticeship with Gardzienice were synthesized with what I was doing in 2011 under the influence of Balduzzi. Through differential reproduction of the known, something unknown appeared.

Erotic descent through “oh pa say”

This epistemic object arose from a very different process, more complex and personal.³⁰ Unlike many of the song-based practices of the Work-center, Gardzienice, and other post-Grotowskian practitioners, my embodied research from 2005 to 2013 was based on the invention of original songs or “song fragments” in which simple melodic and rhythmic elements are combined with nonlexical (nonsense) vocables. The song fragment “oh pa say” was created during the *First Song Cycle* project (2007–2009), in which all song fragments were developed through unmediated accumulation. In that approach, neither melodies nor vocables are written down until long after they have been established and memorized, a process that tended toward the development of musically simple song fragments that were richly layered with associative meaning and bodily memory. The “oh pay say” song fragment is especially simple, making use of just five notes

in its root melody.³¹ In contrast, most of the song fragments used in later versions of *Rite of the Butcher* were created during a recorded improvisation session and then modified and memorized as songs. That process allowed for longer and more complex melodic and vocable lines, while sacrificing the pure embodiment of the practice through its reliance on digital recording as part of the creative process. In the documented practice, the simple song fragment “oh pa say” is combined with an extended line of actions to produce a spiral development in which repeated cycles of the refrain iteratively produce a complex song-action.

During *First Song Cycle*, “oh pa say” had been linked to a line of actions that developed over six or seven minutes, through several stages, including: an initial invocation, touching and being touched by an imaginary partner, a gentle, free-flowing dance initiated in the spine, and a final “descent” in which a deepening and thickening of vocal resonance went along with a gradual dropping in pitch and a viscerally sexual association. In the documented practice, this song-action is compressed into less than two and a half minutes and cut short at the moment of greatest associative intensity. This version begins with the practitioner seated. Linking song and movement through breath, they initiate a searching gesture of the right arm and hand, which begins gently but soon becomes more forceful and staccato. The action of the arm draws the performer to standing and leads them forward into the space. There is a pause in the song as the searching action of the hand becomes a caress of the practitioner’s own left shoulder. When the song begins again, it is more rhythmically regular as well as being pitched higher and finding a more delicate quality of resonance. This light, searching quality in both song and gesture leads the performer diagonally across the space, shifting from left arm to right and culminating in the touching of the right hand to the empty space above the head. The song now begins to descend in both pitch and resonance, followed by the arm. The performer sinks to their knees as the song continues to descend through several repetitions. Here the song-action is cut short, interrupted by a short pause and followed quickly by the next song-action, a sustained and forceful chant with nonlexical vocables: “enzoma isode.”

In the context of my present discussion, the significance of this song-action is not only the combination of song and action but also the depth and quality of the imaginative associations that color it. Revealing some aspects of this association, including the sexual content of one moment, raises an important question about the limits of transferable technique and therefore of the technical in Rheinberger’s sense. To what extent can associations themselves, whether imagined or remembered, be taught or

transmitted as technique? The actual associations I was working with in this moment, such as imagined visual images or physical sensations, are not transmissible to any other practitioner and therefore cannot be included in the technique or technical structure of the practice. On the other hand, more general sexual associations—such as searching, caressing, touching or being touched, and penetrating or being penetrated—are transmissible to a degree. Substantial work has been done on the ethical risks arising from the use of sexual associations in hierarchical (director-actor and teacher-student) relationships and on the spectacular display of anti-normative sexuality in performance art. But neither the acting studio nor the theatrical stage of performance art aims to conduct open-ended embodied research of the kind described here. When analyzing an embodied research based in solo practice, the question is less how personal associations create meaning between working partners or between performer and audience than what kind of psychophysical or affective impact they provoke in the practitioner. There remains much work to do in applying queer and feminist perspectives to embodied practice and research.³²

Wrestling the angel (song fragment “bosay”)

This epistemic object was first spontaneously elaborated during the same early improvisational session mentioned above.³³ Although lines of influence could probably be traced, I do not recognize it as the clear result of any particular synthesis of previously sedimented technique. Like “oh pa say,” the song fragment “bosay” is rhythmically and melodically simple, comprising just a few notes and a “click” sound (vocal percussion). In *Rite of the Butcher* it has always been combined with a physical action of embracing or grappling with an invisible partner. The quality of this imagined contact ranges from intimately sensual to aggressively combative, increasing in force as the song repeats. The arms and spine are fully engaged and the action can grow to include rolls across the floor as well as standing movement. The physical precision of this song-action is found in the continuous translation of irregular impulses across the spine and arms, as if in response to the movements of the imaginary partner, while the song retains its regular rhythm, producing a dynamic juxtaposition of embodied regular and irregular rhythms. The association of “wrestling” and the struggle to move or to stand cut through the repetition of the action, giving it linearity, while changes in pitch and resonance cut through the refrain of the song: another spiral. The practitioner is engaged in a process of energetic development, gradually drawing more and more of the body into

the physical action while fighting not to break the structure of the song. The result is a complex engagement—movement, song, action—or body, voice, affect—which in its totality constitutes what I call song-action.

By the time of the documented presentation at Movement Research, both song fragments—“oh pa say” and “bosay”—had crossed what Rheinberger calls the epistemic boundary and been incorporated into the technical. In other words, as the practitioner I was no longer concerned with the question of how to reproduce the song fragments themselves. Similarly, the physical actions could each be trained on their own in a fairly straightforward way. Thus, what had become interesting at this point was how the song fragments could be integrated with the physical actions to provoke a more complex and multifaceted engagement on the part of the practitioner. The three examples just described can be understood as distinct epistemic objects, which I aimed to share with the Movement Research audience. But what is the significance of these “epistemologica”? Even if they are indeed epistemic objects, previously unknown pathways or possibilities at the edge of known technique, of what use are they? What can be done with them? I do not wish to make any strong claim here for the significance of these particular examples. On the contrary, I prefer to assert the bare minimum: They are contributions to knowledge. Yet even if I do not wish to claim any particular value for these epistemic objects beyond a minimal epistemic expansion, it seems worthwhile to consider how this type of object—a small, new technical element—might be taken up in a larger context, becoming instrumentally useful to other projects.

As noted above, the kind of embodied research discussed here hews close to the extreme of “pure research”: experiments in embodied technique that have no direct instrumental purpose but which may later be applied according to a variety of orientations. It therefore cannot be assessed by any single instrumental criterion. Rather, the main criteria of assessment are those of research: Is it transmissible? Is it new? What can it do? Let us consider each of these, in turn.

Is it transmissible? Above all, new technique must be transmissible to other bodies and contexts. Otherwise it would hardly deserve to be called technique, for the technical is exactly that which can be reproduced. The song-actions described above are transmissible both as distinct epistemic objects and as signposts indicating a field or territory of technique. I often use technical elements from my previous research, such as *Rite of the Butcher*, in classroom teaching and workshops. Most often these elements are smaller and more atomized than the three epistemic objects described above. Thus I am more likely to teach the *kind of vocal resonance* used in

“oh pa say” or the *spine-limbs connection* found in “wrestling the angel” than the whole integrated song-action. However, when I teach someone a physical action, song fragment, or song-action, what I am really intending to transmit is less that specific technical element or object than the more general area of technique in which it is located. The two aspects go together: Training in a specific song fragment is training in a general approach to singing; working on a song-action like “wrestling the angel” is a way of engaging with the technique of song-action. As I continue to develop the technique of song-action, I expand the territory of technical knowledge into which I can make pedagogical invitations. In any case, it should be clear from this discussion that what is documented in the video is not something unique to myself as a practitioner—however ephemeral that single moment of practice might be—but something that can be taught, shared, and transformed by others.

Is it new? A second set of questions asks about the relationship between the documented practice and other practices that may be more or less distant in time and space. Following this line of inquiry one might appeal to any number of analytical frameworks in order to make diachronic and synchronic comparisons between the documented practice and, for example: other presentations made at Movement Research that year, especially those in which dancers vocalized; other practical approaches to “action,” as in Action Theater or the technique of “actioning”; or other attempts to integrate song, movement, and narrative, as in contemporary opera and musical theater. Drawing more finely grained distinctions, one could compare this particular integration of song and action with those developed by other post-Grotowskian practitioners such as those mentioned above. This kind of comparative analysis, which can be used to determine whether the documented technique is substantively new, fall within the conventional range of theater, dance, and performance studies. In contrast, answers to the third question lie outside this domain, in the related but undertheorized domain of embodied research.

What can it do? Rather than comparing existing practices, this question opens onto the discovery of new pathways for practice. Could the song-action technique documented here be used to resolve any problems currently faced by opera or musical theater performers? Could it suggest new compositional strategies for post-dramatic theater? Might this technique be useful to creative arts therapists looking to combine existing therapeutic approaches based in dance and drama? Could it be used to structure a weekly practice session aimed at physical exercise, mindfulness, community building, or any combination of these? These are questions of application, of how

basic research can be applied. In addition to such interdisciplinary questions, there is also a set of highly specialized questions that extend the documented technique in a focused way and which have been the basis for my own embodied research since 2011. These relate to the use of song-action with traditional Jewish songs; the extension of song-action solo practice to duo and trio dynamics; and yet more subtle rhythmic and muscular integrations between song, action, and other layers or zones of embodiment.³⁴ Both sets of questions—the expansive interdisciplinary kind and those that increase specialization—are significant here because they cannot be answered through analysis, only through further embodied research. Their answers are not analytical but empirical. While my own research in song-action has mostly taken place in enclosed, laboratory settings with just a handful of practitioners, there is no reason why the resulting technique could not be adapted for larger groups and more public contexts. While for me song-action has been simultaneously a physical, interpersonal, spiritual, and scholarly practice, there is nothing to stop others from developing it for narrower applications or adapting it to contexts I could not have foreseen.

What I am describing is not radically new insofar as this is how embodied technique has been developed, shared, adapted, transformed, innovated, circulated, discarded, and revisited throughout human history. Yet rarely has the core impulse to discover new technique been foregrounded over its instrumental use. Rarely have embodied practitioners acknowledged the dialectical and mutually sustaining relationship between tradition and innovation, training and research, technical and epistemic. Rarely has embodied technique in its nascent, open-ended, “blue skies” mode been distinguished from the specific aims of the performing, martial, healing, ritual, and other embodied arts. Nor has a strong theoretical connection been developed between the epistemic objects we encounter through embodied practice and those produced by technoscience. Yet the parallel is clear, for the discoveries that so fascinate Rheinberger lead to exactly the same sets of questions: *Is it transmissible? Is it new? What can it do?* In science too, the empirical has often been debased in favor of theory. We now know that technology produces science as much as the reverse. By the same token, it is time to recognize the extent to which embodied research underpins all our theories and philosophies of embodiment.

Writing in the phenomenotechnical mode

I attempted in the previous section to write in a voice or mode that would capture the precision and substance of embodied technique as an instrument

not unlike those that ground the technological sciences. I now want to focus explicitly on this mode and consider how it differs from other, more established modes of written analysis. Clearly we are not dealing here with what Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear call “third-person” methodologies, in which a strict separation between subject and object produces critical distance.³⁵ That kind of analysis is third-person in that it accords primacy to the perception of spectators and to the meaning of a practice as it appears in the public sphere. For this reason, such an analysis is usually more effective when undertaken by someone other than the practitioner. Because of my closeness to and implication in the documented practice, it would be difficult and counterintuitive for me to imagine what the performance could have meant to a spectator. It is not that I could not think about *Rite of the Butcher* in terms of the circulation of signs and symbols, but in doing so I would continually have to fight against the intensive meanings that the practice generated for me as its practitioner. Like many artists, I prefer not to speak in such terms about my own practice. The account given above has more in common with what Varela and Shear dub “first-person” methodologies, but it cannot be identified with any of the approaches they describe. In particular, the approach developed here is importantly distinct from that offered by phenomenology.

Phillip Zarrilli has championed the use of a phenomenological approach in analyzing performance practice. In a boxed text that appears in two of his recent publications, Zarrilli provides a detailed phenomenological account of a few seconds at the beginning of a 2006 performance of Beckett’s *Ohio Impromptu*. Like my account of *Rite of the Butcher* above, Zarrilli speaks about a moment of his own public embodied performance practice, but there are important differences between these two accounts. Zarrilli chooses to narrate those brief moments in which he enters onstage, prepares to perform, and utters the first line of text. Furthermore he describes a performance that—like other works by Beckett and Ota Shogo staged by Zarrilli—is performed in radical stillness and/or slowness. As a result, Zarrilli’s description emphasizes interior bodily perception:

My attention shifts to my breath. I follow my in-breath as it slowly drops in and down to my lower abdomen. Keeping my primary attention on my in-breath and out-breath, I open my auditory awareness to [another performer] about three feet to my left.³⁶

In keeping with the phenomenological tradition of Merleau-Ponty, Zarrilli’s emphasis is on his own perception and experience. His aim is to

help the reader understand “what it is like” for him in that moment. To accomplish this, he necessarily leaves out an analysis of the layers of embodied technique that make the narrated moment possible. Thus one does not learn, from Zarrilli’s account, what makes his in-breath at the start of *Ohio Impromptu* different from an ordinary, everyday in-breath. The practitioner’s background in Indian martial arts, as well as *taiji*, yoga, and other areas of technique, discussed at length in the rest of these books, is necessarily excluded from the phenomenological account. Precisely because they have been mastered and sedimented to the point of unconscious embodiment, these layers of technique cannot be articulated in the phenomenological mode.

Zarrilli’s use of phenomenology is developed with great insight by Deborah Middleton and Franc Chamberlain in an essay that argues for the value of Varela and Shear’s first-person methodologies in the context of performance and performer training (as well as spiritual practice). Citing the same passage, Middleton and Chamberlain point to the technical expertise at work in Zarrilli’s practice by comparing it with an account given by Don Hanlon Johnson of an experience in which he awakens to bodily presence. “Johnson seems to be describing an early moment in his awareness training,” they note, “Zarrilli a much later one.”³⁷ Indeed, one can attempt to read phenomenological accounts technically by asking what layers of embodied knowledge and habit had to have been incorporated in order to make that particular experience possible.³⁸ But the approach taken here is distinct from those articulated by Varela and Shear, Zarrilli, and Middleton and Chamberlain insofar as I am not particularly concerned with consciousness, experience, or “what it is like” to engage in a particular moment of specialized practice. As Middleton and Chamberlain suggest, focusing on lived experience demands “a shift away from externally-oriented object-consciousness” and “from research which makes truth-claims for consensual reality.”³⁹ In contrast, my goal here is to offer an account that is firmly grounded in the experience of the practitioner while nevertheless making qualified claims on consensual reality. I have taken Rheinberger’s social epistemology as my model because it describes an experimental context in which the privileging of the researcher’s perspective goes hand in hand with such claims.

My account of “epistemologica” moves between first- and third-person pronouns. To name this particular mode of analysis and articulation I borrow a term from Rheinberger, who takes it from Gaston Bachelard: *phenomenotechnique*. A phenomenotechnical account is one that thoroughly analyzes the technical in order to trace the contours of its border with the

epistemic. Phenomenotechnique describes both the technical and the epistemic in terms of the line or boundary where they come together. It is more than an account of the technical, the merely known, the sedimented premise or tool, but also more than a mere evocation of the unknown. According to Rheinberger (and Bachelard), this is the kind of account that best allows us to understand scientific research, which most often unfolds at the point where technological instruments and epistemic objects make contact. “Instruments stand at the heart of th[e] epistemic ensemble in modern science,” writes Rheinberger. “On the one hand the instrument embodies an already acquired knowledge; on the other, it helps produce the object as technophenomenon.”⁴⁰ In embodied research, the instrument is technical but not technological: It is the known technique that structures embodied practice. What is produced by this technique is also embodied, but it is not yet technical: an epistemic object, new technique in-the-making. A phenomenotechnical account describes both sides of this equation, articulating a precise research edge. Hence “[p]henomenotechnique *extends* phenomenology.”⁴¹ Without a thorough explication of the technique that structures practice—even if such explication can never be comprehensive—first-person descriptions of experience and perception remain incomplete, ungrounded, unspecified. To describe an epistemic object, it is necessary to begin from the experimental system that produces it.⁴²

A phenomenotechnical account uses the language of technique to point toward what is yet unknown. It begins from technical language. I therefore call for a return to the language of technique, which is so often elided outside the studio or rehearsal room. When performers (or athletes) are asked to describe what they do on record, often they speak in general terms and avoid the kind of technical analysis that they would use in a context of practical work. Perhaps in deference to the gap between practical expertise and general interest, highly skilled practitioners tend to assume that most people will not care about the technical details that structure their practice.⁴³ But a serious encounter between critical discourse and embodied knowledge cannot take place until the language of technique makes a substantial return. This encounter, which finds a strong analogy in the engagement of social epistemologists with scientific discourse, must assume with Rheinberger that the technical language of the practitioner gets at the “aboutness” of the work in a way that critical and spectatorial analysis cannot.⁴⁴ Yet most technical accounts do not go as far as the phenomenotechnical mode. Especially where the focus is pedagogy, technical accounts tend to emphasize the known over the unknown, stopping short of describing epistemic objects in their unknown emergence. Such accounts

may even mislead the reader by suggesting an illusory completeness that conceals the provisional and processual nature of knowledge.⁴⁵

What we need is a mode of analysis that uses thick technical description to point to unfolding epistemic objects: a mode that defines a field of inquiry by tracing its research edge and which thereby returns cultural analysis to an engagement with philosophical realism at the level of embodiment. The phenomenotechnical mode assumes philosophical realism. Because human embodiment is relatively reliable, embodied practice is not merely a frame for the circulation of signs but also an empirical investigation into repeatable pathways of technique. This brings us to a further distinction of the phenomenotechnical mode: the way in which it both does and does not privilege the voice of the practitioner. In contrast to third-person approaches, the phenomenotechnical mode does accord a certain kind of privilege to the practitioner. Far from being suspect because of their intimacy with the practice, the practitioner is understood as having special access to the technical and epistemic objects in play by virtue of this closeness. However, this privilege is eminently contestable. Unlike the phenomenological mode, the phenomenotechnical mode does not prioritize experience, perception, or “what it is like” to be or do something—phenomena which, though they may be shared to some degree through language, are not open to contestation or validation.

Because they cannot be contested, phenomenological accounts alone are insufficient to delineate a shared field of research. Varela and Shear acknowledge this problem in their discussion of first-person methodologies. To resolve it, they suggest the need for a “second-person” position located between first-person accounts of experience and more distanced third-person accounts. For Varela and Shear, this role is filled primarily by a teacher or mentor, as when “a researcher seeks the mediation of a more experienced tutor to improve and progress his skill as a scientist.”⁴⁶ This works when we are dealing with research in the weaker sense, where an individual researcher makes discoveries relative to their own prior understanding. But if we want to consider examples of research in the strong sense, where a network of researchers works together over time to produce genuinely new knowledge, then we need to understand the second-person position not as an individual teacher or mentor but as a community. We might then say that the embodied researcher has the privilege of speaking first about what has happened, but this must be subjected to analysis by others with related expertise. Hence the phenomenotechnical mode is one that accords *contestable privilege* to the practitioner. The practitioner has (or ought to have) the first opportunity to offer an account of the practice, against which future

accounts will be contrasted. But the development of consensus about the structure of a given practice will arise out of a process of contestation that involves a community or network of practitioner-researchers working in related areas. This is precisely the position from which a laboratory scientist speaks: Because of the scientist's closeness to the experiment, they are able to offer a first interpretation of its results. While questions of bias and vested interest may be raised, there is no general assumption that scientists are untrustworthy when analyzing their own research, as one sometimes finds in discussions of embodied research. However, a scientist's announcement of research results is never the final word on "what happened." Rather, it is the start of a communal process that unfolds through shared documents and discourse, as well as further experimentation, in which the question of what happened is explicitly contested. It is time for us to understand embodied research in these terms, not in order to claim that embodied research is science (it is not), but in order to demonstrate that it is in fact *research*.

When we speak of research in embodied practice and the embodied arts, let us not fall into the illusion of a unified public sphere populated by atomized individuals. For between those scales intervene all the institutions of *disciplinarity*, by which I mean not the ossified gatekeepers of established power-knowledge but the communities, networks, hubs, and nascent movements that organize themselves around shared commitments to particular fields and pathways of knowledge. This is the shifting "patchwork" to which Rheinberger refers. If we are going to speak only of individuals and society at large, then we may as well not use the term research, for research has no meaning without the differential incommensurability of its varied fields. In the above account of song-action, I speak as an embodied researcher, according myself a limited and contestable privilege in relation to the technique that structures the documented practice. I am the only one who was there during the whole research process. My account, along with the cited video document, is now offered up to a larger community for contestation or validation. But the community to which I offer my account is not the "we" of an imaginary public or even the "we" of those who happened to be in attendance at Judson Church that night. It is a *disciplinary* we, grounded in shared knowledge and expertise and with its own technical vocabulary, research paradigms, and critical debates. It is precisely those practitioner-researchers who have already been working for some time with physical actions, folk songs, extended voice technique, imaginative associations, and body-voice integration who will produce the most critical and incisive evaluations of my account. They alone can work toward consensus regarding the epistemic objects I have proposed and their potential uses.

Coda

The phrase “colors like knives” comes from the original poem–text spoken in *Rite of the Butcher*.⁴⁷ In that poem, the phrase suggests the image of a god who produces the world through a process of iterative differentiation, through the redaction of colors out of an originary darkness (or light): Instead of a word or *logos*, the world begins from color. In the present analysis this phrase takes on a second meaning, linked to Karen Barad’s peculiarly violent metaphor of the “agential cut” as that which produces the subject/object distinction in scientific laboratory research.⁴⁸ If performance technique can indeed produce new and specific epistemic objects, as my interpretation of Rheinberger suggests, then my claim is that the color of the voice (for example)—its timbre or resonant quality—operates in the epistemic space of embodied practice as a knife operates in an anatomical dissection. The voice in this sense cuts not only into the time and space of performance and into audience perception but also into an epistemic field constituted by the relative reliability of human embodiment. This voice is a technical object, an experimental apparatus that makes an agential cut as sharp as that of the biologist’s microscope or the surgeon’s knife.

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- 1 Originally published as “Colors Like Knives: Embodied Research and Phenomenotechnique in *Rite of the Butcher*,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 27.2 (2017): 195–215. This item is licensed under a CC-BY: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. The digital version of this article contains several full-color photographs.
 - 2 For these recent debates in music, see John Croft, “Composition is not Research,” *Tempo*, 69/272 (2015): 6–11; and responses by Reeves (50–59), Pace (60–70), and Croft (71–7) in *Tempo* 70/275 (2016). On the “work-concept” in music, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Compare these debates in music with those found in *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, eds. Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones, Baz Kershaw, and Angela Piccini (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
 - 3 The reference to the video, with additional information, is given in note 17.
 - 4 Movement Research at Judson Church: www.movementresearch.org/performanceevents/judsonchurch/ (accessed 22 February 2016). With Massimiliano Balduzzi, I was an Artist-in-Residence at Movement Research from 2010 to 2012.
 - 5 Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1998): 52. See also Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
 - 6 Martin, *Critical Moves*: 37, 39.
 - 7 In Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015), I offer the historically significant work of Tirumalai

Krishnamacharya, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and Jerzy Grotowski as examples of pioneering research in embodied technique. In Ben Spatz, "Citing Musicality: Performance Knowledge in the Gardzienice Archive," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 7.2 (2013): 221–35, I examine a set of published multimedia videos as traces of research while also drawing on my own period of apprenticeship with Gardzienice. In Ben Spatz, "Massimiliano Balduzzi: Research in Physical Training for Performers," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 5.3 (2014): 270–90, I analyze a set of video documents produced by Balduzzi and myself as part of our sustained partnership. These three publications represent three points along a spectrum of distance between myself and the object of study: historical (Stanislavsky), participatory-ethnographic (Gardzienice), and collaborative (Balduzzi). The current essay takes that trajectory to its logical conclusion with an analysis of my own solo practice.

- 8 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 21.
- 9 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *An Epistemology of the Concrete: Twentieth-Century Histories of Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 224. This collection of essays builds upon and extends the arguments of the earlier monograph. I call the technical and the epistemic quasi-philosophical categories because for Rheinberger they are first of all practical and concrete elements of a laboratory setup (e.g. microscope and protein or model organism and gene), but they can also be linked to philosophical debates over realism as I suggest below.
- 10 Rheinberger, *Toward a History*: 30.
- 11 "Technique consists of discoveries about specific material possibilities that can be repeated with some degree of reliability, so that what works in one context may also work in another" (Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 42). Although their technologies allow for quantitative repetition and hence for the scientific method, the artisan intuition of scientists is far more similar to that of artists and embodied practitioners than has usually been acknowledged. This has been one of the major arguments of social epistemology, sociology of scientific knowledge, and science studies.
- 12 Rheinberger, *Toward a History*: 141.
- 13 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Forming and Being Informed: Hans-Jörg Rheinberger in Conversation with Michael Schwab," in *Experimental Systems: Future Knowledge in Artistic Research*, ed. Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013): 216. This volume is an important precedent for my argument, although it does not take the decisive step of identifying artistic technique with Rheinberger's concept of the technical. This is likely because of the dominance of the "work" concept (see Goehr, *Imaginary Museum*) in music and visual arts, which effectively hides technical knowledge behind its artifacts. Hence Schwab's interpretation of technique and the technical is much narrower than mine (see 10, 207). Witzgall and others in this volume also engage with Rheinberger's concepts.
- 14 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Forming and Being Informed": 199.
- 15 Andrew Pickering, more than Rheinberger, emphasizes the embodied technique possessed by scientists:

[T]he open-ended dance of agency that is scientific practice becomes effectively frozen at moments of interactive stabilization into relatively fixed cultural *choreography*, encompassing, on the one side, captures and framings of material agency, and, on the other, regularized, routinized, standardized, disciplined human practices.

- The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 102, emphasis original.
- 16 Rheinberger, “Forming and Being Informed”: 205.
- 17 Ben Spatz, *Rite of the Butcher* (2011): urbanresearchtheater.com/2011/02/21/rite-of-the-butcher-desert-version/. This is a complete video of the presentation, recorded by Movement Research staff, with what I consider the “minimal density” of annotation for a research document: title of the work, names of creators and practitioners, and burnt-in time code for stable referencing. The following areas of embodied technique are presented in the video: silent physical action (0:00–3:10 and 10:10–10:40); spoken text with physical action (3:10–5:02); song-action (50:02–9:24 and 9:55–10:10); and movement improvisation (9:24–9:55). Although an audiovisual document cannot provide a comprehensive record of this technique, it affords access to some aspects—such as alignment of the body and quality of the voice—with a level of detail and stability that cannot be achieved either through live encounter or through the written word. Without suggesting that the cited video is in any way identical to the practice that took place on that date, I treat it as an archival record of particular repeatable pathways in embodied technique. As in other fields, it is not the local instance of an epistemic object that carries significance as a research output but its documented trace. Hence, the relevant question is not what the video document misses but what it captures. Additional multimedia documentation of *Rite of the Butcher* can be found at www.urbanresearchtheater.com/
- 18 This lineage has gaps. Grotowski worked not with Stanislavsky but with his students, and Balduzzi worked not with Grotowski but with people who had worked with him. I have also worked with many other practitioners who use the term “action” in technical ways, some of whom were influenced directly or indirectly by Grotowski. The three points “Stanislavsky–Grotowski–Balduzzi” represent moments in the development of the technique of action that hold particular resonance for me insofar as I associated specific questions, choices, and developments with each.
- 19 See Ben Spatz, “Stanislavsky’s Threshold: Tracking a Historical Paradigm Shift in Acting,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 29.1 (2014): 91—a revised version of a section in *What a Body Can Do*: 122–32.
- 20 On Gardzienice, see Paul Allain, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997); Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge, *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Spatz “Citing Musicality.” On the Workcenter, see *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (New York: Routledge, 1997); a special issue of *TDR* 52.2 (2008); and Kris Salata, *The Unwritten Grotowski: Theory and Practice of the Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 2012). To grasp the influence of this turn to traditional song cultures in contemporary theater practice it is important also to consider the New World Performance Laboratory, Song of the Goat Theatre, Theatre Zar, Farm in the Cave, and other companies influenced by Grotowski, his Workcenter, and Gardzienice. These practices, in turn, should be understood in the context of developments in ethnomusicology and the natural voice movement—see Caroline Bithell, *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 55–63.
- 21 Richards referred to the temporal development of a song as a “spiral” in his plenary dialog with Daphne Brooks at Performance Studies International #19

(Stanford University, 2013). I have not been able to locate a reference to this phenomenon in his publications in English, but I consider it a valuably concrete evocation of Richards' experience of songs as epistemic objects. Referring to a very different musical idiom, Thomas F. DeFrantz describes a similar spiral phenomenon:

House music also tends to work with sparingly articulated referents, evocative lyrical hooks that are open-ended enough to repeat over several minutes without significant elaboration. In this expressive space that values repetition over change, details of harmonic and rhythmic structural shifts matter greatly. More than anything, house music relies upon the movement of the bass to generate sonic drama.

DeFrantz, "Hip-Hop Habitus v.2.0" in *Black Performance Theory*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 233.

22 Thomas Richards, *Heart of Practice: Within the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards* (New York: Routledge, 2008): 45.

23 Ibid.: 134.

24 "[T]raditions are research. From generation to generation they must advance, develop, otherwise they will die. Knowledge is never complete. It needs to advance substantially otherwise it will descend into mechanical repetition" (ibid.: 52). Compare with Rheinberger:

[T]he temporal coherence of an experimental system is granted by recurrence, by repetition, not by anticipation and forestalling. Its future development, on the other hand, if it is not to end in idling, depends upon groping and grasping for differences. Together, this adds up to what can be called differential reproduction. [...] Reproducing an experimental system means keeping alive the conditions—objects of inquiry, instrumentation, crafts and skills—through which it remains "productive." All innovation, in the end and in a very basic sense, is the result of such reproduction.

(*Toward a History*: 75)

25 Here I add a third category to Mark Fleishman's definition of Performance as Research as "a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels, in search of a series of differences." Fleishman, "The Difference of Performance as Research," *Theatre Research International* 37.1 (2012): 29.

26 For the latter two terms, see *Toward a History* (141) and *Epistemology of the Concrete* (233).

27 Spatz, *Rite of the Butcher*: 1:24–1:59 (primary version in silence) and 3:38–4:26 (variation with spoken text).

28 An anonymous reviewer of this article queried my reference to the "core" of the body as well as the notion of "sufficiently similar" skills in the previous paragraph. To what extent can such references be made precise? I cannot do more than reiterate my two main points: first, that embodied technique can only ever be relatively reliable and that something like "the core of the body" functions either as established technique or as epistemic object in any given experimental system; and second, that this writing is offered alongside the above-cited video document, which provides an entirely different way of accessing the practice and can be used to clarify or critique what is written here.

- 29 On the latter, see “Irregular Rhythms,” this volume. Gardzienice’s *cheironomia* technique has been further developed, in varying ways, by Teatr Chorea (www.chorea.com.pl); by Anna-Helena McLean (www.moonfool.com); and in my ongoing Judaica project (www.urbanresearchtheater.com). This diversity of developments suggests that the original research in Gardzienice uncovered a highly generative area worthy of further exploration.
- 30 Spatz, *Rite of the Butcher*: 5:02–7:25.
- 31 In conventional musical terms, the melody is *ti sol mi sol ti sol* followed by a half-step rise to *do la mi la do la*. One could also transcribe this as B-G-E-G-B-G / C-A-E-A-C-A. The former notation (tonic sol-fa) is preferable because it emphasizes the relative intervals between notes rather than the kind of absolute pitch specification favored by European musical notation. Thanks to Scott Mc Laughlin for help with this note.
- 32 Rosemary Malague contrasts the abusively heterosexist pedagogy of Sanford Meisner with the explicitly feminist performance art of Karen Finley in *An Actress Prepares: Women and “the Method”* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 113–14. Erotic associations also played an important role in Grotowski’s shift from the theatrical production to “art as vehicle.” After Ryszard Cieslak’s death, Grotowski revealed that the actor’s famous work in *The Constant Prince* was based on “a time of love from his early youth” in which “sensuality” became a “carnal prayer”—see “From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle,” in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Thomas Richards (New York: Routledge, 1995):123; and see “This Extraordinary Power,” this volume.
- 33 Spatz, *Rite of the Butcher*: 7:44–9:24.
- 34 For the development of this research, see Ben Spatz, “Molecular Identities: Digital Archives and Decolonial Judaism in a Laboratory of Song,” *Performance Research* 24.1 (2019): 66–79.
- 35 “First-person Methodologies: What, Why, How?” in *The View from Within: First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, eds. Francisco Varela and Jonathan Shear (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999), also available as *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6.2–3 (1999): 1–14. My thanks to Tomoyo Kawano for providing me with this reference.
- 36 “Performing Reader in Beckett’s *Ohio Impromptu*” in *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 43–4; reprinted in *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, eds. Phillip B. Zarrilli, Jerri Daboo, and Rebecca Loukes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 20–1.
- 37 Deborah Middleton and Franc Chamberlain, “Entering the Heart of Experience: First Person Accounts in Performance and Spirituality,” *Performance and Spirituality* 3.1 (2012): 105.
- 38 This is in part what Sarah Ahmed does in her queer re-reading of Merleau-Ponty in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 39 Middleton and Chamberlain, “Entering the Heart”: 108.
- 40 Rheinberger, *Epistemology of the Concrete*: 30.
- 41 Bachelard in Rheinberger, *Epistemology of the Concrete*: 31, italics original.
- 42 I have borrowed the term phenomenotechnique from Rheinberger because it seems to point to exactly this type of analysis, but other concepts might be employed to similar ends. Thomas Csordas has attempted to combine Bourdieu’s understanding of *habitus* with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology through the concept of “somatic modes of attention”—see “Somatic Modes of Attention,”

- Cultural Anthropology* 8.2 (May 1993): 138; and for an application to embodied technique, see Jen Tarr, “Habit and Conscious Control: Ethnography and Embodiment in the Alexander Technique,” *Ethnography* 9.4 (2008): 477–97. More recently, the term *somatechnics* has been coined to “highlight the inextricability of soma and techné, of ‘the body’ (as a culturally intelligible construct) and the techniques (dispositifs and ‘hard technologies’) in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed”—see Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray, eds., *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologicalisation of Bodies* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009): 3.
- 43 It is useful to note that Bachelard encountered the same problem with scientists, begging them “to make available their daily laboratory experience, the daily dramas of their daily work, to the philosophers of science, so that they could reflect properly about the practice of contemporary science.” Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, “Gaston Bachelard and the Notion of ‘Phenomenotechnique,’” *Perspectives on Science* 13.3 (2005): 317–18; cf. Rheinberger, *Epistemology of the Concrete*: 28. “Tell us what you think,” he implored, “not when you quit the laboratory, but during the hours when you leave ordinary life behind you and enter scientific life” (cited in Rheinberger, “Gaston Bachelard”: 218). This is what I often find myself saying to skilled performers undertaking Practice as Research projects in academia: Before you attempt to explain your practice by reference to Foucault or Merleau-Ponty, tell me what you do in the studio. Explicate the technical skills that you teach and describe the problems you face in practice. *Talk shop*, for that is where your primary expertise lies.
- 44 “The bench work language of the scientific practitioner translates with much more appropriateness what his work is actually about than what a particular philosophy of science declares him to be doing.” Rheinberger, *Toward a History*: 109.
- 45 Again, this is a problem for textbooks and public disseminations in every field, not just embodied technique. “[A]s soon as scientists go public, they have a strong tendency to leave all that [technological mediation] behind and to convey a picture of what they are doing as if the instruments were absent—or transparent.” Rheinberger, “Forming and Being Informed”: 204.
- 46 Varela and Shear, “First-person Methodologies”: 9. Middleton and Chamberlain also identify the second-person position as an experienced teacher in their reading of Don Hanlon Johnson’s account of a workshop with Charlotte Selver (“Entering the Heart”: 98–9).
- 47 See *Rite of the Butcher*, this volume.
- 48 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), offers a reading of particle physics that closely resembles Rheinberger’s model of the technical and the epistemic. One important difference is in how they figure what I have called the technical/epistemic boundary or “research edge,” a poststructuralist reworking of the subject/object relationship, which Barad calls a “cut.” When I conceptualize something like “wrestling the angel” as an element of song-action, I could be said to make a “cut” in reality, bestowing a name upon a particular zone of my own embodied technique, naming a small fraction of my habitus. Every element of embodied technique would then derive from a cut of this kind: a roundhouse kick, a mime walk, a pirouette, a focused breath, etc. But I am uneasy with the narrowness of the metaphor of cutting, which in Barad derives from practices of quantitative measurement and which may be less applicable to other kinds of research. Some research cuts; other research traces, interprets, gropes, dances, charts, invites, invokes...

3

MOVEMENT: FRAGMENTS

First Showing (2000)

I have often worked at the margins of dance, desiring deeply to move but in some ways alienated from the ideals and assumptions of dance as an artistic and aesthetic genre. Well before I discovered “physical” or psychophysical theater, I approached movement in a theatrical manner, as in this early attempt at a choreographic work arising from the unavoidably dramatic bodily movement of laughter and crying. Although I didn’t have the tools then to structure precise physical actions, my comments about emotion, physicality, and musicality prefigure the post-Grotowskian work I later discovered.¹

This piece is primarily about laughter, but it’s really about those wild physical explosions that interrupt our lives, including laughter, crying, sneezing, coughing, etc. I want to avoid too much reliance on the emotions behind laughter and crying, although that is of course an important element. But I mostly want to focus on the physicality of it. To some extent I’m also interested in playing with the musicality of laughter, I mean the sound of it. My first realization was that laughing, crying, sneezing and coughing all share a unique and strange relationship to everyday conversation. They are these physical spasms that interrupt daily life and,

although we may create a space for them in our lives, they can never be part of normal communication, because they are wild and uncontrollable on a physical level. My second important is that *laughter is leaping and crying is falling*.

My plan is to have a laughter section, then a crying section, and then a section that combines the two. On top of that development will be a steady increase in another type of spasm (sneezing/coughing) which interrupts the more emotional paths of the other two. This builds and builds until it finally takes over, after which everything will die down leaving one last laugh in the dark. I planned to do the laughter section for Tuesday, but what I have is not quite enough, so I'll probably spend another session on that. Then I'll go on to crying and will hopefully have the general laughing/crying layout for second showings.

Laughter should take us into places of ecstasy and revelry and cruelty. I want to work with individual laughter and the physicality of it, and how it resembles crying and choking and constipation. I also want to work with the dynamics of group laughter and exclusivity, though I don't want to get into clichéd images of one person sadly watching a group moving in unison. I'm interested in mimicking as opposed to laughing together. If you laugh and someone laughs with you, it's fun. If you laugh and someone imitates you, that's one of the harshest insults a person can give. Crying should take us into slower, curved movement. Laughter does go into leaping, as I thought, but that always has to come down via falling. This makes sense, because the transition from laughter to tears is also very subtle. Both laughter and crying involve leaning against one another. Then there are the spasms of wildness, which include laughter and tears that burst out of you when you're trying to be still, but also non-emotional spasms like the ones mentioned above.

In terms of imagery, I've been thinking of the dancers as random incarnations. They go between neutral moments of pure symbol and taking on slight character. Whenever they laugh, for example, they become people. I want to take the beautiful images (and sounds) of laughter, like the image of a person's head being thrown back gleefully, and spread it all over the stage onto different bodies. The piece "takes place" in every setting where laughter or crying takes place, from a lecture-hall where a student is trying dutifully not to crack up, to a midnight kitchen where someone is crying alone.

1 Excerpt from "First Showings," unpublished reflection piece (2000).

The Door is Open (2004)

I have written elsewhere about my experiences with Gardzienice and the Workcenter, but not about the workshops I took in Poland with Rena Mirecka. Although they added up to barely a month of work, these were equally pivotal to my understanding of embodied practice and research. In the fall of 2004, I was living in Wrocław on a Fulbright fellowship. All my effort at that time was dedicated to resolving what I experienced as a painful division between the work of the actor/performer and that of the teacher/director. I began to lead an informal theater ensemble, which I called “Badawczy Teatr Miejski” (Urban Research Theater), holding rehearsals in my apartment and outdoors, while at the same time participating in workshops led by Mirecka, Zygmunt Molik, and others at the Grotowski Institute. While navigating between these two contexts, I made a discovery that has informed everything I have done since.¹

27 October

I opened a door today. Or a door was opened during that workshop with Rena. Something magic. An answer that is a presence. Everything I already have, only this time do it for real. Don't give up. Don't say, “This isn't the right one.” In the work, in the body. I can do it for hours. Actually training. No more waiting. This is discovery. Playing at home, I finally know how. Like a child again. Concentration is easy. You just realize that you can't do it any better if you try harder or think of the future. All you have is what you have. Enough to start.

It was a great rehearsal. I followed my instinct the whole way through. I led us into physical isolations, silly and serious, then moving through the room, then touching objects, and then while they were moving and playing with objects, I played music. I had already moved to that same music, before rehearsal started, and that made me understand everything in a completely different way. Later I led them outside, still in silence, and we didn't run or walk but did a sort of playful jumping step all over the square. I knew how to lead this because it was what I wanted to do. For the first time I was really part of the exercises, not just showing what I have already done but actually learning and trying things. At the end we sang to a tree and leaned against it and kissed it and stood in a circle around it. I understood finally what it is that Rena and others have. They have their

own physical work, their own explorations which they can tap into, and that allows them to lead into liminal things with confidence, because they are doing it for themselves.

19 November

After the improvisation tonight, we sat around in a circle on blankets. Rena was pleased by the work and how it had begun on a theme but led somewhere completely different. She said that I had touched many possibilities and that I needed to choose which one, and with which partner, to continue my work. She pointed to the moment with Z. when I had made a crazy noise. She said “At many different times today I believed you, but I don’t know whether you understand the importance of what you did. But you must know what moments were the most important for you.”

I think I understand now what she meant at the end of the first workshop, when she said that it was visible that I don’t do daily physical work. When I come in at the beginning I am never open physically. I am always very much in my mind and my body is not ready for serious work. However, if we do rigorous warmups and I push myself, then my body opens up quickly. After the warmups today, before the improvisation, I was already moving and looking and feeling completely differently than at the beginning, and that’s what enabled me to do all that work. So it makes sense that she told me: “You have the ability to meet yourself.” I am not always with myself but I can meet myself. That feels accurate. Right now I still need a director, to make me meet myself.

5 December

The door is still open, and something big came through. It didn’t come through today, it must have been coming through all month, or it came through silently and I didn’t notice, but here it is.

There were eight people working on the climbing, using five basic positions, climbing and climbing on each other for 45 minutes with the *Fight Club* soundtrack playing. The four who were in Rena’s workshop were totally in it all the time. They looked like they could go on forever. The four who were not would go in and out, stop themselves, and most obviously they would start to talk about what they were doing. You could literally see them stopping themselves. It was like this all day. At one point the non-Rena people were all sitting on the side watching the others work, and it was a literal illustration of what Grotowski said about training the actor not to “do” but to “resign from not-doing.” The non-Rena people were all engaged in not-doing, even

though the exercise space was open and the game continued. The Rena people had resigned from their own idea of tiredness and boredom. They weren't thinking about what they were doing and so there was no question of being bored or too much repetition or of exhausting the possibilities or of "running out" of ideas. It was the same right at the beginning. I began the day with us just walking, nine of us in the room around a candle in the center, and the sky outside turning dark blue from black. Must have been about a half hour. The Rena people walked and walked and then ran and jumped. The rhythm changed but they were in the game from beginning to end and there was no question of anything else. The non-Rena people walked and stopped and slowed down, they stepped out to go to the bathroom or get tea and you could see their non-presence stopping them from participating.

It's not a matter of ability, it's a matter of concentration, that's the essential thing, but it's a sort of concentration-in-the-body. It's not mental concentration, it has to do with having your entire body alive and responding to your instant desires, exactly like an animal. Suddenly I understand all the metaphors. And I also understand how I must have looked in that other workshop last year. Everything I did was mechanical. I would fill each action but not fulfill it. I would do each movement but my mind was somewhere else. At that point I honestly didn't realize that such a thing was visible. Did I learn that just from Rena? I don't know, but I understand it now and I will always know the difference in myself and recognize that it doesn't matter whether I am doing a cool move, it matters whether I am working. I understand now what it means to work.

1 Unpublished journal entries (2004). On the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices and the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, see "Vessels," "Burning Up," and "Citing Musicality," this volume; as well as Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 132–53.

Letters to an Empty Room (2008)

After returning from Poland to New York City, I struggled to put into practice what I had learned. My desire to *work*, in the sense described above, was insatiable; but the city offered no more support than it had before my journey, nor could I find many companions who felt the same hunger. The following excerpts are from the Urban Research Theater newsletter I sent out each month while working with a

small group of people and eventually just with a single studio partner, Michele Farbman. They show how we worked patiently, in various “emptied spaces,” to explore what it means to meet with oneself in a practice structured by movement and song. Eventually I collected selections from this newsletter in a self-published book called *Letters to an Empty Room*.¹

Michele said: A practice is something you do every day. But what do we do every day? The repeatable performance structure itself is a practice, of course—but so is the larger, more flexible structure of our overall work schedule. Is it “the work” only when we are on our feet, singing and moving? Or is it the work as long as Michele and I are in that empty, ugly classroom together? Is it the work when we meet for coffee? Is it the work when I send out emails?

Two understandings of the space in which we work: Inner space and outer space. The space of “doer” and the space of “outside eye.” I call the inner space the *yolk*. In that space, words are sparse and actions are essential. In the yolk-space, we can go for hours without a single word, communicating through nonverbal (technical) exchange. The yolk-space is the heart of the work. Without the yolk, there is no work. The yolk is the embryo. The yolk is where the new is born. But the egg-white-space, the “albumen,” is also essential. This is the place of interface with the world. In this white-space we discuss technical, personal, and philosophical matters. The white-space is the frame of the work. It protects the yolk, nurtures its dense tenderness. The white-space is home to the outside eye: the strategist, teacher, director, or guide. It is where spectators or witnesses sit. Other kinds of guests—fellow practitioners and students—may enter the yolk with us.

The border of the yolk is clear. In the space / out of the space. Working / resting. The borders of the white-space are fluid, flexible, runny like the white of the egg. There are different kinds of “resting,” depending on our proximity to the yolk. We can lie just outside the yolk, near its border, feeling its vibrations in silence. A bit farther from the yolk we can sit up, begin to use words, begin to ask what our practice might look like from the outside. Farther still and we begin to scheme, maybe take the conversation to a coffee shop or a diner. Maybe we adjourn for the day. Maybe we take a day off. Separated by hundreds of miles, we are still somehow in the white-space. The white-space has no border. It fills the world. Close to the yolk / far from the yolk.

At certain times it is possible for both of us to be in the yolk together. Such a period can last for minutes, hours, or days. I experience such times as a reward for the technical labor that has gone before. It is like the crest of a wave, giving us permission to play as children. Freedom. These moments are timeless—but they always end. One or both of us must come out of the yolk, blink, and look around. Rest. Consider. Even theorize. Plan for the future. Cultivate the yolk from outside. Assess our position on the technical ladder.

Two parts of the egg of our work: yolk and albumen. A border defined by the techniques we have cultivated. A yellow heart, the site of fertilization, the zone of creation; and a white exterior, our work schedule, our commitment to continue, our ability to carve out space for the yolk and to protect it. And a shell: our face to the world, sending out emails, writing a newsletter, building a website and a mailing list.

1 Excerpts from *Letters to an Empty Room: Meditations on Performance Practice* (Blurb Books, 2010): www.blurb.com/b/1409809-letters-to-an-empty-room/

Irregular Rhythms (2014)

Between 2009 and 2013, I had the honor to work intensively with Italian teacher, performer, and director Massimiliano Balduzzi, from whom I learned two vital and distinct but related crafts: how to structure physical work, including intensive physical training, and how to develop a theatrical montage or composition out of embodied research. These skills filled a gap for me, allowing me to link the pure flow of song I had been developing to more structured and manipulable movement sequences, images, narratives, and text. This excerpted article was published alongside a set of videos in the online Routledge Performance Archive, which document Massimiliano's unique approach to physical training.¹

The work on impulse and “stops” forms the basis for another aspect of Balduzzi's work that is less explicit in his teaching, but which I consider equally important. This is his approach to *irregular rhythm* as a basic dimension of variation for exercise-actions. While a student of Balduzzi may well hear the words opposition, association, impulse, and rhythm during even the shortest workshop or class, the specific irregularity of the rhythms Balduzzi

proposes is less overt. By irregular rhythm, I mean the opposite of a musical or regular rhythm in which successive beats set up a pattern of expectation. The dominant sense of rhythm in Balduzzi's training and practice is staccato and irregular, offering continual surprise rather than continuity and flow. What I am calling irregular rhythm is a physical equivalent of what musicians call syncopation, which David Temperley defines as "a conflict between stress and metre."² In the present context, there is no suggestion of an underlying musical score against which rhythmic variation occurs; and still less of Temperley's distinction between composer and performer. However, it could be that the irregularity of impulses in Balduzzi's physical practice unfolds against a backdrop of what Temperley would call a "deep structure" of regular meter, which the practitioner continually sets up in order to break.

Pedagogically, Balduzzi coaches performers to find a wide variety of rhythms within a single exercise-action. In an exercise-action like "going down with the head," for example, rhythmic variation can be a source of tremendous freedom for the practitioner, while still maintaining the physical precision of the exercise—which as I have suggested involves both the external shaping and internal tensions of the body. Although Balduzzi's practice sometimes verges on continuous flow, it is primarily grounded in a strong, irregular, syncopated sense of rhythm that is full of surprise alternations, sudden tensions, and releases. Balduzzi's work on irregular rhythm is visible in the dynamics of "run and stop," where it appears in perhaps its most basic form. But it can also be seen throughout the documented practice: in the exercise-actions, the floor work, the impulses/isolations, and the final "open work." Notably, in the work on impulses and isolations, the exploration of rhythm takes precedence over the shaping of gesture and the direction of force. Rather than developing an alphabet or vocabulary of isolations, Balduzzi prioritizes the sharpness and clarity of the impulse across a range of movements from small to large.³

Balduzzi's use of irregular rhythmic variation across this range of movement technique marks a distinctive contribution to the field of actor training and to embodied technique more generally. I am not suggesting that the use of irregular rhythm is new to physical training or even to European physical theater training. On the contrary, it is only by situating Balduzzi's work on rhythm in relation to other documented practices that we can meaningfully analyze his contribution to the field. For example, Daniel Mroz describes what seems to be a closely related phenomenon under the rubric of "punctuation," a term borrowed from Richard Fowler, a student of Eugenio Barba. Mroz also points out that syncopation is a key element in some varieties of solo martial arts training, where it works against the risk

of becoming predictable.⁴ One anonymous reviewer of this article even suggested a comparison between Balduzzi's "stop" and the *mie* or "pose" in Japanese Kabuki theater. Certainly, technical links can be drawn between Balduzzi's practice and that of Barba, solo martial arts training, and perhaps even Kabuki. But what is the nature of such links? Can their significance be separated from the question of historical influence or coincidence, so that they can be analyzed as epistemic phenomena, as discoveries about certain concrete possibilities of practice?

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- 1 Excerpts from Ben Spatz, "Massimiliano Balduzzi: Research in Physical Training for Performers," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 5.3 (2014): 270–90. The associated videos can be found in the Routledge Performance Archive under the practitioner entry for Massimiliano Balduzzi: www.routledgeperformancearchive.com/browse/practitioners/balduzzi-massimiliano/ (accessed 3 August 2019). The digital version of this article contains several full-color photographs." This should come after the page numbers, before the link to the associated videos.
 - 2 David Temperley, "Syncopation in Rock: A Perceptual Perspective," *Popular Music* 18.1 (1999): 30.
 - 3 Routledge Performance Archive, Massimiliano Balduzzi (2013): "Isolations/Impulses."
 - 4 Personal correspondence; and see Daniel Mroz, *The Dancing Word: An Embodied Approach to the Preparation of Performers and the Composition of Performances* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2011): 53, 177.

CHOREOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH (2017)

This reprinted book chapter was written as an introduction to the epistemology of practice set forth in my previous book, *What a Body Can Do*. After introducing a set of basic distinctions between practice, technique, and the epistemic, it examines three specific examples or case studies: my own transformative undergraduate experience with dance teacher Cheryl Cutler at Wesleyan University; the increasing emphasis on and expanded meaning of “research” in William Forsythe’s choreography; and the place of movement in Kaneza Schaal’s theatrical work *Go Forth*. If some parts of this essay repeat ideas I have shared more fully elsewhere, I hope that here they take a usefully accessible and inviting form.¹

The searching movement

There is great interest these days in applying scientific research methods to dance and other embodied practices. That is hardly surprising, given how important the discoveries of technological science are to the world we live in. In this essay, I explore a different pathway: not applying scientific methods to dance, but asking what studies of science can tell us about choreographic methods as modes of research in their own right.

How does science work? Through what processes do the sciences generate knowledge? Arguably, if we want to understand how science works, scientists are not the people to ask. Scientists can tell us how molecules and particles and chemicals work, but who can tell us how scientists work? I have

argued elsewhere that social analysis of science—as found in the field of social epistemology—has as much to offer our understanding of embodied practice as science does.² When technoscience looks at embodied practices like dance, it sees bodies and body parts, heart rates and brainwave patterns, muscles and tendons, statistics and other quantitative measures. This is very different from what social epistemology sees when it looks at embodied practice. Social epistemology studies how practice is structured by knowledge.³ A social epistemology of dance would examine the objects that interest dancers rather than those that interest scientists: styles and schools, practices and techniques, processes of transmission and collaboration, invented traditions and traditions of invention. It would see all of these as *epistemic*, knowable but never fully known, constantly unfolding. Rather than trying to pin them down, social epistemology would approach individual dance works as delimited fields of investigation. Crucially, social epistemology acknowledges both the corporeality or *realism* of epistemic practices and their social construction. In this chapter I offer notes toward a social epistemology of choreography as research.

We can begin with a few quotations from Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, a German historian of science. Although Rheinberger is talking about scientific laboratory research, his words and descriptions will strike many choreographers as surprisingly relevant or even familiar. In fact, Rheinberger begins one of his meditations on research with a quote from art historian George Kubler: “Each artist works on in the dark, guided only by the tunnels and shafts of earlier work, following the vein and hoping for a bonanza, and fearing that the lode may play out tomorrow.”⁴ Rheinberger goes on to analyze the “art of exploring the unknown” in terms that may be applied equally to art and science. What exactly are the “tunnels and shafts of earlier work”? Is this just a colorful metaphor, or could the image of branching pathways suggest a more profound truth about the nature of research? Rheinberger focuses on the relationship between the old and the new. Asking how new discoveries come about leads him to acknowledge that

one never starts at the beginning, but stands at the end of the path that others have already followed. We have always already left much—perhaps even the most—behind us. And that determines the point at which we are standing, and it determines what we are able to see from this point.⁵

In this way, Rheinberger states, “one can characterize the research process as a searching movement that takes place along the boundary between knowledge and ignorance.”

My aim here is to illuminate the sensation of movement Rheinberger describes. As dancers we are used to the feeling of movement, but Rheinberger's "searching movement" is not movement in space. Rather, it is movement in and through knowledge. One may run, leap, and twirl for hours, accomplish great athletic feats, and nevertheless have a sensation of drudgery and dullness. On the other hand, one may be almost motionless, testing a subtle new possibility, or even making what seems like a mistake, and suddenly taste the thrill of discovery. In research, the sensation of the wind whistling past one's ears may come at the quietest, slowest, or most accidental of moments just as easily as in the throes of dynamic movement or physical risk. This feeling of arriving somewhere new—like the first person to walk on the moon—is not linked to any particular technique or system. It arises from the delicate balance of knowledge and ignorance to which Rheinberger refers. It is the sensation of arriving at the end of known pathways, of encountering a practical possibility that was previously unknown.

To understand how choreography can accomplish research in this sense, I propose two distinctions based on social epistemology: First, technique may be distinguished from practice. While practice indicates a specific and actual moment, located in time and space, technique refers to the knowledge that structures such moments. Second, the technical can be distinguished from the epistemic. Technique refers exactly to those "tunnels and shafts of earlier work," the relatively reliable pathways that bring one to a particular epistemic location. The epistemic, then, is potential knowledge that borders upon but is not (yet) included in the technical. Some of the epistemic will eventually become known and will be incorporated into the technical.⁶ The rest will remain unknown, ungrasped, part of the complex monolith of practice.

From these two distinctions we emerge with three concepts:

1. *practice*, understood as situated moments lived and experienced;
2. *technique / the technical*, knowledge that structures practice and which allows us to compare moments of practice across time and space; and
3. *the epistemic*, that territory of the unknown which is closest to us, just on the edge of grasping, encountered but not yet known.

These concepts should not be treated as final or conclusive. Like any concepts, they are analytical techniques in their own right, hence available for appropriation and transformation. In what follows I use these concepts to analyze three choreographic moments. Of these three examples, only one

refers to the work of a choreographer in the conventional sense. The other two examples are chosen because of how they productively extend the concept of the “choreographic function”⁷ beyond its usual domain. They do this by tracing lines of technique toward the epistemic.

Iteration

“GO! GO! GO!” The wiry dance teacher pressed herself against the corner of the dance studio as if she intended to launch each of us across the floor with her own body. One by one, and sometimes in pairs or trios, we crossed the studio on its diagonal, executing the simplest of ballet steps. It is a familiar scene, but there was something different about this introductory class at Wesleyan University in 1997. The steps were commonplace, but our engagement with them was not. Many of the students in that room had never had any formal dance training before and many never would again. Yet somehow, as we crossed the floor to the vibrations generated by an old vinyl record player, we leapt through each movement as though we had been training for years. It must be only an illusion, in my memory, that each of us—students of theater, film, psychology, biology, classics—could miraculously execute one *grand jeté* after another. What I know is that, although we were just beginners (impossibly late beginners from a “serious” ballet perspective), we had no sense of trying and failing to meet an external ideal. Absent from that room was any sense of ballet as a towering cultural artifact, a heavy heritage to which we could only fail to measure up. I scarcely even recall being aware that what we were doing was ballet, so different was its feel and taste from my prior experiences. Although the studio had a mirrored wall, there was no “culture of mirror” in the sense of an “image of correctness, of ‘getting it,’ of perfection, that is sought in the mirror” and which “colonizes” the bodies of dancers in more traditional contexts. Instead, the opportunity was realized “for dancing full out to occur.”⁸ How did this come about?

I was in that class because someone who had attended Wesleyan ten years earlier had told me that the most important thing I could do in my first year was to take Cheryl Cutler’s Introduction to Dance course. “It changes your life,” she said, and I sensed on the first day of class that she was right. “Laughing afterwards: everyone just knows,” I wrote in my journal. “I have been to classes that have been this inspirational to me, but I have never been to a class after which every single student agreed so deeply: this is going to be a fantastic experience.” What I could not have understood then was the extent to which the special qualities of Cutler’s

class were due to the duration and depth of her embodied research in dance pedagogy. In signing up for that class, I was stepping into a thirty-year stream of pedagogical research, a life's work on the question of what it means to "introduce" dance. Cutler began offering dance classes to Wesleyan students—then all male—in 1967 and continued to do so until she retired in 1999.⁹ Years later, when I asked her for a syllabus from the amazing course, she told me that for many years she had never had one. The course had evolved, detail by detail, through a process that any reader of Rheinberger would recognize as a kind of research:

You know, I had this great advantage: I started small. No big over-all plan. Nobody oversaw me because, I suppose, they didn't think anything would come of those classes. I just watched my students in class to see what they needed, then made up my next class to meet that need. So it kind of grew organically. I could gauge when to rev up and when to back off, according to their level of energy or exhaustion in the semester. ... It was also important not to get too "heady" – for instance, I always made up my movement combinations to music, so that the combinations "danced"; but on the other hand, I made sure to identify and fit in somewhere in the combination the stuff the students needed to work on.¹⁰

There is no doubt that what we felt in that room was Cutler's love and passion for movement and for us as individual growing people. But what she describes in this passage is more than love and passion: It is a process of iterative development that allows for a gradual passage from the known into the unknown. Iteration in this sense uses repetition to produce difference. It is neither pure changeless repetition nor random difference, but a system that repeats the technical in order to produce specific differentiations that draw the practice into the epistemic. In Rheinberger's terms,

the temporal coherence of an experimental system is granted by recurrence, by repetition, not by anticipation and forestalling. Its future development, on the other hand, if it is not to end in idling, depends upon groping and grasping for differences.¹¹

When we talk about choreographic repetition, we often think of a movement phrase that is repeated in a performance or of the rehearsal process itself (*répétition* in French). But innovation at the level of technique takes place over decades, not minutes or days. Cutler's Introduction to Dance had such

a reliably powerful effect on students because it was tailored and dynamically responsive to us on multiple time scales. The small adjustments she made on a week-to-week basis were incorporated, in turn, within more gradual changes implemented on an annual basis—in response to the seasons and the academic calendar—and again into developments unfolding over the course of years and decades.

The question is, how does the teacher elicit a student's receptivity/interest? Not by dumping loads of information in front of him/her, but by listening to and loving/respecting both the material and the student, and then selecting what out of the masses of possible information might be immediately relevant or accessible to the student in some way. ... Once the student's curiosity is roused, the teacher can introduce one progressive challenge after another, drawing the pupil into widening realms s/he never dared/dreamed entering, let alone mastering.¹²

"How does the teacher elicit a student's receptivity/interest?" is a research question. Great teachers conduct research by tracing the pathways of known technique into the unknown of its application to particular populations and individuals. In the case of dance teachers, this research involves a kind of choreography. Indeed, teaching is one of the institutional contexts in which embodied research can—under the right conditions—be sustained for decades. This is one of the pleasures of teaching and it is not so far removed as we might think from what Karin Knorr-Cetina calls the "libidinal" dimension of research, which "binds experts to knowledge things" and gives research "a flavor and quality distinctively different from that of routines and habits."¹³

Because its explicit aim is to transmit established knowledge rather than to produce new forms, the research dimension of teaching is not always recognized as such. But if dance technique is "relational infrastructure," as Judith Hamera claims, then long-term pedagogical experiments ought to be recognized as choreographic research projects.¹⁴ Cutler's pedagogical choreography is a superlative example, but in fact pedagogy is arguably one of the main locations for embodied research in dance. Dance education, in other words, is more than a combination of "two Foucauldian technologies: those producing a 'reformed' and disciplined body ... and those of self-refashioning."¹⁵ It is also a site for the development of new possibilities at the edge of old ones and for the adaptation of existing knowledge to new circumstances, both of which are valid definitions of research. By the

time I arrived at Wesleyan, Cutler was offering much more than an introductory survey of dance forms. Twice per week, for two hours each day, she guided us through intimate partner exercises, sweaty ensemble movement, and classical floor work, with complete attention paid to the entirety of the situation. She manipulated the music, the curtains, and even the room lighting in order to move us along specific energetic and movement pathways. What she offered in that class was not a set of modular units but a choreopedagogical whole, a seamless progression that allowed us to access remarkable transformations within a short time. This wholeness was achieved through research.

Object

At a recent academic workshop on the question of how and when performance can be research, dancer Nicole Peisl and her colleague Lynette Hunter drew a thin rope taut across the length of the room and invited us to follow its slow movement—down to the floor, then gradually up again—with our “felt sense.” As the rope moved in space, I allowed myself to be moved by it, enacting a kind of kinesthetic empathy with its inanimate but animated vibrations.¹⁶ The progress of the rope in space was mesmerizing. But just as the dance teacher’s research object is not the students themselves, but rather the choreopedagogical technique through which students pass, the object under investigation in Peisl’s workshop intervention was not the rope. Rather it was this “felt sense,” the way in which we were invited to experience and engage with the rope’s movement. The term “felt sense” is explored by Peisl in her doctoral research, drawing on the work of Eugene Gendlin and David Rome and in dialog with her lifelong experience as a dancer and choreographer, including fifteen years of work with William Forsythe. The formal simplicity of the rope exercise provoked one of the more concentrated moments in the week-long workshop, precisely because what was at stake was not the rope itself but our way—our technique—of relating to it.

Forsythe is perhaps the contemporary choreographer to whom the concept of research is most readily attached. His work, writes Steven Spier, “is a body of research conducted through the practice of choreography investigating the most fundamental questions of art.”¹⁷ Again and again, in Spier’s edited volume, scholars and practitioners discuss Forsythe’s work in terms that would make no sense to a classical choreographer—someone aiming to create the most elegant or effective staging of a story or piece of

music—but would be commonplace to a social epistemologist analyzing laboratory science:

The curiosity about limits is perhaps the vital element in Forsythe's work. What are the possibilities of the dancing body? What is a dance? What is performance?¹⁸

What continues to be a driving force in Forsythe's own company is the idea of a laboratory for research into dance. His pieces develop and incorporate knowledge about dance. ... His pieces are, as he once said in a conversation, hypotheses about ballet and dance; his work is an ongoing process of self-reflection and questioning, a process that establishes a field where things can happen without stipulating an outcome.¹⁹

The process of creation can feel like a failure, struggle, or like exultation. The performers and the choreographer need to be willing to wait, to fail, to not know, to be outrageous, disciplined, clairvoyant. They must be willing to change, to abandon what they understood to be right.²⁰

Statements like these turn away from the composition of a given piece, let alone the actual movement that appears onstage, and focus instead on the epistemic process—the continual, iterative engagement with the unknown—that produces compositions and performances as outputs. This is more than just a shift of emphasis: It is a radical destabilization of the concept of an artistic work. For centuries, the notion of a unique and coherent artistic work has been one of the main assumptions of European culture. With the turn toward research, we see this concept deconstructed as the apparent stability of any given artistic work is replaced by the unfolding, iterative instability of an epistemic object.

In the essay cited above, Karin Knorr Cetina discusses the fascination researchers have for the “unfolding ontology” of epistemic objects, which draw us in precisely because we only partially understand them. It is not difficult to see that these epistemic objects are the broader class to which Forsythe's “choreographic objects” belong:

There is no choreography, at least not as to be understood as a particular instance representing a universal or standard for the term. Each epoch, each instance of choreography, is ideally at odds with its previous defining incarnations as it strives to testify to the plasticity and wealth of our ability to re-conceive and detach ourselves from positions of certainty.

Choreography is the term that presides over a class of ideas: an idea is perhaps in this case a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action.²¹

The main objects of choreography, in other words, are not dances. Rather, the main objects of choreography are what Forsythe refers to as a particular “class of ideas” suggesting possible actions. Another word for such ideas might be technique—but only if by that we mean both established technique and the technique of the future, which is currently in the process of unfolding out of the epistemic.

Elsewhere, Freya Vass-Rhee refers to these as *boundary objects*: “objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites.”²² The concept of a stable artistic work derives from print culture and the apparent stability and transmissibility of writing.²³ Once we begin to focus on embodied practice, there is no “work” as such. Instead there are practices on different scales: one evening’s performance; all the performances that go under a shared name; the practice of a dancer or company as it develops over time; etc.—and there is the technique that structures those practices and according to which they resemble and differ from each other. To take a transversal slice of that technique at one level of detail and call it an original work is at best misleading and at worst disingenuous. There is then a tradeoff in understanding choreography as research: The artistic work slips away and along with it the choreographer as individual creator. In its place is left the kind of emergent discovery, located in a web of knowledge, to which Rheinberger refers. As Vass-Rhee notes, Forsythe is long “past the period in which he credited each individual dancer as co-choreographer, currently tending to designate pieces as works ‘by William Forsythe and the Forsythe Company,’” a shift that reflects the “distributed” and materially interwoven research process.²⁴ It might surprise some readers to know that Martha Graham made similar claims, “denying that she . . . founded a ‘school of movements’” and asserting: “I have simply rediscovered what the body can do.”²⁵ Graham had no recourse to the kind of research language that informs contemporary choreography, but she was equally forceful in demanding that we understand her work as an unfolding exploratory process.²⁶

Going further, we might declare that choreography as research produces dance works—as well as choreographers and dancers—only incidentally. Most fundamentally, what research choreography produces is technique. This may seem odd to those for whom technique carries the connotation of backward-looking formalism, but it makes sense as soon as we recognize

that the technical is continually changing through an iterative relationship with the epistemic. Forsythe even articulates a desire to produce choreography without dancers:

What else, besides the body, could physical thinking look like? ... Historically choreography has been indivisible from the human body in action. ... Are we perhaps at the point in the evolution of choreography where a distinction between the establishment of its ideas and its traditional forms of enactment must be made?²⁷

Forsythe's *Improvisation Technologies* DVD and the more recent website project "Synchronous Objects" provide concrete examples of how digitization can be used to separate technique from the specificity of particular bodies.²⁸ A different strategy is used in Forsythe's installation pieces, such as *White Bouncy Castle* (a huge white bouncy castle) and *Scattered Crowd* (a room packed full of balloons), in which audience members are compelled by the physical environment to make extra-daily movement choices.²⁹ In these installations, movement technique is shared with participants not through visual appreciation and kinesthetic empathy but through crafted situations designed to introduce "a lay audience, through the simplest or even silliest of means, to fundamental conceptual issues about the body in space, and about engendering and composing movement."³⁰ Both digitization and installation are strategies for abstracting choreographic objects from their usual material supports.

According to Pil Hansen, a new generation of contemporary choreographers is working with Performance Generating Systems that are even more complex than those developed by the Forsythe Company in terms of how they balance their inputs and outputs.³¹ The drive to draw new objects from the epistemic is endless, as Karin Knorr Cetina reminds us: "The lack of completeness of being of knowledge objects goes hand in hand with the dynamism of research. Only incomplete objects pose further questions, and only in considering objects as incomplete do scientists move forward with their work."³² There is no reason to suspect that such epistemic incompleteness is any less important for research choreographers than it is for scientists.

Context

I descend, with others, down industrial steps and through tunnels both cavernous and cramped, into a basement room located far below the Westbeth Artists Housing complex in Manhattan's West Village. Although we

start the journey as a group, the passage splits us apart as we stop to gaze at the extraordinary photographic prints—contemporary interpretations of an ancient burial tradition—that adorn the crumbling grey walls. In them, we see a man embarked upon an otherworldly journey. He is caressed by grass, launched into the air, merging with the sea. Always his dark skin is touched by shimmering gold: wrapped in it, held by it, and finally consumed by it. Once inside the basement, a ritual unfolds, a precisely crafted montage of actions and objects. Three figures move, sing, gesture, and enact a series of vignettes between darkness, semidarkness, and threads of light. Sound and action reverberate in the space. Light from multiple sources flickers and partially illuminates the large basement room as if it were a temple. There are wire sculptures, a massive clay jar into which one of the men’s heads can be fully submerged, and the same golden eye coverings and gold-ribboned bodywrap that we saw in the photographs. Eventually, too, there are microphones, beer bottles, and a record player. As the piece progresses, its geometry relaxes. By the end the performers stand before us as themselves, chatting and telling dirty jokes.

The premise of director Kaneza Schaal’s *Go Forth* is her treatment of the ancient text *Going Forth by Day*—more commonly known as the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*—as an archaic theatrical script:

The 3,000-year-old funerary text is approached as an ancient performance score: excavating the spells and incantations to create a series of burial vignettes, fragments of translation, memory and imagination. Photographic funerary murals usher the audience into a mythological underground landscape. Galvanized by the intimate relationship between black people and death around the world, *Go Forth* paves way for its audience to reflect on their individual and collective mourning processes.³³

Go Forth works on multiple levels, from its unexplicated ritual atmosphere to its juxtaposition of objects that might be found in a museum with those of modern stage tech. “I wanted an underground space, ideally a maze,” Schaal notes, comparing the “labyrinthine basement” of Westbeth Artists Housing to the traditional burial grounds she encountered during a visit to Egypt.³⁴ Only during a talkback after the performance did I learn that the three performers—Justin Hicks, William Nadylam, and David Hamilton Thomson—come from three different disciplines: music, theater, and dance respectively.³⁵ Within the richly textured performance, they operate as a seamless trio. This seamlessness makes it difficult to distinguish between the

“pure” choreography of physical movement or dance that appeared in *Go Forth* and the progressively wider contexts in which we might locate it.³⁶

I would like to have more insight into the creative development that led to *Go Forth*. As compelling as the performance was, I suspect that a window into its process of emergence could be even more precious. But where is the institutional support for such a framework? When an artist reaches the level of recognition that William Forsythe commands, it becomes possible to begin developing comprehensive documentation strategies to break the work apart and make it available at the level of technique.³⁷ Far more often, those layers can only be glimpsed through the composite palimpsests of theatrical performance events. *Go Forth* was presented as part of PS122’s COIL Festival, one of several that now take place in what has become an explosion of experimental performance festivals each January in New York City. (Locals complain, with good reason, about the forced dynamics of such a jam-packed couple of weeks, but for a visitor to the city this is an extraordinary opportunity to see a terrifically wide range of work.) Theaters like PS122 and the Public Theater stretch their resources to give emerging artists and companies proper support during this period. Where then would the time and money come from to support additional layers of documentation that would trace the development of these works over months and years, or reveal the threads of collaboration and cross-pollination that fuel such a convergence of creative energies? Even if a young choreographer wanted to archive and document her creative process and the research context for her investigations, it is not clear which multimedia strategies would be most effective in doing so. How does one capture process—let alone context—on paper or on video?

The meaning of the choreographic objects manipulated in *Go Forth*, from the audience’s choreographed descent to Thomson’s individual movement sequences, emerges from their situation within the theatricality of the piece, within the overpacked January festival season, and in relation to many other cultural contexts. Even without the program’s explicit reference to “the intimate relationship between black people and death around the world,” *Go Forth*’s relationship to contemporary black identity is an essential part of its meaning. Schaal says of the project:

I was excited to bring together a team of black artists, very different kinds of black. We have dancers and we have writers and we have African Americans and we have Sri Lankan Camaroonian Frenchmen. And so I was excited to make a room where race was a material that was necessarily present and important, but not necessarily the subject of our inquiry.³⁸

Go Forth was one of several performances in the January festival season that traced

an ontology of blackness that extend[s] beyond race. We wondered, if blackness was no longer stable, what are its performative markers? How can black performances be theorized toward their own ends, even as those ends are dispersed across geographies and historical eras? ... Black performance is not static, contained, or geographically specific. There is no locale that designates the origin of “black” sensibilities because skin colors have always been global and relative.³⁹

Schaal’s staging of an ancient Egyptian religious text resonates in some ways with approaches to spirituality found elsewhere in contemporary black performance: “The ritualism communicates. ... [The performance] offers depth instead of flash, a kind of cumulative spiritualism rather than any ‘wow’ moments.”⁴⁰ Yet *Go Forth* is just as clearly marked and influenced by Schaal’s work with the Wooster Group, Elevator Repair Service, and other predominantly white New York City experimental theater companies.⁴¹ The confluence of these lineages perhaps suggests something along the lines of what Royona Mitra, writing about British-Bangladeshi choreographer Akram Khan, dubs “new interculturalism.”⁴² An earlier wave of intercultural theater, epitomized by Peter Brook’s 1985 production of the *Mahabharata*, attempted to bring culturally specific texts to a “universal” (white) audience by abstracting them from their context. In contrast, the “new” in Mitra’s new interculturalism indicates an approach situated in a hybrid or diasporic cultural context from which it makes a far more politicized claim to universality. For Mitra, Khan is an example of an artist who has actively transformed the “contemporary” or “mainstream” dance scene from a distinctively nonwhite position. Works appearing in this new mode reject the division between cultural identification (“other”-ness) and formal innovation by laying undeniable claim to both, thereby helping to shatter the entrenched dichotomy between white-controlled cultural appropriations and ghettoized “authentic” performances by artists of color.⁴³ *Go Forth*, we might then say, is as black in its sources and powers as it is universal in its aims and effects. Neither explicitly framed as black performance nor compelled to deny its blackness, it breaks the alignment of universality with whiteness and posits a black universal. Its politics are not written on its sleeve but buried like foundations in its ontology.

DeFrantz and Gonzales link contemporary theorizations of blackness to what E. Patrick Johnson has called the “*epistemological moment of race*,” in

which “performance facilitates self- and cultural reflexivity—a knowing made manifest by a ‘doing.’”⁴⁴ We might then ask what social epistemology and the epistemology of race—two lineages of thought that respond in different ways to some of the same issues—could learn from each other. The possibility to examine how formal choreographic objects operate in and from racially and culturally marked contexts goes along with less evidently political shifts in philosophical thought that allow for the recognition of epistemic objects in general as both materially real and culturally constructed. Whether we pay attention to both sides of this equation is a matter of power and representation. Forsythe’s work, after all, is also intercultural: a merging of (white) U.S. American iconoclasm with German state-funded ballet. This white-on-white contrast is less visible in today’s cultural landscape, allowing those who write and think about his work to prioritize its formal epistemic objects.⁴⁵ Social epistemology, however, reminds us that even the most rigorously quantified objects of knowledge are also culturally constructed insofar as the techniques that allow us to interact with them develop within specific social circumstances and histories. One of the key arguments of social epistemology is that scientific objects are “simultaneously objective, relative, and historical.”⁴⁶ This is why Mitra can describe Khan as creating a choreographic language that is both “organic and syncretic.”⁴⁷ A merely organic choreography would be a direct continuation of the past, a lineage of pure authenticity. On the other hand, a merely syncretic or constructed choreography would lay no claim to a real material substrate.⁴⁸ A language that is both organic and syncretic draws on multiple sources in order to produce something genuinely new. Neither collage nor continuation, it amounts to a substantive discovery of new possibilities—in a word: research.

On research choreography

Although choreographic objects mean differently in different times and places, this kind of contextually and socially constructed meaning does not exhaust their meaning. As epistemic objects, they also push back against the social act of construction, revealing their own emergent contours, which cannot be denied any more than they can be strictly determined. So, choreography can be research. But is all choreography “research choreography”? Is there choreography that enacts pure training (repetition without iterative differentiation) or efficient performance (application of craft without movement into the unknown) and therefore is not research? Certainly. André Lepecki writes of errancy as dramaturgical method:

[T]he dramaturg must engage in an “anexact yet rigorous” methodology, not aligned with knowledge and knowing, but with the work of errancy. Here errancy must be understood not as the search for errors, the privileging of mistakes, or the apology of failure as method ... but in its strongest etymological sense, to err as to drift, to get lost, to go astray.⁴⁹

I hope I have demonstrated that this anexact yet rigorous methodology has another name—research—and that it both embraces and far exceeds the quantified research of technological science. Choreography here has been understood as an ongoing negotiation with the materiality of embodiment. When this negotiation is directed toward the discovery of new, previously unknown pathways in practice, choreography becomes research. Where it borders on theater, on somatics, on digital media, on cultural identity, and on everyday life, choreography reaches into these territories in a way that is neither planned nor haphazard but *epistemic*.

The question then becomes where this takes place: not where in space, but where in knowledge? And not only at the individual level—what do you know?—but also at the institutional level: What knowledges does a given institution support? I find that Lepecki—no doubt in response to the still-powerful positivist legacies that accord science more legitimacy than dance—overemphasizes the importance of the unknown in relation to the known. For errancy always begins somewhere and, when research is truly experimental, that beginning point is the only aspect of epistemic practice that can be at least partially controlled in advance. Choreography as research then has as much to do with where one locates oneself in the pathways of knowledge as with where one goes from there.

You are not alone in the tunnels and shafts of practice.

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- 1 Originally published as “Choreography as Research: Iteration, Object, Context” in *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader* (Second Edition), eds. Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 68–83.
 - 2 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).
 - 3 Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
 - 4 Quoted in Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, “On the Art of Exploring the Unknown,” in *Say It Isn’t So: Art Trains Its Sights on the Natural Sciences*, eds. Peter Friese, Guido Boulboulle, and Susanne Witzgall (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2007): 82.

- 5 Ibid.: 86.
- 6 “The epistemic things that ground the experimental sciences emerge from the deposit of the technical and its potential for tinkering. Whence it follows that time and again they lend themselves to becoming reincorporated in that deposit.” Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): 141.
- 7 Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998): 223n2.
- 8 Ibid.: 162–3.
- 9 Wesleyan University, “The History of Dance at Wesleyan”: www.wesleyan.edu/dance/historyofdance.html (accessed 29 August 2016).
- 10 Personal communication (2008). For Cutler’s application of this approach to a broader set of contexts, see Cheryl Cutler and Randall Huntsberry, *Creative Listening: Overcoming Fear in Life and Work* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2007).
- 11 Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things*: 75.
- 12 Personal communication (2016).
- 13 In Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn*: 186, 182.
- 14 Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 19.
- 15 Ibid.: 30.
- 16 This took place in a session of the Performance as Research Working Group, during the 2016 International Federation for Theatre Research conference in Stockholm.
- 17 Steven Spier, *William Forsythe and the Practice of Choreography: It Starts From Any Point* (London: Routledge, 2011): 3.
- 18 Roslyn Sulcas in *ibid.*: 18.
- 19 Gerald Siegmund in *ibid.*: 24.
- 20 Dana Caspersen in *ibid.*: 95.
- 21 William Forsythe in *ibid.*: 90. Forsythe’s individual website is also called “Choreographic Objects.”
- 22 Susan Star and James Griesemer quoted in Pil Hansen and Darcey Callison, eds., *Dance Dramaturgy: Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 93.
- 23 The major historical and philosophical reading of this history in music is Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). It is useful to compare the concept of the musical work to that of the choreographic work, given their very different relationships to notation.
- 24 In Hansen and Callison, *Dance Dramaturgy*: 101.
- 25 Martin, *Critical Moves*: 170.
- 26 Assertions of this kind—the denial of technique as form in order to refocus attention on an underlying engagement with the epistemic—are commonplace among pioneers of embodied research. I provide several examples from actor/performer training in Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 114–15.
- 27 Forsythe in Spier, *William Forsythe*: 91–2.
- 28 Volker Kuchelmeister, *Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye DVD* (Berlin: Hatje Kantz Verlag, 1999): www.hatjecantz.de/william-forsythe-improvisation-technologies-2109-1.html (accessed 13 December 2016); William Forsythe, Maria Palazzi, and Norah Zuniga Shaw, “Synchronous Objects for *One Flat Thing, Reproduced*: Visualizing Choreographic Structure

- from Dance to Data to Objects” (Columbus: Ohio State University Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design, 2009): synchronoussubjects.osu.edu (accessed 13 December 2016).
- 29 See Spier, *William Forsythe*: 140–4.
- 30 *Ibid.*: 141.
- 31 In Hansen and Callison, *Dance Dramaturgy*: 137.
- 32 In Schatzki et al., *The Practice Turn*: 176.
- 33 PS122 COIL Festival Website, “Go Forth” (2016): www.ps122.org/go-forth (accessed 31 August 2016).
- 34 Leonard Lopate with Vallejo Gantner, Rachel Chavkin, and Kaneza Schaal, “The Boundary-Pushing COIL Festival” radio broadcast, 30 December 2015: www.wnyc.org/story/coil-performance-festival-pushes-boundaries (accessed 31 August 2016).
- 35 For additional creative credits, see the production webpage at www.kanezaschaal.com/
- 36 Thomson describes himself as an artist working “among the intersections of movement, text, sound and song.” When asked about his relationship to “pure dance,” he replies:

I’m at a point in my life where I like moving and I like dancing, but I’m not a traditional ‘choreographer’ per se. That’s not how I think of making work. I don’t make up steps to answer questions; instead I look for tasks and structures.

- David Hamilton Thomson, artist website: davidhamiltonthomson.com (accessed 31 August 2016); and Meg Weeks with David Hamilton Thomson, “David Thomson: In Process” interview (2013): gibneydance.wordpress.com/2013/04/24/david-thomson-in-process (accessed 31 August 2016).
- 37 In addition to the examples mentioned above, the Forsythe Company has produced the custom-built Motion Bank and Piecemaker software for annotating catalogs of performance and rehearsal videos—see Hansen in Hansen and Callison, *Dance Dramaturgy*; and Motion Bank: motionbank.org/. An earlier example of a large-scale multimedia project dedicated to the work of a single choreographer is the Siobhan Davies Dance Archive—see Sarah Whatley and Ross Varney, “Born Digital; Dance in the Digital Age,” *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 5.1 (2009): 51–63; and Siobhan Davies Replay: siobhandaviesreplay.com/
- 38 Lopate et al., “COIL Festival.”
- 39 Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzales, *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 8–9.
- 40 This comment is from a 2007 review of Reggie Wilson’s company by Michael Wade Simpson, quoted in DeFrantz and Gonzales, *Black Performance Theory*: 109.
- 41 Mar’ya Wethers defines “predominant whiteness” as

a phenomenon occurring like the layers of an onion, with some diversity displayed on the outside but greatly decreasing as you look more inward—from the programming on stage (some brown), to the audiences in the house (occasionally brown), to the administrative and technical staff and governing boards behind the scenes (little to no brown).

SLIPPAGE, “Configurations in Motion: Performance Curation and Communities of Color” (2015): 15, sites.duke.edu/configurationsinmotion/files/2015/12/Duke-Configurations-Final-Booklet.pdf (accessed 3 August 2019).

- 42 Royona Mitra, *Akram Khan: Dancing the New Interculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- 43 Susan Leigh Foster offers a brief history of racist dance classification practices in her introduction to *Worlding Dance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 2. This approach to dance classification is a particular implementation of the European art/culture system—see Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998): 216–25).
- 44 DeFrantz and Gonzales, *Black Performance Theory*: 8, emphasis added.
- 45 Awash in whiteness, the border between white German and white American identity feels less urgent today than the still-burning color line in the United States. Hence reviews of *Go Forth* necessarily make reference to Schaal's Rwandan heritage, while contemporary discussions of Forsythe easily skip over the multicultural facets of his whiteness.
- 46 Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 33.
- 47 Mitra, *Akram Khan*: 44.
- 48 On the idea of substrate, see Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 64–7.
- 49 Quoted in Hansen and Callison, *Dance Dramaturgy*: 54.

4

THEATER: FRAGMENTS

Wild Spirit (1999)

This fragment is from Act III of what I called a “physical opera”: a written script for a piece of physical theater that describes in detail a work combining movement, narrative, musicality, and imagery. During this period I wrote several such scripts, searching for a way to compose and articulate nonverbal performance, yet without access to a stable ensemble or much knowledge of how a movement and voice-based theatrical devising process could unfold in practice. These works were never staged.¹

The house lights go out.

In the darkness, the same radio news medley is played from Act I, overlapping and growing until it becomes unintelligible. The lights come up slowly. The players are arranged in the same groups as in Act I, except for Tam, who is not in this Act. Each group is frozen in position for the same type of scene, but the staging has changed slightly. Each scene has now become more urgent. Also, the players are not frozen, but active.

The players in the first group, instead of sitting around leisurely watching TV, are now staring intently at the nonexistent television. Their eyes

are wide and dazed, their jaws are slack and drooling. Their entire focus is absolutely contained in the TV.

In the second group, Tam has been replaced by Rand, who is now wearing the bandana. Rand is standing over the other player, who is kneeling on the ground. The player being mugged has his head down so that he is curled into a ball. Rand is holding the player's head down roughly, and the gun (which is now real) is pointed at the other player's head, so close that it touches. Rand's expression now is crazed with anger, and the hand holding the gun is shaking.

In the third group, Ana is now lying in the bed instead of Rand. The two other players are kneeling by her side, their heads against her body. Both of them are crying. Ana is delirious, mumbling to herself and talking fitfully in her delirium.

In the fourth group, the baby was stillborn. The mother is collapsed against the player who had been holding her hand. Both of them are weeping together. The player who had been between the mother's legs is now standing a little bit apart from the other two, facing away.

In the fifth group, Ana is now gone. The other player is alone, lying on their stomach, doodling in a notebook and listening to a WalkMan, both of which are real.

The news medley continues in the background against a chorus of quiet weeping. The weeping grows until it is wild and stylized. All the players in the third, fourth, and fifth groups are crying loudly and moaning and sobbing. The players in the first and second groups are still in their scenes.

The players in the three weeping groups (except Ana) let their crying take them out of their scenes. They walk around aimlessly with their sadness, keeping up the noise level.

After a little while, the players in the first group simultaneously stand up and turn away from the TV set, at the same time knocking their chairs over. Staring angrily away from the television they have just defeated, they begin to hum low notes, as in Act I. This humming passes to the players in the second group, who abandon their scene and join in. Tam puts the gun in his pocket.

For a while, the humming and the sobbing and the radio broadcast are all in competition. Then the radio is drowned out by the humming. Soon the humming passes on to the other players, who slowly drop their sadness. Eventually all the players are walking around in neutral, humming.

1 Excerpt from "Wild Spirit," unpublished physical opera in three acts (1999).

Acts Without Organs (2008)

After Poland, as I continued to pursue post-Grotowskian practice alongside doctoral study, I had the idea that Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* could be mapped or translated onto acting technique. What if each chapter in that epic volume were taken as a set of practical instructions for physical and vocal training, for the structuring of encounters, and for the transformation of the self? In the essay excerpted below, I examine deterritorialization as a concrete aim or "orientation" that might be derived from Grotowski's post-theatrical work and applied more broadly, including in pedagogical contexts of actor training.¹

The concept of *deterritorialization* is among Deleuze and Guattari's most significant. For practitioners and scholars of theater, there is nothing new about the idea that theater discovers or displays new territories. But how is it exactly that theater does this, and why is it a valuable thing to do? The idea of discovering new territory seems vulnerable to accusations of exoticism. Is there not something imperialist about the territorial metaphor? In D&G, however, one finds not the noun "territory" but the more flexible and intriguing verb: *deterritorialization* and its reverse, *reterritorialization*. Neither term implies a static territory that can be discovered or conquered. Both refer to active processes that take place across multiple fields or regimes, when an element shifts context and function, passing from one regime into another, the latter perhaps previously nonexistent. In the unique coupling of wasp and orchid: "The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen."²

My argument here is that deterritorialization ("DT") takes place with some frequency in all our contemporary theater schools and institutions, but that it is under-acknowledged and misunderstood. One indicator (or cause) of this invisibility is the lack of any proper language with which to name and analyze the manifestations of DT in our practice. Those words that do exist to name what I am calling DT are weak ones: "process-based," for example, or "noncommercial." In this paper, I offer up an evaluative language that could allow a crucial aspect of theater practice to become more visible. I begin by naming what already exists—locating moments of DT in the contemporary acting classroom—and then go further, asking what it would mean to actively prioritize such moments. Although a search

for processes and moments of deterritorialization is clearly one of the main reasons why people choose to study and work in theater, this orientation remains largely unconscious, unarticulated, and unclaimed.

Toward the end of his life, Jerzy Grotowski concluded that there are two basic orientations according to which one can make use of the techniques of performing arts.³ The first, “Art as presentation,” prioritizes the presumed relationship that work done in rehearsal will ultimately have with an external audience. The point of any given technique, then, is to “produce an effect,”⁴ and the method of composition is cumulative, building up to a presentation or “show” on the basis of which every technical and artistic choice receives its meaning. The second orientation, “Art as vehicle,” prioritizes the effect of performance techniques on the performers themselves. Although no artistic project is ever oriented entirely in one way or the other, it is possible to see these two orientations pulling in opposite directions at every step. Furthermore, there is a tremendous range between those projects that are primarily oriented toward (re)presentation and those that are primarily oriented toward processes of deterritorialization.

When Grotowski refers to a “glowing” or “shining man,”⁵ we should not think of a beautiful, handsome specimen of masculinity—nor of any other image of supposed perfection. A beautiful or athletic body is no closer to the luminescence of deterritorialization than a weak or ugly one. No amount of skill suffices to render this quality. That is because what shines out of the DT process is not the material body but the process of deterritorialization itself, which is ultimately independent of age, gender, race, or body shape—although it is always taking place in relation and reaction to those realities. An orientation toward deterritorialization is already at work in theater classrooms. It is one of the major poles of teaching work. However, this orientation is always in competition with the other task of teaching: that of preparing students to function as compositional elements in (re)presentational productions for which they could one day be paid. Teachers are always juggling between these two sets of priorities. (This is as true for math teachers as it is for teachers of theater.) An increased awareness that representation is not the only valid use of performance techniques could have significant consequences for theater pedagogy, for the programming of theater departments, and for the structure of conservatory training programs.

Contemporary performance practice is marked by a strong binary division between the *class* and the *show*. Classes are defined according to what skills are taught. They are open to everyone (no auditions), participants are

expected to pay, and they are considered valuable insofar as the skills taught will be useful in future shows. Shows, on the other hand, are defined according to their artistic content, such as a given playscript. Participation is by audition, participants are rarely expected to pay, and the work is valued because of its relationship to the public sphere. Rendered invisible by this dichotomized system is the place of deterritorialization processes in both classes and shows. For although individual performers may be more or less conscious or articulate about their desire to experience deterritorialization through acting work, there is no doubt that this desire is one of the central reasons why many if not most actors choose to act.

An accurate description of contemporary theatrical practice must take these differences into account by distinguishing a third category of work that is focused neither on the transference of skills nor on the composition of a show for public consumption. In this paper I have been calling such work “deterritorialization.” In an academic context, the most viable term at present is “performance research,”⁶ while in other settings the phrase “work on the self” may be equally accurate. Such work currently finds its place within the dominant framework of classes and shows. It is smuggled into such frameworks and accomplished almost in secret, giving rise to the illusion that it is subservient to these well-articulated modalities rather than having its own independent existence. By naming and describing the value and potential of processes aimed at deterritorialization, we open the door toward their increasing prioritization and toward a possible transformation of the role and function of performing arts in our culture.

★ ★ ★

I have argued for the validity of artistic choices that emphasize the deterritorialization of the performer over a capitalization on their existing strengths. But in that case, what purpose is served by any kind of structured repetition? Why develop a repeatable performance, let alone actual *methods* of acting? In other words, if deterritorialization is the primary goal, then why not spend each day working on a different text in a completely different way? Could we not maximize deterritorialization by trying out different techniques every day? Why return to the same exercises or scored elements day after day? Why not search daily for what is most strange, most dissimilar from what has gone before? Such an approach could be called *serial flight*. This is my term, but it relates to D&G’s concept of the “line of flight.”⁷ In serial flight, there is precisely no *line* of flight. Instead, deterritorialization takes place in a buzzing, indeterminate way, covering no ground, its manifestations never going far enough to become

visible. There is no continuity to this kind of deterritorialization process—no depth. There are reasons, then, to approach deterritorialization through gradual and continuous practices that deepen and accrue over time precisely because they do not make haphazard and wholly discrete assaults on the “new.” Once repetition enters the picture, a line of flight can begin to form.

1 Excerpts from “Acts without Organs,” unpublished essay (2008). The reference is to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

2 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 10.

3 See Jerzy Grotowski, “From the Theater Company to Art as Vehicle,” in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Thomas Richards (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

4 Grotowski:

We can say that I demanded from [Ryszard Cieślak] everything, a courage in a certain way inhuman, but I never asked him to produce an effect. He needed five months more? Okay. Ten months more? Okay. Fifteen months more? Okay. We just worked slowly.

Quoted in Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*: 16.

5 “[The] human body remembers the dawn of humanity. It remembers a man—not a Neanderthal, but a ‘glowing [shining] man,’ a human pre-matrix. It may be an utopia, but Grotowski kept searching for it in the theater, and later, in his paratheater in Pontedera. He was searching for the ‘glowing man.’” Ludwik Flaszen, interviewed in Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz, *Jerzy Grotowski: An Attempt at a Portrait* (Warsaw: Program 2 TVP, 1999).

6 I am referring here to what is called “performance as research,” not to scholarly research on performance.

7 Translator Brian Massumi observes that the French *fuite* “covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a *point de fuite*). It has no relationship to flying.” In Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: xvi.

Beckett’s Non-Theater (2011)

The relationship between theater and embodied research is ambivalent. Grotowski called theater a “great adventure,” but he eventually left its institutional and epistemological structures in order to conduct a more narrowly focused program of embodied research. In the unpublished essay excerpted below, I argue that the work of Samuel Beckett, in a very different way, also productively demonstrates the limits of theatrical form. Noting that writing and television both offer nearly complete control to the *auteur*, I position Beckett’s theatrical work—and *Waiting for Godot* in particular—as an anomaly in his career that reveals the depth of the challenge he offers to contemporary artists working with embodiment.¹

The trajectory of Samuel Beckett's career demonstrates his desire for absolute control in each medium in which he worked. His later plays, which evolved out of his increasing work as a theatrical director and incorporate stage directions of astonishing specificity and precision, reveal him "working more as a choreographer or painter than as a traditional playwright."² Indeed, the level of compositional authorship Beckett exerted on his television plays leads Jonathan Kalb to conclude that in television Beckett "found a medium that perhaps suits his temperament and talents best of all," affording him "the ultimate directorial control."³ The television plays allowed Beckett to become the total author of a visual spectacle, responsible for the composition of every action of both performers and camera. Although comparisons with choreography, painting, and music are useful, the most relevant analogy is with writing, Beckett's primary craft and the only one that spans his entire career. Writing and television can be seen as the two extremes of Beckett's work, each allowing him to work painstakingly on the composition and musicality of word and image so as to produce a final, inviolable artistic composition.

Waiting for Godot marks a transitional point between these two extremes: the moment in which Beckett began to explore the territory of theater. Unlike his later work, *Godot* really is a playscript in the conventional sense. Plays are strange animals: as finished works, they remain unfinished; complete in themselves, they are necessarily incomplete by nature of the genre. In comparison with the history of dramatic scripts, *Godot* is highly specific in its requirements, but in comparison with the rest of Beckett's work, it is extremely open. *Endgame*, written five or six years later, was already "better visualized"—"a more complete and coherent movement"—and for this reason came to be preferred by Beckett.⁴ In fact, one can chart a clear progression toward directorial precision throughout Beckett's early plays and into the later ones. Given this evident trajectory in Beckett's later work, there is no reason to think that the openness of *Godot* was a conscious choice on the part of the author. Rather, it seems that Beckett at that time did not yet have the theatrical experience necessary to shape and compose the piece more precisely.

I conclude that Beckett was a playwright only accidentally. More accurately he was an "auteur," a creator of finished artistic works in the mediums of prose, theater, and television. For Beckett, writing and directing were part of the same project, a project of *writing images* that became more and more specific throughout his lifetime. As a result, it is somewhat nonsensical to think of *restaging* Beckett's dramatic works, unless

this were understood as something like a “re-performance” of Beckett’s own stagings that would recreate them as accurately as possible rather than attempting to “reinterpret” them as one may interpret a play.⁵ Yet even to attempt the re-performance of Beckett’s productions would be a thankless task, since one can neither make them one’s own nor arrive at a genuine “theater of Beckett.” Billie Whitelaw mused: “What on earth people do trying to tackle Beckett without having him at their side I don’t know.”⁶ It is not so much that Beckett’s work is part of a “struggle against actors,” as Martin Puchner claims.⁷ (One might as well call ballet a “struggle against dancers” because of its demand for body-breaking precision.) The mistake comes in assessing Beckett’s work from the perspective of a Euro-American theater culture based on the staging of plays, when it is better understood as an embodied work linked closely to the artist himself. Staging a re-performance of a Beckett production today would be like attempting to re-enact a ballet (or a Japanese Noh play) without the benefit of a qualified teacher.

Puchner describes the separation of gesture and word in Beckett’s work as an element in his attack on “the integrity of actors and their freedom of movement.”⁸ But there is another way of looking at Beckett’s “rule about the separation of speech and movement.”⁹ One has only to make the comparison between Beckett and ballet, or Beckett and Noh, to see that this rule is less an attack on actors than a practical strategy for achieving the highest levels of performative precision without the benefit of an institutionalized, long-term training system. In the Noh theater, sound and movement may be simultaneous without any diminishment of precision—but this is the result of a lifetime of training on the part of the actors. In the “West,” there is no established training system that could allow for such a precise coordination of word and gesture.

1 Excerpt from “Did Beckett Write for the Theatre? Performance as a Practice of Failure,” unpublished essay (2011).

2 Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 98.

3 *Ibid.*: 116.

4 *Ibid.*: 72.

5 Marina Abramovic has used the term “re-performance” to refer to her own re-doings of earlier works.

6 Quoted in Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*: 17.

7 Martin Puchner, “Samuel Beckett: Actors in Barrels and Gestures in the Text,” in *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002): 158 and *passim*.

8 *Ibid.*: 157.

9 Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*: 33.

PLAYWAR (2012)

From 2009 to 2012, Massimiliano Balduzzi and I worked on a project called *PLAYWAR*. As playwright, I wrote and rewrote hundreds of pages of text, initially with a third partner (Michele Farbman) and then on my own: dialogues, monologues, dream sequences, imaginary puppet shows, narratives, song lyrics, and more. Each performed version of *PLAYWAR* was a new composition, most often focused on two figures whom we called Playboy and Warboy. In the final version, two further alter egos appeared: the dapper Mister Fireworks and the glamorous Miss Ega. The following meta-theatrical text, from a longer piece called “The Show,” was written as it appears here and later divided into dialogue between these characters.¹

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

IT IS A GREAT HONOR TO BE INVITED TO SPEAK WITH YOU, IN THIS PLACE OF ALL PLACES, AND TONIGHT OF ALL NIGHTS. WORDS CANNOT EXPRESS THE FEELINGS THAT ARE IN OUR HEARTS TODAY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

WE CANNOT TELL YOU ANY MORE THAN HAS ALREADY BEEN SAID ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS. ALL WE CAN DO IS WAIT. BUT AT LEAST WE CAN WAIT TOGETHER.

NONE OF US KNOWS WHAT LIES AHEAD. WE HOPE THE WORLD WILL CONTINUE AS IT DID BEFORE. WE HOPE THAT LIFE WILL GO ON. BUT WE WILL NOT FORGET THIS MOMENT. NONE OF US, AFTER TODAY, WILL EVER BE THE SAME.

NONE OF US WILL FORGET THIS NIGHT. THIS NIGHT WHEN WE STAND TOGETHER IN DARKNESS AND PRAY FOR ANOTHER CHANCE. ANOTHER ROUND. ANOTHER DAY. HOWEVER LONG WE MAY LIVE, WE WILL REMEMBER THIS MOMENT.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THROUGHOUT EVOLUTION, PEOPLE HAVE FACED DEATH AND TRIUMPHED. ON THE BATTLEFIELD. ON THE MOUNTAINTOP. IN THE WASTELAND. IN OUR HOMES. MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAVE SEEN THE FACE OF DEATH AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE. I HOPE THAT WE TOO WILL BE SURVIVORS. I HOPE THAT ONE DAY WE WILL TELL ANOTHER GENERATION ABOUT THIS MOMENT.

AS A WARNING. AS A LESSON. AS AN INSPIRATION.
FRIENDS.

THESE RECENT DAYS HAVE BEEN FULL OF FEAR.

WE WAKE UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND WE ASK OURSELVES: IS THIS RIGHT? SHOULD I BE HERE? WHY AM I DOING THIS? WHO IS MY FRIEND? WHO IS MY ENEMY? WOULD I FIGHT FOR VENGEANCE? FOR HONOR? WOULD I KILL TO PROTECT MY FAMILY? WHAT WOULD I DO TO RESTORE ORDER IN A TIME OF CHAOS? WHAT WOULD I SACRIFICE IN THE NAME OF PEACE? HOW FAR WOULD I GO?

WE ASK OURSELVES THESE QUESTIONS EVERY DAY. WE DREAM THEM. WE CARRY THEM WITH US. THERE IS NOT ONE MOMENT IN OUR LIVES WHEN WE ARE FREE FROM THESE QUESTIONS. FROM THIS SENSE OF IMPENDING DOOM.

FRIENDS.

DO NOT ALLOW FEAR TO NUMB YOUR SENSES ON THIS NIGHT OF ALL NIGHTS.

FEAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN WITH US, EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. IN THE SAND. IN THE SNOW. IN THE JUNGLE. COLD FEAR. HOT FEAR. THE FEAR IN OUR HEARTS. THE FEAR OF GOD. FEAR SURGING THROUGH OUR VEINS.

OF COURSE WE ARE AFRAID TONIGHT.

ONLY A MAD PERSON COULD LIVE IN THIS MOMENT AND NOT BE AFRAID. ONLY SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST GRIP ON REALITY COULD STAND WITH US HERE TODAY AND NOT BE STRUCK TO THE CORE WITH ABSOLUTE TERROR.

THIS IS THE MOMENT OF TRUTH. THIS IS THE FINAL RECKONING. AND WE SALUTE YOU. WE SALUTE YOUR BRAVERY. FOR WHAT IS BRAVERY, IF NOT A DETERMINATION TO STAY TOGETHER AT THE VERY END? WHAT IS COURAGE, IF NOT THIS?

FRIENDS.

IF WE DIE, WE DIE TOGETHER.

NONE OF US CAN SAY FOR SURE THAT WE WILL STILL BE ALIVE TOMORROW. AND IF WE ARE, WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT KIND OF WORLD WILL REMAIN FOR US TO LIVE IN. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT THIS MAY BE THE END. THE END OF EVERYTHING.

THE END OF EVERYTHING WE KNOW.

GREATER POWERS ARE AT WORK TONIGHT. PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD, OR DESTINY, OR ACCIDENT. NOW, AS WE STAND AT THE PRECIPICE OF DEATH, THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO TO MOVE EVENTS IN ONE DIRECTION OR ANOTHER. WE CANNOT DETERMINE THE FATE OF THE WORLD TONIGHT. IT IS OUT OF OUR HANDS.

WE SMALL BUT INFINITELY PRECIOUS BEINGS. WE WHOSE BODIES WERE FORGED IN THE HEARTS OF STARS AND WHO ARE STILL BURNING WITH THAT HEAT, FALLING, FALLING TOGETHER TOWARDS OUR UNKNOWN FATE.

ONLY ONE THING REMAINS FOR US TO DO NOW.

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING FOR US TO DO—ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO—AS WE STAND NAKED, TEETERING AT THE EDGE OF CHAOS, LOOKING OUT OVER THE CHASM OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, WITH THE COLD WIND OF ANNIHILATION BLOWING UP FROM BELOW, READY TO PULL US DOWN...

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO...

PARTY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

TONIGHT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FEAR!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

IT IS TIME TO SHUT THE DOORS AND SHUT THE WINDOWS AND LIVE ONE FINAL ACHING MOMENT THE WAY IT WAS MEANT TO BE LIVED!

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO ALL THAT CAN BE SAID AND DONE WHEN EVERYTHING HAS BEEN SAID AND DONE!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

WELCOME TO THE PARTY AT THE END OF THE WORLD!!!!!!!

1 From *PLAYWAR*. Created and performed by Ben Spatz and Massimiliano Balduzzi. Directed by Massimiliano Balduzzi. Original texts and songs by Ben Spatz. Performed in New York City at the Center for Performance Research, Brooklyn (2009); Where Eagles Dare Theatre (2010); North American Cultural Laboratory (2010); Movement Research Festival (2010); Medicine Show Theatre (2010); Linnea Rossa (2011); Bob the Pavilion, Columbia University (2011); Occupy Broadway (2011); and Abrons Arts Center, with lighting design by Sarah Riffle and sound design by Asso Martino and Kanika Oung (2012).

A THOUSAND TINY VIEWPOINTS (2020)

I have never trained deeply in Viewpoints, either as developed by Mary Overlie in postmodern dance or as adapted for ensemble theater by Anne Bogart and SITI Company. But when I was invited to write an essay in response to Overlie's work, I found that I did have something to say. Overlie links her Viewpoints to postmodernism and all versions of the Viewpoints attempt to horizontalize the elements or techniques out of which performances are composed. Yet it has always seemed to me somewhat ironic that a project of horizontalization should take the form of a closed set of six (or perhaps nine) relatively stable elements. In this essay, I attempt to push the idea of viewpoints as far as it can go. First I offer an intentionally jarring combination of historically and culturally diverse "viewpoints". Then I consider examples of three contemporary forms that incarnate the impulse to horizontalize: the lexicon, the index, and the catalog.¹

The sack was immensely heavy and contained innumerable small boxes each marked on the lid with an indented device so that the old man in his blindness could inform himself of their contents by a single touch. Each one of these boxes contained, as I expected, the models, slides and pictures which went inside the machines and were there magnified by lenses almost to life-size. A universality of figures of men, women, beasts, drawing rooms, auto-da-fés and scenes of every conceivable type was contained in these boxes, none of which

was bigger than my thumb. I spilled out a mass of variegated objects on my lap, each a wonder of miniaturization and some of scarcely credible complexity.

“The set of samples,” he explained.²

Standing in space

The title of Mary Overlie’s recent book takes us to the heart of the matter: *Standing in Space*.³ To stand in space is apparently among the simplest of tasks. Yet Overlie asks us to understand it not as a mere particle of everyday behavior, but as a dwelling place, an opening beyond which we may encounter a field of possibility. We are invited to approach standing in space as a starting point, a practice that is amenable to what Charles Spinosa calls “elaboration”:

[W]henever we learn a new practice, even a very simple one such as jogging, we find ourselves constantly sensitive to new things to which we had paid scant attention before. Or we become sensitive to old things in a new way. In jogging, we become sensitive, for instance, to pains in our legs and lungs, to the racing of our hearts, to how much we perspire, to what interests us as we jog, that is, whether we are more interested in having some intellectual problem to try to work through while we jog or having some beautiful trail to look at. Generally, we elaborate our practice according to whatever new sensitivities appear.⁴

To elaborate standing in space as an open-ended practice is to treat it as a threshold to possibilities that lie through and beyond it. Once standing, what then? What small movements sustain the act of standing? What rhythms and perceptions, what emotions and stories, unfold within this act? What if standing is not the endpoint of a trajectory but the gateway to a field? And space? What is space? How do we encounter and grapple with space through the act of standing? For Overlie, “Space is a performance technique, just as there are mountaineering techniques, ice flow navigation techniques, and ballet.”⁵ How can we understand space not as a dimension within which technique unfolds but as an area of technique in itself? What actions lie within or beyond—not in addition to or alongside—this technique? Running, crying, listening, imagining—can we understand these not as alternatives to or abandonments of standing in space but as elaborations of this primary act?

I have participated in workshops organized by the concept of Viewpoints in five or ten different places, with as many different teachers and approaches. What has remained constant in each approach is the idea, or rather the principle, or rather the *threshold technique* of taking a certain relatively small number of elements as nonhierarchically defining a zone of practice. For Overlie these elements are Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story. It is well known that Anne Bogart has developed more than one adaptation of the Viewpoints involving six or nine elements. Perhaps others have as well. The key features of the defining threshold technique seem to be as follows: that the elements are countably few (e.g. six); that they are experientially perpendicular to each other (their combinations are highly flexible rather than tightly interdependent); and that they are horizontally rather than hierarchically linked. For Overlie, the nonhierarchical relation between the elements, their mutual horizontality, is fundamental: “The Viewpoints definition, theory and practice of the horizontal is derived from an embrace of nonhierarchical structure.”⁶ In this way her sustained and influential work on the development of Viewpoints may be placed alongside philosophical concepts such as Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, understood as a horizontal network of nonhierarchical branchings, or even the mode of “inoperativity” by which, according to Giorgio Agamben, a presumed whole may be “deactivated” to reveal “a new possible use.”⁷ Yet there are limits to the horizontality of the Viewpoints. It is not a trivial point to observe that any account of, or training in, Viewpoints must introduce them in a specific order. This is as true for the contents of a book (*Standing in Space* provides the order in which I have listed the Viewpoints here) as for a pedagogical structure such as a course syllabus.

I know of no other performance practitioner who has articulated their work in such resolutely epistemological terms—that is, with such an emphasis on the generation of knowledge. In her book, Overlie describes Time as “a living, breathing, ephemeral material that unfolds itself so that you can physically inhabit it,” invoking the language of “unfolding” that social epistemologists like Karin Knorr Cetina have applied to scientific objects and which I have argued precisely describes research in embodied technique.⁸ She refers to the unfolding of these elements not only as “deconstruction” but also as “*particalization*: to break down into the smallest level” and links this to the process of “noticing difference on finer and finer levels of the structure you are investigating”—what Spinoza calls “elaboration” above and what we can recognize as the defining characteristic of research in any field.⁹ For Overlie, this fundamentally epistemic process is equally responsible for the splitting of the atom by physicists and for splitting, revealing, opening up, and unfolding

each of the Viewpoints to expose its contents: “Space contains... Shape contains... Time contains...” And where does this unfolding take place? In multiple “laboratories,” which Overlie describes as “characterized by impartiality” and by a horizontality in which “an infinite number of new hierarchies may be formed and dissolved.” Commonplace in the sciences, but still too rarely articulated in performing arts, is the principle that “Separation is at the root of all technical development.”¹⁰ Finally, duration—so often a problem for contemporary practice research—is not underestimated by Overlie, who recommends “at least 36 hours of data collection” in each Viewpoint (over 200 hours in total) as “a good starting point”; recognizes that the unfolding contents of an epistemic object, if that object is “well founded,” are “inexhaustible”; and reminds the reader that “Hours of standing in Space is required to truly occupy the stillness.”¹¹ These resonances with social epistemology are not an attempt to mimic science. Rather, they demonstrate the rigor of Overlie’s Viewpoints as a self-aware project of embodied research, grounded within but extending beyond performing arts.

Standing in Space is less convincing when it comes to establishing a broader cultural context for the Six Viewpoints. Overlie’s evocations of the avant-garde and art history are frustratingly white and Eurocentric, uncritically centering NYU’s Experimental Theater Wing as the primary site of artistic research without recognizing it also as a site of privilege and power. Overlie is also surprisingly dismissive of other forms of dance and martial arts—many of which derive from equally valid and sometimes much older research processes—which she refers to as “exterior / learned / repetitive systems.”¹² Many artists make these kinds of claims, not only because of commercial pressures, but also because accurate language does not yet exist to describe the dynamic relations of technique and practice, training and research.¹³ My intention here is not to criticize Overlie but to call attention to how the reification of the Six Viewpoints can betray the principle of horizontality on which their ongoing development is based. A full appreciation of the Six Viewpoints would locate them more rigorously within their own cultural context, situating them historically and defining their elements technically—a task that lies beyond my expertise. What I want to do in the space remaining is to follow Overlie’s challenge to enact radical horizontality by taking the idea of “viewpoints” in other, wilder directions.

On the horizontal

The idea of “viewpoints” (lowercased to indicate a concept or technical element rather than a branded area of technique) is radical because it suggests

that the very definition of what is happening in a moment of practice can be fundamentally altered by shifting the analytical perspective from which it is examined. In technical terms, each of the Six Viewpoints is an independent threshold, opening onto distinct vistas of technique, while the “Six Viewpoints” overall is a composite area produced by sustaining a nonhierarchical relation between those thresholds. The major innovation of the Six Viewpoints is its overturning of classical and modernist aesthetic hierarchies of performance and its perhaps unexpected selection of six new and ostensibly equal thresholds of technique.¹⁴ The potential of this radical move is diminished if we fixate upon a particular set of six—or even nine—viewpoints, as if they alone hold the key to embodied research. Rather, it is the perpetual act of overturning aesthetic hierarchies, embodied as technical pathways, that is most valuable in the notion of horizontality. It is not enough to isolate a dominant set of thresholds and overturn their implicit vertical ranking, as Overlie visually depicts in an earlier essay on the Viewpoints through the image of a flat stack of rectangles freed to float through three-dimensional space.¹⁵ This is a necessary but insufficient step, after which each constituent element must be opened to further exploration: vertically by unfolding them as newly available epistemic objects and horizontally by extending them into neighboring fields.

I am interested in how the concept of “viewpoints” can be used to overturn and reopen other closed sets of analytical elements pertaining to theater and embodied practice. There is, of course, Aristotle’s famous list: *plot, character, thought, diction, music, spectacle*. These have been misleadingly compared with the eight *rasa* of Bharata—not because of any substantive similarity but just because they constitute a “classical” schematic of X categories—which Royona Mitra translates as *love, laughter, fury, compassion, disgust, horror, heroism, and wonder*.¹⁶ Alongside these we might juxtapose Laban’s “basic efforts”: *punch, dab, press, glide, slash, flick, wring, float*. Nothing links the structural analyses of Overlie, Aristotle, Bharata, and Laban except for the desire to produce a manageably small number of elements through which to analyze complex moments of practice. Each set has its own strategy and aesthetics for—to use Karen Barad’s term—making “cuts” in reality.¹⁷ Within their own contexts, these sets have internal structures. While Overlie’s work independently, Aristotle’s are hierarchical, and the eight basic efforts of Laban are generated by the systematic combination of three underlying dimensions: direction, time, and weight. But if we follow the deconstructive impulse of the Viewpoints rather than the specific technique that has emerged from Overlie’s own research, we will not hesitate to consider further unexpected combinations

of these elements—for example, by drawing one element from each of the sets. Indeed, nothing prevents our including elements from even further afield, such as breathing technique in yoga or new categories of gender, both of which I discuss in *What a Body Can Do*.¹⁸ The result would be a set of elements worthy of Jorge Luis Borges' fictional encyclopedia, in which animals are divided into conceptually disparate categories such as “belonging to the Emperor,” “innumerable,” and “drawn with a very fine camelhair brush.”¹⁹ Here then is an alternative set of six viewpoints: *space, music, compassion, punch, breath, butch*.

Is this nonsense? How can a gender identity like “butch” be placed alongside a material property like “space” and a palpable zone of embodiment like “breath”? But the queer and transfeminist gender theories of the past decades have shown precisely that gender is not simply a disciplining regime or a set of rules and norms but an area—or rather, countless areas—of ongoing research. Even the “big two” of gender, “woman” and “man,” are research results as well as training protocols. Once this is recognized, it is no longer a question of adding a few more sexes or genders to the list but of multiplying and proliferating gender as a field of technique, taking it toward the limit of what Deleuze and Guattari call “a thousand tiny sexes.”²⁰ What slips in with the reification of fundamental categories—whether six viewpoints or two sexes—is structuralism: the assumption that basic categories can be conclusively enumerated. And what Overlie calls postmodernism is more accurately poststructuralism: an abandonment of the ancient hope of arriving at any final or fundamental set of analytical categories. As embodied practitioners, we know that the absence of fundamental categories does not mean that just anything goes. How then can we reconcile the embodied experience of grappling with material forces and the apparently unlimited ways in which we can analyze and conceptualize those interactions? How can we make practical and experiential sense of a list of terms like *space, music, compassion, punch, breath, butch*—in which each apparently stands in for an area of technique, but there is no common historical or cultural ground for their interaction?

Confronted with a set of viewpoints drawn from such disparate sources and contexts, we can immediately grasp the essential relationship between a threshold and the area of technique onto which it opens, as well as the context in which that technique has been practiced. The most superficial interpretation of this peculiar set would treat its elements only as words. By rendering terms like “music” and “breath” in English, we seem to suggest that they are easily accessed: any charismatic sound, any structured breathing. If instead we retained original terms such as *melodia, karuna*, and

pranayama or *vinyasa*, it would be clear that we are referring not to general and easily transmitted symbols or concepts but—as phrases like “Space is a performance technique” make clear—to highly developed areas of technique with particular material substrates and cultural histories. The juxtaposition of these terms then suggests not an amusing or surrealist thought experiment, but rather a sophisticated set of epistemic objects defined by the respective potential interdisciplinarity of the disciplines within which each of those terms has meaning. Any two of these terms already pose a research problem: What kinds of interaction can exist between Overlie’s Space and Bharata’s *karuna*? What might be found in the overlap between Laban’s punching effort and the linking of breath and movement found in *vinyasa*? What kinds of *melodia* in the ancient Greek sense can participate in butch gender technique? Such projects, based on interdisciplinarity between distinct lineages of technique, are wild enough. Each carries its own cultural, political, and epistemological stakes. To enter an interdisciplinary epistemic territory defined by all six would then require many years of experimentation, and in the case of this ragtag assemblage might not be worth the effort. The point, however, is to recognize the powerful structuring effect produced by any attempt to enumerate a set of fundamental categories in the first place.

Pick up an object: leaf, pen, ball... You can spend the rest of your life exploring its affordances and histories and only scratch the surface. The same goes for any body part: foot, eye, heart... and for less localizable zones of embodiment: center, balance, voice... This is embodiment not as a stable ground or foundation for action but as “first affordance,” a limitless domain of research into being with resolutely ethical-political force.²¹ Because the world unfolds with infinite complexity, every zone of technique is defined by the key thresholds through which one must pass in order to dwell within it. There is no ballet without *barre*; no capoeira without *ginga*; no European classical music without a particular set of twelve pitches. These thresholds simultaneously define a zone of fractally branching pathways in technique and exclude an infinite number of alternatives.²² As cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed writes:

When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. Such exclusions—the constitution of a field of unreachable objects—are the indirect consequences of following lines that are before us: we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not “on line.” The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there.²³

The question is how to understand the relationship between a set of thresholds and a complex area of technique. When is it necessary to enumerate a manageable number of categories for a given area? At what point does this enumeration become possible, what does it accomplish, and what does it prevent? When should such an articulation be undertaken and when should it be postponed, deconstructed, or ignored? If a list of basic elements or viewpoints defines the overall threshold to a named area of technique, with what forms of articulation can that enumeration be juxtaposed in order to avoid a collapse of technical depth? How do we offer a set of key thresholds or principles while emphasizing that a list of entry points is not a comprehensive map?

It seems that the enumeration of a set of fundamental categories or viewpoints is most often an act of pedagogy. It is when we are called upon not only to render our practice in technical terms, but also to teach our knowledge to others, that we are compelled to reduce its fractally complex branchings and details to a manageably small group of basic elements. Notation systems are a special case of the obligation to transmit, but anytime we are asked to teach a workshop, design a syllabus, write an introductory text, or make technique accessible, we tend to come up with lists of this kind. To render something pedagogical is to give it a linear shape: to create one or several marked trails through a dense forest of practical pathways. There can be no doubt that such acts of creative simplification are crucial to all lineages of embodied technique; hence the innumerable systems and schemas that exist. By way of conclusion, I want to ask about the opposing move, the counterpart to schematization. What kinds of “opening” acts complement the necessary closures of pedagogy? What kinds of document work to articulate the interior structure of an area of technique? What is the name for the process by which we render a practice more open, more horizontal, and thereby rhizomatize the pedagogical tree? What might a substantive technical or peer-oriented document of embodied research look like, as distinct from its pedagogical rendering? A living practice is defined by an ongoing relation between training and research, in which the edge that separates the two domains is always shifting. If a description of six viewpoints is a blueprint for training, what would constitute an adequate trace of the corresponding research?

Lexicon, index, catalog

In the epigraph to this essay, Angela Carter gives us a fantastical synthesis of the poststructuralist recognition of life’s uncontainable complexity and the structuralist desire for comprehensive analysis. On the one hand, the set of

“samples” is “innumerable,” a “mass of variegated objects” of “scarcely credible complexity.” On the other, we are told that these items are “symbolic constituents of representation of the basic constituents of the universe. If they are properly arranged, all the possible situations in the world and every possible mutation of those situations can be represented.”²⁴ In this fantasy, Carter envisions what no practical technique can achieve: a collection of archetypal symbols, each precisely defined in its own right, which together map the entire space of possible realities. It goes without saying that, within the scope of the novel, this metaphysical set can never be fully described or enumerated. Its power lies in the impossibility of its completeness; to list its contents would be to reduce it to just another deck of Tarot cards.

How might we concretely construct an open set of viewpoints? In this final section, I consider three recent examples of performance-related documents that strive to articulate complex fields of ongoing research without organizing them according to any manageable set of fundamental categories. Like Carter’s set of samples, each offers “a mass of variegated objects” rather than a manageable set of categories. Of course, as real documents linked to actual practice, they cannot be literally innumerable. However, each makes its contents available in a way that intentionally highlights its incompleteness, pushing back against the desire for comprehensive coverage and enumeration. Instead of providing a table of contents for the epistemic fields they map, these examples take the form of a lexicon, an index, and a catalog. Described in order of increasing multimodality—textual, text with image, and audiovisual—I hope they may serve as possible models for ongoing practice research, performance as research, artistic research, research-creation, and related modalities, which today must move beyond lamenting the insufficiency of documentation and toward the production of new types and forms of work that more adequately incorporate the horizontality fundamental to every sustained creative process.

A lexicon is a written form of mapping. As I have noted elsewhere, one of the hallmarks of intensive research is the blossoming of a new lexicon of terms, which are suddenly required to map the interior complexity of what had previously seemed simple.²⁵ In *Lexicon of the Mouth*, Brandon LaBelle offers a horizontal approach to mouth and voice that proceeds through a set of terms which intentionally generates no integrated whole but rather a sense of interminable unfolding:

*Voice—Subject—Mouthing—Theater—Fever—Cavity—Oral Imaginary—
Monster—Bat—Relations—Marks—Cannibal—Flows—Diets—Matter—
Taste—Raw—Foreign—Loss—Alien—Swallow—Education—Puke—*

Slosh—Lubricant—Belch—Sublime—Aloud—Evoke—Energy—Indian—Siren—Transgression—History—Anger—Arrest—Shatter—Uniqueness—Poetry—Ur—Semiotic—Brute—Noise—Clown—Impersonation—Delirium—Huh!—Raw (#2)—Beast—Tired—Social—Present—Rest—Loss—Pressed—Auditorium—Unsound—Subvocal—Madness...

There are more than one hundred items in LaBelle's lexicon. Written with poetic intensity, the book uses words to explicate the density and diversity of what is so often reduced to an anatomically defined body "part," even or especially in performer training. By disaggregating the mouth, LaBelle aims to provide "a feverish view—an opening, a horizon, an elaborated sensuality—for the imagination of a future voice, one that may ultimately surprise us with stammering, singing, biting its lip, or speaking an unforgettable sound."²⁶ Precisely because it offers no linear pathway into practice, but rather a kaleidoscopic horizon of possibilities, LaBelle's *Lexicon* stands as a research counterpart to every pedagogically oriented voice training book.

A similar impulse underpins *Emergency INDEX*, an "annual document of performance practice" that has been published since 2011 and for which I have served as a contributing editor.²⁷ Extending beyond LaBelle's single-author work to produce a compendium of myriad dispersed voices, the *INDEX* practices "a policy of radical inclusion" according to which "included works will not be restricted by genre, quality, popularity, politics, or venue." Each volume runs to hundreds of pages and includes all manner of performances: from theatrical productions to installations, durational events, outdoor processions, semi-private acts, and more. Each entry is allotted two pages, one for a photograph and another for a description of "the primary problems driving the work and the tactics developed in the performance to address them," thereby extending the form of the written lexicon into a textual-visual montage. By eschewing curatorial and organizational strategies, the *INDEX* attempts to map the vast field of performance in a rigorously horizontal and rhizomatic way, leading me previously to dub it "a book of wonders, a kind of bestiary."²⁸ Again, a bestiary is distinct from an evolutionary tree in which species are fixed in historical and physiological relations. In a bestiary, every creature appears on its own terms, opening a space of variety rather than a system of parts. The term bestiary also reminds us that this form of articulation is not only "postmodern" in a chronological sense, but has always existed alongside more schematic forms. Of course, it would be possible to go through the *INDEX* and categorize the entries according to "genre, quality, popularity,

politics, or venue.” But the stance of the editors is clear: Any such categorization must be a secondary step, layered onto a primarily rhizomatic ontology which better suggests the contemporary field of performance than any linear introduction.

The third example is from my own research and moves into the domain of audiovisual recording. The online Songwork Catalogue is a collection of approximately three hundred short video clips selected from hundreds of hours of video recording undertaken in the context of an academic research project, which aimed not only to develop new songwork technique but also to explore new strategies for generating audiovisual research documents from experimental practice.²⁹ By listing the clips chronologically and avoiding any schematic or linear breakdown, the Songwork Catalogue intends to model a rhizomatic approach to the mapping of technique and practice. Aesthetically and technologically simpler than the video essay, the audiovisual catalog offers a transversal view of practice, privileging breadth and depth over coherency and comprehensive mapping. For this purpose, the large number of clips is crucial. If there were ten or even twenty clips, they might offer an illusion of comprehensive coverage. Three hundred clips, in contrast, is effectively innumerable—too many to count—and implies the possibility of many more. In this way the Catalogue represents songwork as an open field of knowledge, comprising not a set of basic elements but “a thousand plateaus,” a myriad of thresholds into song.³⁰

LaBelle’s *Lexicon* groups its variegated entries into twelve chapters. Each *Emergency INDEX* is itself indexed by country as well as by the names of contributing artists, while the annual volumes individually structure a growing database that is now also available online. To help navigate the Songwork Catalogue, co-creator Erçin and I are in the process of developing six “pathways for training,” linear sequences organized according to six themes: *rhythm, somatics, association, partnering, stereotype, gender*. Elsewhere, I have selected and labeled eight still images from the Catalogue according to a set of embodied “affects”: *pensive, active, dog, harmed, sparks, yearning, giddy, vessel*.³¹ Each of these is an attempt to render the lexicon, index, or catalog more manageable; to illuminate linear pathways through their intentionally unwieldy contents. In some cases, this is done in order to render the materials pedagogical, shifting the orientation of analysis from research to training. In other cases, the generation of cross-cutting categories may be part of further research, as in qualitative research when participant data (such as interviews) is used to derive a set of emergent keywords for further analysis.³² What is important here is how the form of the lexicon, index,

or catalog responds to the challenge of the horizontal by pushing back against the impulse to organize and group, shattering the coherence of categories as a book's index shatters its table of contents. These forms move us in the direction of a horizon(tal) that was never further away than the act of breathing or of standing in space, yet so often forgotten: back beyond writing, toward a thousand tiny viewpoints.

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- 1 This essay was written by invitation for *On the Horizontal: Mary Overlie and the Viewpoints*, ed. Tony Perucci (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).
 - 2 Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (New York and London: Penguin, 1972): 95.
 - 3 Mary Overlie, *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice* (Billings, Montana: Fallon Press, 2016).
 - 4 Charles Spinosa in Theodore R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina, and Eike von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 210; see also Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015): 63–4.
 - 5 Overlie, *Standing in Space*: 7.
 - 6 *Ibid.*: 79.
 - 7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 3–15; Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016): 245–7.
 - 8 Overlie, *Standing in Space*: 23; Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 63.
 - 9 Overlie, *Standing in Space*: 67, 71.
 - 10 *Ibid.*: 78, 83–4, 67, 79, 143.
 - 11 *Ibid.*: 4, 8, 11. On duration in practice research, see also “Duration and Kinship,” this volume.
 - 12 Overlie, *Standing in Space*: ix, xi, 92–4, 123, 39.
 - 13 For this argument, see Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 149.
 - 14 Overlie, *Standing in Space*: 92–4.
 - 15 Mary Overlie, “The Six Viewpoints” in *Training of the American Actor*, ed. Arthur Bartow (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006): 194.
 - 16 Royona Mitra, “Decolonizing Immersion: Translation, Spectatorship, Rasa Theory and Contemporary British Dance,” *Performance Research* 21.5 (2016): 91.
 - 17 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
 - 18 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 76–9, 214n13.
 - 19 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002): xv.
 - 20 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 213.
 - 21 See “Embodiment as First Affordance,” this volume.
 - 22 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 44–8.
 - 23 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 14–5; see also Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 45–6.
 - 24 Carter, *Infernal Desire Machines*: 95–6.

- 25 In *What a Body Can Do*, I compare the appearance of new genders and sexualities to that of the “particle zoo” discovered by atomic physics in the twentieth century (206, 214n13).
- 26 Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014): 187, italics added.
- 27 *Emergency INDEX* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2017): emergencyindex.com/
- 28 Ben Spatz, “Review of Emergency INDEX 2011,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 57.2 (2013): 185.
- 29 Ben Spatz, Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, and Agnieszka Mendel, *Songwork Catalogue* (Urban Research Theater, 2017): urbanresearchtheater.com/songwork/. The Songwork Catalogue was produced as part of the project “Judaica: An Embodied Laboratory for Songwork” (UK Arts and Humanities Research Council 2016–2018); see Ben Spatz, “Molecular Identities: Digital Archives and Decolonial Judaism in a Laboratory of Song,” *Performance Research* 24.1 (2019): 66–79; and Ben Spatz, *Making a Laboratory: Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video* (New York: Punctum Books, forthcoming).
- 30 The Wooster Group’s “Dailies” collection offers another transversal audiovisual archive of performance practice: thewoostergroup.org/blog/dailies/all-dailies/ (accessed 3 August 2019). And, of course, the vast mess of YouTube is truly innumerable and impossible to navigate, a horizontal archive growing exponentially.
- 31 Ben Spatz and D. Soyini Madison, “Boundary Affects: Stills from the Songwork Catalogue,” *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 1.3 (2018): 16–23.
- 32 See Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967).

5

SEX: FRAGMENTS

the desert (2003)

The project I called *the desert* was always monstrous. It was first a novel, then an improvised ensemble performance, then a poetic novella, years later a dance, until eventually some of its images fed into the solo performance *Rite of the Butcher*. Each version was different, but most circled around the desert as an image of queerness or what I would now call nonbinary gender and sexuality. The fragments below were written during the ensemble theater version of *the desert*: a few bits of text, a handful of open-ended scripts, an unfinished letter. In them I feel pulsing a range of questions and needs that still call to be articulated—even if this is likely not how I would write today about queerness, about nonbinary gender, about intersex embodiment, about anger and shame, about beauty and ugliness.¹

Texts

Grace

Grace nodded. “I think,” she began, but faltered. Starting over, she spoke slowly, pausing to consider her words. “It’s been a long time. But even so... For me, sex is something that involves male and female parts coming together.” It sounded awkward in the moment, but Sara nodded. “Yes,” the

older women agreed. “For us too. But we have plenty of each, more than we can possibly remember at once. Don’t you see?” She took Grace’s hand in her own, and squeezed the tip of her index finger lightly, whispering: “Male.” She touched Grace’s hand in the valley between two fingers: “Female.” Touching Grace’s thumb, “male.” Her palm, female. Her wrist at the pulse, male. The crook of her elbow, female. Her shoulder, male. Her armpit, female. Her chin, the tip of her nose, the lobes on her ears, male. Her eyes, her nostrils, the inside rims of her ears, female. Her lips, male. Her mouth, female. Her tongue, male. Sara’s hand traced Grace’s body from top to bottom, mountains and valleys, tips and holes, in and out, like a maze. Intricately charted and full of hidden treasures, like the desert itself. In the end, they kissed, tongues in mouth, tongue on tongue, mouth on mouth, like something more complex than sex. In the end, Grace lay happy and warm next to Sara on the sandy earth.

Beast

The glyph between Beast’s legs puzzled Joe, and so he touched it. It was strange, like an alien. It was not like what the girls had in the village, or like what he had between his legs, but was some combination of the two. A thickness here, a fold, a tenderness. It was a puzzle, and the unlocking of it showed on Beast’s glowing face in the night. Turning this way and that, the poor creature did not speak, but let out such moans as hurt Joe’s heart. And yet, he could not stop touching this thing. At first, it was out of pity that he touched, then curiosity, until he found himself aroused and no longer wished to pull away. The creature was coming, came again and again, and then Joe found himself coming too. Joe had never come only from touching someone else. It was not the body here that aroused him so, pale and worn and leathery as the skin was, broken and twisted as its skeleton. It was something in the eyes, something that had been hurt so badly and opened so wide that it could never again be closed, and Joe found himself falling into this vulnerability like a pool. What Beast felt became what Joe also felt, and a channel was opened between them that on that night seemed as if it could never fade.

Heat

Heat of the world! Brass in on it glowing white-hot! The land lies, it doesn’t tell you it hurts, and it goes and goes, the rudeness, the pink abrasive tiles, and sticky wet words. Taking you for a copper moment no one in the heat of it, the heat of all of them, and the flies. Gathering clumsy buzzing and

stinging around the prickle red skin-bake, rubbing into it, pulling on it, telling me what to do—but it's empty. I can't follow such a thick one, such a maze going pit-like into hot open breaths, such a dizzy wish to fall off the top of a fucking carnival rider. This is the heat of the moment, in the thick of awful haze when I'm washing your pebbles off down into some bucket of rubbing drumming heat rocks. Take it! I can't run that fast any more with air that pulls my throat down to my stomach, with rubber lungs in the oven all the time, with flies in my face and a dead man staring up at me and we both stare into the prickle red sun-bake sky.

Scripts

The Show

A is traveling.
A arrives at B and C.
A asks for directions.
B and C show a trick.
A has a strong reaction.
B and C do something in unison.
A exits.
B and C do something together.

Ghosts

All 3 are sitting together.
A hears a ghost. Then B hears it.
B becomes possessed.
C touches B.
B feels shame or fear and pulls away.
All 3 feel shame or fear and pull away.
The ghosts pass on.
The 3 touch each other.

Memoirs

A describes people from their childhood.
B and C reveal that they were two of those people.
A asks how they came to be in the desert.
B and C explain.

The Picture

A says: "This is a picture of myself more beautiful."

B looks, and falls in love with it.

C refuses to look at it.

A drops it.

C runs and cries.

B searches for another picture.

Firedance

A and B are dancing.

C is crawling.

A and B perform an action of pure joy.

C has a strong reaction to it.

A and B teach C how to perform the action.

A performs the action.

All 3 dance.

Monsters

B and C watch as A becomes ugly. Uglier. As ugly as possible.

A relaxes.

B and C touch A.

Take turns. B becomes ugly, relaxes, and is touched. Then C becomes ugly, relaxes, and is touched.

Letter to the Orange-Haired Girl

dear H.

first of all, thank you so much for writing. afterwards i ached to know what the three people who left were thinking and why it disappointed them so much. tuesday's performance was a disappointment to us all, in fact. everyone was frustrated afterwards and perhaps even for some of the same reasons as you. i've been thinking and talking very hard about this show and the questions it raises for the last couple days, so i can't put all of my complex feelings and thoughts into this letter. but i'll try to answer your questions just a bit and if the answers interest you then perhaps we could have coffee or something and talk further.

the basic question about structure: We arrived at what we have through a workshop process starting from just ideas. what we have now is a daily routine from morning to night which the characters proceed through each day. every day it comes out differently but the routine is the same. jack always wakes up and does pushups. bridget always has an attack of arthritis at noon. gil always gives a sermon in the afternoon. that is our only script, and it is constantly subjected to change without notice.

the goal? to create an image of queerness. i guess i would love it if we could create that in each performance, but the way it's turning out with this kind of theater (this is my second piece of unscripted theater) is that you really only get worthwhile results when you stop trying to overdetermine what will be included in each performance. i think now that the image of queerness we create may only be visible to people who see two or three or four or five of our shows. tuesday was a bad night for everyone. i have been debating with my co-director what the role of the director is at this stage of the game and he had convinced me to pull out more than i now think i should have. he can do that gracefully but i cannot, so there was a weird energy in the space, people looking for cohesion and me weirdly refusing to lead in any way.

i wish you could have seen it yesterday. from the first moment it was different and—to me—amazing. jack didn't wake up first, as he usually does. he didn't do pushups. gil had to wake him up and then bridget started doing his pushups. from then on the span of the day had real cohesion. it had the feel of taking place in actual time. conversations that were dropped came up again later, and in the more relaxed atmosphere much more beauty and meaning were found. and because of that it was that much closer to the original vision of queerness that inspired this project...

which is this: a city in a desert. an allegory. the city represents patriarchy, order, control, hygiene, power. outside its walls is a vast junkyard where the city throws all of its trash, and there among the trash live the squatters, dwellers, strangers, monsters, queers... exiles from the city. beyond the junkyard is the mythical desert: open, infinite, without borders or barriers, perfect, and perfectly lonely like death. two complementary visions of queerness, then: on the one hand, the angels, harmonic, balanced, smooth, slow, eternal, androgynous. and on the other hand, the ministers (better called freaks): kinky, perverted, off-balance, fetishized and fetishizing, poly-gendered, fractured.

i know you probably didn't see much of that on tuesday. i believe it was more visible last night. and of course, you are very much invited tonight and tomorrow night to find out what happens. as always i can guarantee nothing, but if the actors can find the place of honesty that they found last night, then at the very least you will see some moments of genuine beauty.

thanks again for taking the time to write.

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- 1 The theatrical version of *the desert* (2003) was co-directed with Kody Blue and performed by Tom Frazer, Tim Jones, Gillian Tunney, Sofia Villella, and Sheenru Yong. It was presented in New York City at ABC No Rio, as part of the Fuse Festival at HERE Arts Center, and finally outdoors in Tompkins Square Park.

Pornography and Trauma (2009)

#MeToo is the tip of an iceberg disclosing the trauma that exists around sexuality in our society. Only recently has crucial embodied research in nonbinary gender, decolonial sexuality, transfeminism, and intersectionality allowed me to grasp how sex can be—at the same time, but for different people and in different contexts—the most extraordinary pleasure and the cruelest violation, as well as the most omnipresent symbol and the most repressed secret. But since a young age I have grappled with diverse approaches to feminism, both intellectually and as an embodied journey through desire, anger, shame, love, and discovery. In these notes toward an unwritten essay, I attempt to think through the meaning of pornography, in relation to trauma, without accepting the premise of binary gender.¹

I read anti-pornography feminists as *traumatized* narrators of sex.² I have deep empathy for them and consider their rage and compassion to be powerful and valuable. But their feelings about sex do not reflect my own. Nor does the *rightfulness* of their rage imply the *rightness* of their social (or legal) arguments. Similarly, I read pornography defenders of (even violent) pornography as *spoiled* narrators of sex, people who avoid empathetic identification with victims of sexual abuse and assault and demand that the world be their playground. I am interested in people who defend pornography and

kinky practices from a perspective of empathy, and in people who speak the truth about trauma without attempting to outlaw the play of others.

What is the *meaning* of porn? According to these ideas, the meaning of porn is that there is no such thing as trauma. But this is not, of course, in the sense of a discursive argument about the nonexistence of trauma. Rather, pornography depicts a world in which every act that is *potentially* traumatic is immediately rediscovered as *hot*—that is, playful. Traumatic narratives, on the other hand, depict a world in which even actions intended as innocent play remain indefinitely suspect for the violence that might be hidden beneath them. This is the difference between a “strong arousal theory” and a “strong trauma theory” in Silvan Tomkins’ vocabulary.³ Porn is a world in which everything is assessed immediately and only in terms of its potential for excitement. Trauma is a world in which everything is assessed in terms of its potential to induce pain and suffering. The latter also resembles a stereotypic idea of psychoanalysis, in which seemingly playful aspects of childhood are reexamined for the subconscious trauma they may have caused. But the former is also part of therapy—especially expressive arts therapies and those that focus on the ability to play as a way of processing even traumatic experiences.⁴

I am using non-gendered pronouns. I am aware that, even in my own imagination, the “spoiled narrators” here are men and the “traumatized narrators” are women. But I want to destabilize those assumptions as well as assumptions of heterosexuality or even binary sexuality.

1 Notes toward an unfinished essay for Wayne Koestenbaum’s course “Humiliation” at The Graduate Center, CUNY (2009). The following three endnotes have been added to provide additional context.

2 I am thinking here about the writings of Andrea Dworkin.

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

4 Here I am thinking especially of the drama therapy modality called Developmental Transformations (DvT): www.developmentaltransformations.com/.

Is Grotowski Queer? (2013)

Intersections of Grotowski’s work with feminist and queer theory remain underexplored. Even today, I am aware of only a few practitioners and graduate students who are attempting to “queer” Grotowski through a reclaiming or reinterpretation of his techniques and ideas. The prevailing

conception of Grotowski in the United States is still a masculinist one that places him amongst other patriarchal European directors of the twentieth century. This however leaves out many aspects of Grotowski's work, which suggest a modality of queerness very different from what has become known as "queer theater." In this excerpt from an unpublished paper, I look for what is already queer in Grotowski.¹

More than two decades ago, Sue-Ellen Case described how "social conventions" of female or feminine gender could be "encoded" in theatrical performance through blocking, for example "by assigning bolder movements to the men and more restricted movements to the women, or by creating poses and positions that exploit the role of women as sexual objects."² Case was concerned with the extent to which an acting technique may unwittingly replicate the sexist and heterosexist power dynamics of everyday life. In Rhonda Blair's formulation of the same period, this process works in the other direction as well, since "performing a role is a kind of 'training for life,' a rehearsal and patterning of a way of being in the world."³ Thus, there is flow in both directions between the technique of gender and that of acting. From a feminist perspective, the danger is not just that acting will re-present hegemonic sexism onstage, but equally that it will support the ongoing reproduction of inequality by offering training in normative gender under the guise of actor training. This concern is confirmed by Elizabeth C. Stoppel's suggestion that "acting classes claiming to free students physically, in order to develop characters from a more neutral basis of gestures, in fact allow students to remain locked into gendered behavior" as long as gender is not explicitly problematized as part of the process.⁴ Grotowski's work is a useful case study here because he never saw his actors as undertaking an entirely public project. Asking how gender works in roughly "Grotowskian" actor training can therefore never be a matter of how the signs of gender are manipulated onstage, or how the audience perceives the gender of the actor, but must first of all be a question of how gender *works*, on an embodied level, between and within the performers.

Grotowski considered himself primarily a teacher of men.⁵ While he certainly worked with women, and probably also with some people whose gender identity could in retrospect be considered queer or trans, the majority of Grotowski's pupils and collaborators can be classified as men. In the terminology of contemporary gender theory, we could say that Grotowski worked with male-assigned people to bring them past

a threshold of femininity that was radically different from the gender roles in which they had been raised. This queerness did not extend into everyday life, at least in terms of the assigned genders of the participants in Grotowski's work. Nor did it imply a permanent transition from male to female or feminine (or vice versa). Rather, it aspired toward an androgyny evoked by numerous mystical texts, such as those of Christian mysticism, which were important during the last phase of Grotowski's work.⁶ The possibility of unity or synthesis between male and female assumes an originary dichotomy and elevates the union of opposites to a special or liminal realm. For this reason, the idea that men can achieve something mystical through a kind of "becoming-feminine" can also be seen as distinctly patriarchal.

As Abigail Solomon-Godeau reminds us, the articulation of "soft" or "feminine" masculinities need not be aligned with feminism or with overtly gay identities and politics.⁷ Rather, it may entail a project by and for men in which "actual" women are seemingly rendered superfluous insofar as men become capable of enacting genuine femininity. In her study of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, Solomon-Godeau notes that the popularity of eroticized and androgynous representations of men was "contemporaneous with a heightened misogyny, a rollback in whatever rights women had briefly acquired during the revolution ... and an emerging bourgeois civil sphere constituted in large part through the exclusion and discursive silencing of women."⁸ Several critics have written about Grotowski's classically patriarchal attitude toward public appearances and pedagogy.⁹ I do not wish to undermine these criticisms or to suggest that the queerness I find in Grotowski is a radical or political queerness. Grotowski was adamant in his rejection of politics, if by that we mean the waging of power struggles in the public eye or the struggle for equality among diverse social groups. Yet, we cannot, for that reason, dismiss this queerness as irrelevant to feminist, queer, and trans identities.

I want to consider three concrete ways in which Grotowski guided his collaborators and disciples toward a technique that—at least in the cultural context in which he was working—can be identified as feminine. In each case, the passage toward the "feminine" is ultimately contained. That is, it does not overwhelm or displace the more fundamental "masculine" premises of the work. This can be seen in three dimensions of Grotowski's work: (1) the actor's relationship of desiring submission to both director and score;¹⁰ (2) the concept of "organicity," adopted and adapted from Stanislavski to indicate a distinctly feminine

or at least androgynous mode of passive enactment rather than willed or muscular force;¹¹ and (3) the turn away from the audience. Each of these is related to the others in what Grotowski's saw as the actor's work or calling.

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- 1 From "Is Grotowski Queer? Gender and Organicity in the Empty Room," conference paper at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, Orlando, Florida (2013). This paper was presented as part of a panel I convened, called "Training Queer: Intersections of Queer/Gender Studies and Actor/ Performer Training."
 - 2 Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008): 117–18.
 - 3 Cited in Mary Cutler, "'Typed' for What?," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, eds. Ellen Margolis and Lyssa Tyler Renaud (New York and London: Routledge, 2010): 137. The reference is to Blair's essay "Liberating the Young Actor: Feminist Pedagogy and Performance," *Theatre Topics* 2 (1992): 16.
 - 4 Elizabeth C. Stoppel, "Reconciling the Past and the Present: Feminist Perspectives on the Method in the Classroom and Stage" in *Method Acting Reconsidered*, ed. Krasner (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000): 123n19. See also Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares: Women and "the Method"* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
 - 5 Unpublished, unofficial transcript of a conversation with North American actors and directors in Orvieto, Italy (2000). On Grotowski's under-acknowledged collaborations with women, see Virginie Magnat, *Grotowski, Women, and Contemporary Performance: Meetings with Remarkable Women* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
 - 6 For example, the Workcenter's *Action* incorporated the following text from the *Gospel of Thomas* (§22):

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner as the outer, and the upper as the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male shall not be male, and the female shall not be female... then you will enter [the kingdom].
 - 7 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Male Trouble," in *Constructing Masculinity*, eds. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 69–76.
 - 8 *Ibid.*: 74.
 - 9 For example, see Charles Ludlam, "Let Grotowski Sacrific Masculinity Too," and Charles Marowitz, "Grotowski in Irvine: Breaking the Silence," in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (New York: Routledge, 1997). See also Philip Auslander's lumping of Grotowski with Brecht and Stanislavsky under the categories of "logocentrism" or even "phallogocentrism" in *From Acting to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
 - 10 On this idea, see "This Extraordinary Power," this volume.
 - 11 Grotowski's final text describes "Performer" with a capital "P" in conventionally feminine terms, as possessing an "organism-channel through which the energies circulate" rather than "an organism-mass" composed of "muscles." Jerzy Grotowski, "Performer" in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*: 378.

soft butch (2018)

This essay was accepted and later rejected by the editors of a book on non-binary gender identities. The editors found it too contentious to publish, writing: “From your abstract we were under the impression that you were AFAB [assigned female at birth], but from reading your essay it seems that is not the case but rather you were assigned male at birth.” For them, my partial and heavily qualified claim to some form of lesbian and/or trans-masculine identity was inadmissible. Referring to increased conflict in the U.K. following the government’s 2018 public consultation on the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, the editors wrote in their rejection, “it is not appropriate to expose [our] publication to such risk.”¹

Coming out as nonbinary has been, for me, a process of working backward through my life. I see that I made a series of choices that took me on a path which I can only identify as *passing*: passing as male, passing as straight, passing as cisgender, passing as able-bodied, passing as white. I am all of these things, more or less. But the “less” part needs some attention. I do not want to reject my career or life history any more than I want to give up the privileges that make my life stable enough to write this essay. It isn’t a question of rejection but of unfolding and remaking. Nonbinary feels like the tool I was waiting for all my life, with which to begin this process. And strictly speaking, I am not sure it is “me” who is nonbinary. Are nonbinary people a specific class or group? If so, I am proud and relieved to carry that banner. But I think that nonbinary gender is more than just a category of identity. Nonbinary is a lens, a framework, an analytic, a multidimensional space in which the two big genders of man and woman are located. Woman as a binary category is different from woman as a location in nonbinary gender space. We can talk about how close or distant we are from the “big two,” how we relate to them, and how we move through gender in complex orbits around these and other points. The aim is not to get everyone beyond the binary but to open up nonbinary space, to make it accessible and just.

On 6 July 2016, I wrote a public Facebook post:

My gender identity is nonbinary and more specifically it is soft butch. That’s been true my whole life and I’ve been specifically identifying as soft butch for at least twenty years, but I’d like to say this now publicly and gradually I will start to include it more explicitly in my public academic and artistic profiles.

Soft butch is a lesbian term.² I don't know when the term originated but I encountered it in the mid-1990s, when I was in high school. I had dated a few people when my world was rocked by a lesbian. She was a self-proclaimed radical lesbian feminist for whom that label meant everything. At the time, it seemed as if the dysfunctional aspects of our relationship and the pain we constantly caused each other were directly because of a conflict between her lesbian identity and my male body. I even wrote a soulful, adolescent poem about how my body was wrong for her because it was "hard" and full of "straight lines"—phrases that make me laugh now because they were so inaccurate. My body was never hard or straight. It was a poem about the idea of maleness as an inherent flaw that I carried with me, an imaginary maleness that we both projected onto me. This is the first time I've written about this relationship. I hesitate to say how important it was to me, because we aren't in touch anymore and I don't know what she would think. But I can't talk about my gender without talking about what I learned from her. With her, I experienced intensities that shaped the rest of my life, and those intensities were queer.

If I say that I am a lesbian, what I mean is that lesbians taught me how to love and how to fuck. Some lesbians taught me harmful things, like how to hate the parts of my body we perceived as male. Other lesbians taught me how to move past that hatred. Straight women taught me things too, and men, and some of them were also queer. All of this seems to refer to the level of intimate relations. But how is it that lesbians would be attracted to me if I read simply as a man? How is it that I would be received so often as "one of the girls"? So perhaps the situation is more complicated. When I flirt with women, I have to remember the structural power I hold because so much of the world still perceives me as a man. When I grow out my facial hair, I look in the mirror and feel shocked at how masculine I appear. Perhaps I am some strange kind of transguy. Online, where you can find anything, I have seen the term "circumgender" (or "circumboy") defined as the identity of someone who has transitioned back into the gender to which they were assigned at birth. If we are taking seriously the idea that we are not just biomedical objects and our genders do not just refer to our genitals, then all of these possibilities seem real. If I say that I am a transguy, I am telling you something about my existential condition and also about how I want to be treated. Most importantly, I am telling you something about who I am in the proximate world, the world of intimacy, of erotics as the counterpart to gender.

These days, something is happening to my body image, my body schema. It is like a flicker, but more sustained. My own perception of

myself flickers between a nonbinary perception—in which masculinity and maleness and butch dyke and transguy are points in a complex space between which I am navigating on a somatic vessel made of love and *love-ability*—and an older self-perception of myself as male, which is full of disembodiment, shame, and aggressive desire. Recently, a friend told me that she enjoys looking at me. I realize that people have said something like that to me in the past, but a kind of dysphoria has prevented me from hearing it. I think it may be like that for many people, which leads to the commonplace that many people, including straight people, are queer. If that is true, then many people who are queer do not identify as queer—and that difference also matters. It matters how we name ourselves.

1 Excerpt from “soft butch: on (not) being a lesbian,” unpublished essay (2018).

2 See Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries,” in *The Persistent Desire*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson, 1992): 466–82. This essay has been reprinted many times.

THIS EXTRAORDINARY POWER (2010)

This article is not really about sex, but about power. Yet the dynamics of consensual power exchange in sexual play have been a crucial key to how I understand those dimensions of theater practice that exceed its spectacular form and allow it to become, under the right conditions, a genuine laboratory of the human. Connections to queer and feminist theory are evident below as I draw parallels between gender, sexuality, and mysticism in order to conceptualize the actor–director relation in post–Grotowskian practice. This is the oldest complete essay in this volume and the only one that predates some of its associated fragments. It nevertheless contains some of the most important seeds of my present work.¹

IAN MORGAN: Sometimes you need a bit of a hit, you know? A bit of an accusation... You need to be woken up sometimes... Sometimes that can just be a conversation. Sometimes that can be two hours work. Or sometimes that can be just a shout. Like a wake-up... And that can sometimes, in the wrong hands, be seen as tyrannical.

JAMES SLOWIAK: Or abusive.

MORGAN: [...] That can happen with some really inexperienced directors who somehow think they're being "Grotowskian" in some way, and become all tyrannical about "habits" and "laziness." And they use a certain technique... And then they take on this hierarchical role. And that I find is dangerous... I certainly seek out the "director-colleague."

SLOWIAK: But on the other hand... It's not quite that easy, Ian, because there is a hierarchy in the theater. And there comes a time when someone has to say: "No, don't do that, do this."

MORGAN: Yeah. That's role, though. That's okay. That's not a psychological hierarchy.

SLOWIAK: Right. I mean, the psychological abuse... That kind of thing, no. If you find yourself in that kind of situation, run screaming from the room. Don't hesitate to do that. But if you're really working with someone, you're going to find the exchange that can happen there.²

Actors and directors

In her study of acting Shakespeare, Kirsten Hastrup finds what "seems to be an inherent tension in the director's role in relation to the players, between reciprocity and authority." Citing artists from Harley Granville-Barker to Laurence Olivier and Simon Callow, Hastrup points out the "thin edge" that directors walk "between authority and authoritarian attitudes." The crucial distinction between authority and authoritarianism "is a measure of reciprocity in the development of the play, replacing the feeling of hierarchy." In the same text, Hastrup quotes contemporary director Declan Donnellan, who carefully distinguishes the role of director from that of teacher and compares directing instead to what a coach does for an athlete. John Gielgud, on the other hand, draws attention to that which "the director cannot contribute, but the players can"—that is, the actual living event of the performance. Hastrup concludes: "The authority of the director is always weighed against this extraordinary power of the player."³

There exists an ongoing tension in the theater—manifested in Hastrup's discussion of authority and the above-cited conversation about "Grotowskian" directing—between the equality of actors and directors as artists and the hierarchy on which their relationship is founded. This tension may be strongest in long-term ensemble companies, but it resonates in any situation that is based on the working partnership of directors and actors. How can there be a "partnership" when the names of these two roles already presuppose a hierarchical arrangement? What is the nature of the authority by which the director tells the actor what to do? Where does this authority come from, and by what right is it wielded? What is contained in Ian Morgan's distinction between a hierarchy of "role" and one that is "psychological"? When does a strong "wake-up" call from a director cross the line into exploitation or abuse? What is the difference between tyrannical directing and that which empowers actors even as it may determine

their actions on a precise or even intimate level? And, on the other hand, why are so many actors attracted to a process that involves submission to the direction of another person? How can we articulate the value of what actors achieve through this highly specific practice of submission?

The actor–director relationship is at the center of much contemporary theater practice, whether classical, commercial, or experimental. It has been explored from many angles with widely varying results. Yet the functioning of hierarchy, authority, and power in this relationship has yet to be theorized in depth. Much has been written about the craft, technique, expressivity, and various methods of acting, as well as about the actor as “text” or “sign.” A good deal of ink has also been devoted to the craft of directing in its own right. Little has been written, however, about the importance of the fundamental power dynamic that defines and makes possible the daily partnership of actor and director. This dynamic may be extreme and explicit or it may be subtle and implicit. More importantly, it may be volatile and exploitative or it may be founded on integrity and mutual respect. These differences are not incidental but go to the heart of the processes by which theater is made. In order to understand these processes, we must study not only the operation of representation, dramatic structure, montage, and acting technique in public performances, but also the functioning of authority, hierarchy, and power in those behind-the-scenes relationships on which the rest is built.

The actor–director binary model is deeply ingrained in contemporary theater education, as evidenced by the tracking of MFA students into programs designed for one or the other profession. With a few exceptions (notably at Naropa University and the Dell-Arte School), MFA students must choose before entering graduate school whether they will train as actors or directors. Based on this decision, students are then tracked either into embodied training in movement, voice, and acting techniques or else into a program that prepares them to lead theatrical projects. The age of the “actor-manager” is long gone, and few opportunities exist for those who want training that combines embodiment and leadership. Notwithstanding continuous attempts to develop more collaborative or collective approaches, many if not most contemporary experimental companies continue to rely on the division between actors and directors as a basic principle of theatrical production. Furthermore, despite Donnellan’s assertion that he is more of a “coach” than a “teacher,” the roles of director and teacher are continually blurred throughout theater education. Thus, it is commonly accepted that teachers of acting and directing (in high school as well as university and conservatory programs) also serve as directors of

productions, while it is extremely rare for a drama teacher at any level to appear onstage under the direction of a student. Although such an idea in theory has rich potential, it is hardly ever done because it would upset the power dynamic according to which directors and teachers wield authority over actors and students.

These realities indicate a tangled web of power dynamics that is yet to be sufficiently articulated or understood. Rosemary Malague has documented some of the ways in which the early developers of Method acting in the United States exerted power over their students, from Lee Strasberg's possibly exploitative relationship with Marilyn Monroe to Sanford Meisner's groping of female students in order to provoke their more "instinctual" reactions.⁴ Malague argues that the pedagogy and techniques of Method acting are inherently patriarchal and sexist, but the situation is more complex than she allows, since the same questions about authority and ethics have plagued many avant-garde and experimental ensembles as well. Nor am I convinced by Hastrup's suggestion that such practices were common in the 1940s but would no longer be acceptable today.⁵ Far from being an isolated phenomenon, these issues crop up across a wide variety of theatrical contexts. One finds similar dynamics at work in David Belasco's "Quest for Sexual Knowledge" in nineteenth-century U.S. theater and also much farther afield, as in the astonishingly rigorous and physically abusive training methods of Peking Opera guilds in the same time period.⁶

Each of the best-known modern directors—from Stanislavski and Meyerhold through Strasberg, Beck and Malina, Grotowski, Chaikin, Brook, Suzuki, LeCompte, and Bogart—had or has a different way of wielding power, a different way of coaxing or commanding or inviting actors to follow their directions. Some directors are known for their gentle approach, while others routinely use provocation and bullying as part of their rehearsal technique. Some rehearsal processes tend toward the informal, with actors and directors conversing freely and interacting socially as well as artistically. A hierarchy still exists, but it is implicit and operates within an atmosphere of camaraderie and without what Hastrup calls the "feeling" of hierarchy. In other contexts, however, a strong vector of authority separates the director from the actors even outside the rehearsal room. Actors in these kinds of situations may be discouraged from giving voice to their thoughts except when asked a direct question. But it can be very difficult to say exactly when such a silence is liberating and when it is oppressive—or, similarly, when seemingly tyrannical behavior is useful in the name of art and when it is simply corrupt.

This paper seeks to provide better language with which to discuss and analyze these crucial differences. I do not attempt here to conduct a comprehensive survey of actor–director relationships or a comparison of such relationships across geographical, historical, and cultural distances—as interesting and useful as those projects could be. Instead, I aim to offer the beginnings of a theoretical framework that would make such a survey possible. My task is to examine actor–director dynamics through a number of relevant theoretical lenses so as to more fully articulate what is at stake in that relationship, which is the basis of so much contemporary theater practice. In offering this analysis, I also hope to serve the goals of contemporary artists who are wrestling with issues of power and hierarchy in their approaches to rehearsal and performance. For some, the question may be how to avoid unhealthy working dynamics between directors and actors (or between teachers and students) in institutional settings. For others, the more pressing question is how to effectively develop more collaborative and democratic working methods without losing focus, discipline, or rigor in the process.⁷ Many theater projects take place without official support and many actors work, at least some of the time, without contract or pay. At the same time, many directors aim to push their actors as far as possible in the name of artistic discovery. This can lead directors and actors into an ethical “grey zone” where their actions are difficult to assess because there is no consensus on what constitutes ethical practice. Theater can and should be a place to explore alternative arrangements of partnership and hierarchy, but it should not be a haven for psychological or other abuse. Theater practitioners and theorists must therefore begin to articulate more specifically the ethics that apply in these situations.

In the following sections, I begin from Foucault’s writing on power and then offer two additional lenses of analysis drawn from outside theater practice—one religious and historical, the other secular and contemporary. Because these examples are not explicitly theatrical, they help to set actor–director dynamics apart from the many other dimensions of theatrical technique. In other words, these other theoretical frameworks will help to isolate the issues that pertain specifically to the hierarchical partnership of actor and director, as distinct from other aspects of performance. In my view, it is necessary but insufficient to study acting and directing as two independent crafts. We must also consider the ways in which the hierarchical relationship itself factors into the artistic process. In doing so, we can clarify the difference between creative and consensual hierarchies and those that are unhealthy or exploitative. Only by disentangling these power dynamics will it become possible to coherently argue against the

exploitation of actors while at the same time affirming the extent to which acting is based on an embodied act of submission.

Laboratories of power

Although power has been a key term in much critical theory over the past few decades, it is most often used to refer to institutional, political, or economic forms of domination. From the discourses of civil rights and feminism to the writings of Michel Foucault, many thinkers have pointed out the important difference between explicit, coercive authority (as in military and police forces) and more complicated hegemonic systems of social power that classify and privilege individuals according to gender, race, class, and other categories. Both of these types of power, however, remain identified with actual or potential oppression—or, on the other hand, with the potential for resistance. Power, in this sense, is referenced colloquially in phrases like “speaking truth to power” and “power to the people.” Thus, artists, academics, and activists have often agreed on the goal of resisting, overcoming, and redistributing power, even when they have set forth very different methods for doing so.

These notions of power, so crucial in the struggle for social justice, prove inadequate when it comes to describing what takes place within theater productions and ensembles. The relationship between director and actor is hierarchical without necessarily being unjust or oppressive. Furthermore, its hierarchy is fundamental to its success. Within the director–actor relationship, there can and should be a kind of useful and creative hierarchy against which “revolt” or “resistance” is merely counterproductive. As Jim Slowiak says, the idea of a peer or “colleague” relationship between actor and director is not as simple as one might expect because, in some fundamental sense, “there is a hierarchy in the theater.” However, as Slowiak also acknowledges, the fact that hierarchy can be a productive force in theater should not cause anyone to overlook abusive behavior when it appears. We must be alert both to the abusive potential of hierarchy and to its generative aspects. And for this, we need a more sophisticated theorization of power.

A theory of power in actor–director relationships needs not only to acknowledge the value and importance of the director’s authority, but also to find language with which to describe the particular kind of power that accrues to the actor—what Hastrup calls the “extraordinary power of the player.” Unlike Hastrup, who takes her cue from Gielgud’s comment, I do not believe that the actor’s power appears only in the moment of public performance. Instead, I will argue that the power of the actor

is proportional to that of the director, and that it grows throughout the rehearsal process precisely through the act of submission to a director's authority. This may seem counterintuitive because most theories of power associate submission with the loss of power. But there is another kind of power that is accessible only through acts of submission. The power of actors, in particular, is found within submission to a set of guidelines that have been set forth by other people, i.e. playwrights and directors. Just as classical actors do not look for freedom by changing the words of Shakespeare but rather by entering fully into the rhythm and word choice of the text, actors in experimental theater understand that it is precisely through following the indications of the director that the unique power and freedom of the performer appear.⁸

Foucault's discussion of power, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and later works, complicates earlier notions of power as a singular, repressive force of domination. But it still relies on the binary opposition of power and resistance, even if this binary is distributed throughout all levels of society and functions in highly complex ways. Foucault suggests that power, as a "multiplicity of force relations," is omnipresent "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." Nevertheless, power in Foucault is still always a question of a "strategy" or "force relation" deployed between people or groups. Thus, "Where there is power, there is resistance."⁹ For Foucault, resistance and power are two interlocking and inseparable terms in the same equation. In later interviews, conducted near the end of his life, Foucault elaborates:

[W]hat I mean by *power relations* is the fact that we are in a strategic situation toward each other. [...] If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want.

In this interview, resistance becomes "the main word, *the key word*" in the analysis of power relations.¹⁰

The idea of "doing what you want" is complicated in the case of the actor. When actors take direction, are they or are they not doing what they want? On the surface, one could try to understand the actor's work as a kind of creative resistance that takes place within a strategic relationship. There is truth in that idea, but it seems to reflect the difficulties that arise in theatrical partnerships rather than the source of their creative success. One can hardly use words like "strategic" or "resistance" to describe those

highly cooperative and collaborative moments in which an actor finds freedom and empowerment by unquestioningly following the indications of a director. Such intensely collaborative moments between directors and actors are in fact more similar to what Foucault describes as the *absence* of power relations:

[P]ower relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides.¹¹

Although Foucault describes the absence of power relations in terms of violence and objectification, a connection can also be drawn with situations in which consensual hierarchy alleviates the need for strategic manipulation. If both partners in a relationship agree on a hierarchical structure of command, this can have the effect of removing (or at least temporarily deemphasizing) “power relations” in Foucault’s sense. The more explicit and consensual the hierarchy, the more irrelevant are strategies of coercion and resistance. With the consent of both parties, a hierarchical arrangement can give rise to a specific mode of work that I call the “polarization” of power. In a polarized working relationship, one partner wields authority through verbal instructions, while the other arrives at a different kind of power through submission to that authority. Ideally, a consensually polarized director–actor relationship is one in which there is no need for the director to think strategically about how to compel or coerce the actor into following indications, nor does the actor respond to the director’s indications with resistance. Instead, a deep mutual trust allows the director to issue an unmediated flow of indications to the actor, who obeys them without hesitation. If the actor in such moments becomes, in Foucault’s words, a “thing” or an “object,” it is only in Kleist’s sense of the puppet-God who attains perfect grace because it lacks self-consciousness.

The rest of this paper seeks to analyze the theatrical rehearsal process as a “laboratory of power” in which polarization is a central part of the content of the work.¹² In other words, in addition to the themes, images, and narratives of any given production, and the various approaches to directing and acting as expressive techniques, I argue that theatrical rehearsal processes actively investigate problems of hierarchy and power through the relationships between actors and directors. Since the artistic medium of

performance is not an external object but the body of the performer, the artistic “product” that emerges from a rehearsal process is always inseparable from the interpersonal dynamics of those involved. The practice of theater, to the extent that it involves the practical dichotomization of actors and directors, is founded on hierarchy. Every actor–director relationship can therefore be seen as a unique experiment in the dynamics of power and the creative potential of its polarization.

The power of submission

I have argued that, within the consensually polarized space of a hierarchical rehearsal process, the submission of the actor cannot be understood as a loss of power. It must rather be seen as an opportunity for the actor to access a *different kind* of power. The actor’s empowerment has nothing to do with controlling the actions of another person; instead, the actor’s power is to *do* and *do fully*. In French, the difference between an embodied, active power on the one hand, and a power of authority and control on the other, can be rendered with two different words: *puissance* and *pouvoir*. According to Brian Massumi, in his introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari “use *pouvoir* in a sense very close to Foucault’s, as an instituted and reproducible relation of force, a selective concretization of force.” *Puissance*, on the other hand, “refers to a range of potential” or even “a scale of intensity or fullness of existence.”¹³ These last two phrases are clearly aligned with the power of acting, especially as it was described and accomplished by Jerzy Grotowski and his actors in their approach to training and performance.

Grotowski is an important example here because, in his work, the polarization of power is linked to high levels of acting and directing technique. Far from having to choose between a rigorous technical approach and a focus on the hierarchical intimacy of the actor–director relationship, Grotowski’s work illustrates how these two aspects of theater can go hand in hand. Thus, precisely at the moment when the Laboratory Theater actors were achieving the most extraordinary levels of skill and technique, Grotowski wrote about his work with them in terms that evoke both the sacred and the erotic:

There is something incomparably intimate and productive in the work with the actor entrusted to me. [...] His growth is attended by observation, astonishment, and desire to help; my growth is projected onto him, or, rather, is *found in him*—and our common growth

becomes revelation. This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of “shared or double birth” becomes possible.¹⁴

Grotowski’s actors combined extremely high levels of skill and technical precision with an ethos of spiritual and erotic devotion and sacrifice. As Jim Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta confirm, this combination of rigor and submission developed out of the close partnerships Grotowski cultivated with individual performers. As they write,

the essence of Grotowski’s theatre does not lie in the actor–spectator relationship as many suppose nor in his dramaturgy or *mise en scene*, but in the relationship between the actor and the director that reached its first fruition in the work [with Ryszard Cieslak] on *The Constant Prince*.¹⁵

The nature of this relationship is further elaborated in Lisa Wolford’s description of Grotowski’s work with a series of key actors throughout his career:

Indeed, in so far as there is a common trait among Grotowski’s primary collaborators, I suspect it lies precisely in this quality of receptivity. The actor/doer in Grotowski’s performance work is to some extent figured as passive, “an organism–channel through which the forces circulate.” In order to create the space within which the forces can freely move, the actor must to some extent surrender initiative and will.¹⁶

Wolford refers here to Ryszard Cieslak, Jacek Zmyslowski, Jairo Cuesta, Jim Slowiak, and Thomas Richards.¹⁷ Given the achievements of these individuals, it would be a mistake to confuse the qualities of receptivity, passivity, and surrender with any kind of disempowerment or repression. Doing so would once again collapse all power into a single category (power = authority), leaving the submissive partner with nothing but the possibility of resistance. On the contrary, Wolford’s description points to a particular kind of empowerment that the actor reaches through submission. Although Grotowski’s partnerships were extreme examples of this, anyone who has seen strong direction stimulate strong acting will recognize how the intensity of the former can provoke and support the discovery of the latter. Thomas Richards vividly describes such a moment of intense

polarization when he recalls the first time he saw Grotowski work individually with an actor:

I was at the same time fascinated and terrified. He entered the space like a volcano and began giving indications to the actor—again, again, asking him to repeat his score, driving the actor without any hesitation, like a rider guiding a horse in some way; the actor was immediately jumping to another level of quality in his work. The force with which Grotowski entered and demanded and pushed this actor, pushed not in a negative sense but in the sense of a request, made this person immediately and deeply engage.¹⁸

The image of two human beings partnering as horse and rider is indeed both fascinating and terrifying. In Richards' description, Grotowski's power in this moment—as he “rides” the actor—is not a repressive force but a strong and palpable “request,” one that draws out “another level of quality” and a reciprocal (but distinct) power in the actor's work. The actor in this example surrenders the burden of having to consider what to do next. He is relieved of any need to plan, strategize, or even consciously choose what steps to take and which avenues to explore, while the level of conscious, top-down decision-making is given over to the director. It is an active surrender—or, to state it even more paradoxically, an active passivity. If there is trust, and if the actor fully consents to this “giving over,” then a new freedom appears: the freedom to do *wholly* without having to think about *what* to do. For Richards, submission to a trusted director made possible a unique kind of empowerment:

I was looking for the relationship where someone says to you, “Do it.” And from the freedom by way of that older person who says, “Do it,” you enter into action—“okay, I do it.” And you do it. And from that can come an extraordinary freedom.¹⁹

This passage by Richards is in dialogue with Grotowski's description of the role of the teacher: “The true teacher—what does he do for the apprentice? He says: *do it*. The apprentice fights to understand, to reduce the unknown to the known, to avoid doing.”²⁰ For Grotowski, the possibility of becoming “Performer” comes precisely from letting go of resistance and opening oneself to the *power of submission*. Even as this assertion once again blurs the distinction between director and teacher, it powerfully illustrates the difference between Foucault's concept of “resistance” and the practice of submission that empowers the actor.

Since contemporary theories of power do not provide adequate terminology to describe the relationship between these two different powers, I propose to draw on the language used by John W. Coakley to describe the balance of power in relationships between mystics and priests in medieval Christianity. Coakley offers a two-part understanding of power that is strikingly analogous to the one I have begun to elaborate as a defining characteristic of actor–director relations. He describes “two spheres of authority” as understood by the medieval Church: first, the “official” or “institutional” power of the Church and its clergy; and second, the “informal” or “charismatic” power of mystical visionaries, which originates beyond the church and remains to some degree independent of it. According to Coakley, priest and visionary necessarily formed a partnership in which each relied on the other. Revelation came only to the visionary, but only the priest had the ecclesiastical authority to distinguish between true and false visions and to make the visionary’s experiences intelligible to a wider audience. In Coakley’s analysis, these two spheres of authority operate as “two poles between which is established a permanent dialectical tension, more or less strong according to place and time.”²¹

Many of the women Coakley refers to—Elisabeth of Schönau, Hildegard of Bingen, Mary of Oignies, and Catherine of Siena—were highly respected and honored in their lifetimes, and some eventually became canonized saints. Nevertheless, as women, they were barred from wielding official religious power. The validation of these women and their visions therefore had to come through male priests.

Even when a woman wrote in her own voice, a man very often stood between her and her readers, as editor or at least as scribe. In these ways clerics functioned as figures of power and control. But on the other hand, the men—often the very same men—also typically cast themselves as the women’s admiring followers, pupils, or friends. [...] Many [of them] would express this feeling of being drawn to holy women. They expressed it in terms of an intense fascination rooted in the conviction that the women possessed some essential spiritual quality or gift lacking in themselves, and not infrequently they professed a subservience to these admired women that could seem to undermine their own authority over them.²²

Medievalists continue to struggle with the issue of authorship in the texts that have come out of these priest–visionary partnerships. While it would be naïve to attribute them entirely to the female visionaries, it would be equally misleading to ignore the power of these women as visionary

speakers. The same themes are found in Foucault's reading of confession as a central practice of Christianity, but with a different emphasis. Foucault describes truth as being constituted

in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke, it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it. It was the latter's function to verify this obscure truth: the revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said.²³

Unlike Coakley, Foucault does not consider the act of confession as potentially having power in its own right. Where Coakley sees "two spheres of authority," Foucault sees only new forms of domination. In arguing that power can compel as well as repress speech, Foucault neglects the extent to which speech, *even when directed*, may be an act of power.

Like the female visionaries studied by Coakley, the actor in theater is neither a completely free individual voicing prophetic truths nor simply an exploited subject compelled to public confession. The former image neglects the importance of the director in overseeing the actor's work, while the latter ignores the actor's own agency. In practice, the partnership between actor and director is a complex one that interweaves authorship on both sides through a subtle process of positive feedback, ultimately giving rise to material that neither actor nor director could have generated alone. In highly polarized processes of this kind, it is impossible to distinguish authorship between the partners. The single author, in fact, is the interaction of two or more individuals. This is why Ferdinando Taviani proposed to speak of "Grotowski-Cieslak" as a single entity: "Grotowski and Cieslak can be seen as collaborators only by understanding their names as a unit. [...] The outer shape belongs neither to Grotowski nor to Cieslak. The flow is not Cieslak or Grotowski."²⁴ Similarly, medievalists tend to approach the texts attributed to these visionaries as jointly authored by visionary and cleric through a process that remains opaque to the outside observer.

However, while Taviani describes this intimate process in a purely positive light, scholars like Coakley and Rosalynn Voaden also acknowledge the extent to which male spiritual directors "both counseled and controlled" their visionary partners, simultaneously aiding and promoting them while also helping to bring them in line with Church doctrine.²⁵ In other words, while Taviani considers the Grotowski-Cieslak relation to have reached the point of "no power relations," a broader assessment of actor-director and visionary-priest relationships must take into account

both this exhilarating possibility and the reality that such relationships almost always involve strategies of dominance and resistance as well. To evoke the latter, Voaden reminds us that, while these partnerships were essential to the women's success, they simultaneously helped to ensure "the control of the ecclesiastical authorities over the potentially disruptive pronouncements of prophets and visionaries."²⁶ By analogy, we might ask whether theatrical directors can sometimes be seen as helping actors succeed while simultaneously placing a limit or control on how far they are permitted to go (in comparison with, for example, the relatively director-less genre of performance art). On the other hand, the same priests frequently "professed a subservience to these admired women."²⁷

While the spiritual director obviously plays a crucial role in the life and work of a female visionary, she supplies something the director lacks [... S]he has been chosen by God as his intermediary, and this mark of holiness is something which the director is unlikely to achieve. Often, this gives rise to intense admiration and leads to a remarkably close relationship between the visionary and her spiritual director.²⁸

Finally, according to Voaden, the female visionaries in these partnerships were considered unable to distinguish between genuine and false visions on their own, not only because they were too closely linked to their visions to judge them objectively but also because, as women, they were assumed to be particularly gullible and to have an excessive "desire for attention, even notoriety."²⁹ Although feminism has rendered absurd the idea that women are particularly lacking in objectivity, this idea still has some currency when it comes to actors. That is, actors today may still be considered too gullible or too desirous of attention to be relied upon when it comes to judging which elements from rehearsal should be kept for performance and which should be discarded. In fact, I believe that there is some truth to this, but only if we are able to rigorously distinguish between identity and role. To apply such attributes to actors as a personality type or a category of person is rank injustice, analogous to the patriarchal condescension analyzed by Voaden and other feminist medievalists. If, however, we associate the *position* of the actor with certain advantages and certain disadvantages, then we can begin to understand how the particular characteristics of the actor's work can fit within a larger ethical and artistic context.

Like a medieval priest, the theater director is in a position to edit, validate, and promote the actor's experience, making it visible and comprehensible to a public audience. In theater, furthermore, the director's visual

and aural perception is literally more aligned with that of future audience members than that of the performer can ever be. It is therefore no insult to suggest that actors need directors, just as directors need actors. We are used to thinking of empowerment in terms of the ability to control how other people perceive us. But the empowerment of the actor comes precisely from letting go of that control and giving over that responsibility to someone else. While great actors do achieve high levels of self-awareness in performance, this awareness is not the same as an attempt to control how one is perceived by the audience. The power of the actor is to be unleashed, not infinitely but within limits set by another person. Thus, if in medieval Christian texts “Women are consistently identified with sensuality, with emotion, with passivity and with corporeality,” we should not be surprised that many of these same traits are today associated with actors.³⁰ This connection has nothing to do with the inherent qualities or personalities of the visionaries and of actors—it is rather a description of the specific powers that tend to develop on the submissive side of a highly polarized relationship.

A touchless erotics

Although not all directors would use terms as intimate or explicitly spiritual as those of Grotowski, the sense that the actor “supplies something the director lacks” would likely be shared by many.³¹ As I have argued, that which the actor provides is precisely a different kind of power, one that arrives through submission to an externally imposed structure. Relieved of the burden of choosing what to do on a macro scale, the actor is freed to make choices on a micro scale, within relatively narrow guidelines that have been set by the authority of another person. Even improvised performances work if and when the performers find freedom within a strongly determining set of rules and constraints. Grotowski’s actors, working at the other extreme, found their freedom within extremely precise and repeatable “scores” of physical and vocal actions. His work with them was both polarized and precise, yet I have never come across an accusation that it was in any way exploitative. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for many of those directors who were inspired by Grotowski’s work to experiment with high levels of polarization in the rehearsal space. As Ian Morgan remarks, directors (and not just inexperienced ones!) sometimes confuse the value of polarization with a license to exploit, and this can be especially egregious when it is accompanied by a lack of structure and precision. Actors are then asked to give everything without a context in which to give, and may be bullied for failing to produce what was never clearly requested.

In this section, I argue that the erotics of dominance and submission provide an important lens through which to understand the difference between polarized and abusive relationships, even when those erotics do not involve physical contact. By “erotics” here, I do not mean sexual touch but rather the interpersonal energy that is invested in relationships, as distinct from the common commitment to produce a public work of art. Although actors and directors come together around that public commitment, human relationships always exceed their explicit goals, and this is never more true than when the common goal is something as personally invested as theatrical performance. The relationships formed between actors and directors may be more or less intimate, but they always go beyond the purely professional. The same could be said of any other professional hierarchy, such as those that structure the corporate world—but only in embodied practices like theater, dance, and sports does one person tell another person in such detail what to do *with their body*. Seen from this angle, the actor–director relationship cannot help but be invested with erotic energy—even if this energy is intended to serve a public rather than a private goal—and this energy is necessarily shaped by the hierarchal power dynamic that defines the relationship.

To better understand the “touchless erotics” of the actor–director relationship, it will be useful to consider it alongside the enactment of intense hierarchy in the form of “kinky” sexual play or BDSM (bondage and discipline; dominance and submission; sadism and masochism). This area of embodied practice has been the site of much heated argument in performance studies, feminism, and queer theory precisely because of the difficulty in applying the paradigm of *equality* to partnerships that rely on consensual polarization. For my purposes, BDSM can be described as an exploration of sexuality through the polarization of power; or, alternately, as an exploration of the polarization of power through sex. As conducted by communities of consenting adults, spaces of BDSM are both “laboratories of power,” in the sense described earlier, and “laboratories of sexual experimentation.”³² For some, however, it remains difficult to understand the enactment of strong master–slave hierarchies as other than false consciousness, the uncritical reenactment of social structures of dominance. How can someone actively wish to be dominated? And, on the other hand, how is it possible that someone could want to dominate others without exploiting them? These questions, which have been thoroughly explored in the context of BDSM, must now be applied to the work of actors and directors.

A comparison between the polarization that takes place in BDSM and in actor–director relationships can shed light on both practices insofar as each

involves relationships of consensual power exchange that consciously play with roles of dominance and submission. The BDSM community, because it deals with sexuality and intimate physical contact, has evolved a variety of guidelines and procedures to help ensure that its practices are healthy and safe. In defending themselves against the accusation that BDSM is equivalent to sexual abuse, BDSM practitioners have developed a vocabulary that renders explicit several concepts that remain implicit in discussions of theater. Both BDSM and the performing arts (as well as sports) involve the potential for psychological or even physical harm, especially when amateur practitioners rush into the practice before knowing their own boundaries; and when those in charge (the “tops”) do not adequately recognize the limitations and vulnerabilities of their partners (the “bottoms”). Because of these similarities, the “best practices” models developed by BDSM practitioners are well worth considering from a theatrical standpoint.

In addition to the fundamental concepts of “consensual power exchange” and the “polarization” of top and bottom partners, which I have used throughout this essay, the language of BDSM offers the intriguing notion of “bottom space” or “subspace”: a metaphorical place of empowerment reached through submission.³³ Although most critical theory on BDSM practice has focused on physical pain, the practice of *submission* is more fundamental than that of pain. (Submission without pain can be BDSM, but pain without submission cannot.) Submission may refer to the reception of pain but also to the carrying out of orders and/or the helpless immobility of physical bondage. The essence of submission is the loss of individual will and surrender to an external authority. For many “bottom” players, this experience is one of loving service and freedom.

When I’m serving, I know what I need to do, it’s uncomplicated. I love service because it’s *not* about me—it’s about the other person. I seek to make service into an act of love. It turns off all my self-focus and lets me exist in a separate space. When I’m serving at my very best, I’m invisible.³⁴

There are remarkable similarities between this statement and the passage by Thomas Richards, cited earlier, in which he describes his search for a relationship within which he would submit to direction (“Do it”) and through that submission discover “an extraordinary freedom.” These similarities are all the more striking because of the enormous differences in context. Richards’ submission to Grotowski was part of an apprenticeship focused on skill and precision in the performing arts, which over

time allowed Richards to achieve virtuosity in specific techniques of song, movement, and action. (Similar accounts can be found in any kind of rigorous performance or athletic training.) The submission described by Easton and Hardy, on the other hand, has only pleasure as its goal and does not require any particular movement or vocal skills on the part of the bottom. Nevertheless, both describe an intense freedom that is found through submission to the direction of an authority figure.

Even actors who do not enter into intensive top-bottom partnerships like those of Grotowski may recognize many of the terms used by Easton and Hardy to describe bottoming, such as the ability to “turn off” one’s “self-focus” and become “invisible” within a role or score. Thus, the erotics of consensual power exchange are not applicable only to private relationships. They also figure in relationships that are publicly directed, to the extent that such relationships always have a private dimension as well as a public one. Thus, without trivializing the crafts of directing or acting, it is possible to recognize that the ability to “top” or to “bottom” is a significant aspect of the work of directors and actors, distinct from those elements of craft that are more commonly discussed. A director may be extremely skilled in the composition of image and narrative, but she will not be able to work with actors unless she is also skilled as a top. Similarly, an actor may excel in physicality, speech, and characterization, but he will not be able to function creatively within a theatrical production process unless he is capable of bottoming.

To push the metaphor one step further, we can even conceive of the actor’s score as a kind of bondage. While in BDSM “bondage” refers to devices of physical restraint such as ropes and handcuffs, the bondage of the actor consists of lines of texts, choreographed movements, blocking, gestures, and other layers of the performative “score” set by the director. This is why the act of performing can be either exhilarating or excruciating. The difference between performing in submission and performing in resistance is analogous to the difference between BDSM and torture: In the former, one actively *surrenders* the ability to control one’s movement; in the latter, one is *deprived* of that ability. Bondage within a structure that one accepts and desires can yield incredible pleasure, not to mention the perceived quality of a strong *presence*, while bondage within a structure of coercion and resistance is the most terrible suffering. In this sense, a great actor in performance is like a consenting and desiring bottom in physical bondage. It is the precision and rigor of the constraints that allow the bound person to achieve maximum power and freedom.

If it is true that actors function to some degrees as bottoms, this may also explain why the rules that govern professional conduct in society seem

inadequate to deal with intensive rehearsal and performance development processes. Systems such as unions, contract negotiations, public law, and institutional policies (like sexual harassment policy) are set up to handle interactions based on equality. They act as an important counterbalance to the hierarchies of power that operate in most professional work environments. But they are not well-equipped to function in the heat and intimacy of artistic exploration, especially when part of that exploration involves the purposeful intensification of hierarchy. Social protections like these are necessary but not sufficient. They provide an official, legal perspective on power, but they do not offer a deep understanding of what takes place in a rehearsal room, where the equality of the participants as artists (and as legally protected individuals) interacts unpredictably with the consensual polarization of power. This situation leaves plenty of room for misunderstandings between actors, directors, and observers.

Probably the single most important principle of BDSM ethics is that hierarchy is most ethical when it is understood as a function of *role* rather than identity. (This echoes both Ian Morgan's remark in the dialogue cited at the beginning of this article and my comment about the feminist interpretation of medieval visionary–priest relationships.) In my view, thorough acknowledgment of this principle is the surest way to avoid exploitation in situations based on consensual power exchange. Easton and Hardy describe BDSM as a process in which two partners move simultaneously “to the outer ends of the spectrum, generating something like centrifugal force, spinning further and further out while holding each other safe and tight.”³⁵ This suggests that polarization is not a permanent effect but must be accomplished again and again. When the polarizing activity ceases and the partnership comes to rest—for example, between sessions—that centrifugal force will diminish and the polarization will drop toward zero. “Consent” therefore refers not to a one-time agreement, as in the signing of a contract, but to a continual, active process that underlies both the ethics and the implementation of consensual power exchange.

The theatrical implication is that two individuals become actor and director only to the extent that they reach consensual agreement regarding a specific moment or process of polarization. While this may seem obvious, it has radical implications for the way actors and directors identify themselves within their theatrical communities. In BDSM culture, to identify as a top means either that one has a desire to top or that one is skilled and experienced in topping. Theatrical directors are also those who have the desire and/or the skill to top, but in many cases these desires and skills are inadequately distinguished from other kinds of power such as those of

gender, age, economic means, perceived knowledge, or worldly renown. As a result, the consensual polarization of power between directors and actors can easily blur into various forms of strategic exploitation. If directors were to consciously consider the extent to which their desires and skills are those of topping, such violations might be less likely to occur. Similarly, if actors were to link their desired vocation more explicitly with that of bottoming, they might be both more careful in choosing directors and less likely to resist direction once a working partnership has been established.

A more explicit discussion about the boundaries of dominance and submission in actor–director relationships would allow for greater safety as well as for more intensive and successful polarization. BDSM ethics calls for every “scene” to be preceded by a “negotiation” in which the parameters of the interaction are laid out. The more intense the scene, the more crucial is this negotiation. Strangely, much theater work takes place without such negotiation. Whether or not there is a legal contract, actors and directors rarely sit down as peers to discuss the nature of their collaboration and the degree of polarization with which each is comfortable. Some directors may feel that to interact with actors as peers outside the rehearsal space will diminish their power within it. On the other hand, when attempts are made to introduce egalitarian dialogue directly into the rehearsal process, this can lead to frustration on both sides, as would surely happen if BDSM partners tried to negotiate the parameters of a scene during the scene itself. The significance of “negotiation” is precisely that it takes place outside the space of polarization.

Democratic and polarized spaces

The example of BDSM reveals that when tops and bottoms negotiate as peers outside the workspace (or “playspace”), this increases rather than diminishes the potential for productive polarization within it. Communication as equals is fundamental to cultivating an environment of safety and trust in which polarization can safely be pushed to its extremes. When negotiation functions well, polarization is also likely to function. When negotiation fails, polarization is likely to fail as well. The “failure” of polarization can manifest as the breakdown of a production or theater ensemble (countless ensembles have broken apart over this) or it can lead to the development of artistic works—including commercially successful ones—that are built on relationships of exploitation and abuse. When negotiation succeeds, actors are protected while, at the same time, the possibility of highly polarized work is retained. And as I have argued, such negotiations must go far beyond what can be found in an Actors Equity contract.

In a recent article, I suggested that part of Grotowski's legacy is the realization that values such as authority, hierarchy, and mastery cannot simply be rejected as part of our ongoing struggle for democracy, secularism, and social justice.³⁶ In the performing arts, these seemingly anti-democratic values are essential. The fact that Grotowski's work has yet to be reconciled, in theory or in practice, with post-colonial, feminist, and materialist perspectives is an indication that we have not yet been able to comprehend the complex relationship and intersections between democratic and polarized spaces. Theater and performance studies tend to relegate the idea of a necessary hierarchy to the past, while ignoring the fact that much significant contemporary practice still depends on strongly hierarchical relationships. It is not only Grotowski's work but much of traditional pedagogy and craft-transmission that depend on polarized power dynamics. Far from being esoteric or irrelevant, such dynamics hold a key to the continued revitalization of theater from one generation to the next. While there is every reason to fight against practices based on exploitation and abuse, we cannot confuse those with the much broader and deeper set of practices that rely on strong hierarchical arrangements.

Theater, as a historical and contemporary practice, lies on the border between what Foucault describes as the ancient "arts" in contrast to the modern "sciences."³⁷ Because it is an embodied practice, it is home to many legacies of transmission, secrets of living and dead masters, and specific approaches to bodily technique and pedagogy. At the same time, as a public and secular art form, theater is firmly located within a modern conception of democratic space. As a result, its reliance on polarization must constantly negotiate with principles of equality and pluralism. In the U.S. and elsewhere, movements for social justice have made many theater artists highly sensitive to the dangers of hierarchy, especially when these relations map onto larger institutionalized prejudices. At the same time, I believe there is an increasing awareness of the value of rigorous training and physical discipline in theatrical work. Because these two imperatives have yet to come into serious dialogue with one another, individual actors and directors are left to face crucial questions of power on their own. A more substantial conversation about the risks and rewards of consensual power exchange in actor-director relationships would surely help emerging ensembles find their way, as well as offering a new perspective on the history of theater.

Additionally, through the lens of power analysis, it becomes possible to compare theater spaces with other institutions insofar as they are also "laboratories of power" manifesting different types of hierarchical

and nonhierarchical arrangements. What happens if we compare the undergraduate theater classroom (contiguous with but not identical to the undergraduate rehearsal space) to spaces as diverse as the psychology or history classroom or those of the professional theater ensemble, the elite athletic team, the religious monastery, and the military? Each of these spaces relies on a particular arrangement of power, and much can be learned by studying the flows of direction and submission among participants. A comparative analysis of such spaces must focus not only on the specific skills and abilities they cultivate, but also on the variable dynamics of the polarized partnerships on which they are built: visionary–priest, bottom–top, athlete–coach, soldier–officer, student–teacher, disciple–guru, actor–director.

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- 1 Originally published as “This Extraordinary Power: Authority, Submission, and Freedom in the Actor-Director Relationship,” *Ecumenica* 3.2 (2010): 43–61. The further development of these ideas can be found in Ben Spatz, *Making a Laboratory: Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video* (New York: Punctum Books, forthcoming).
 - 2 Transcribed from a panel discussion recorded at the symposium “Grotowski: After—Alongside—Around—Ahead” (University of Kent, 2009). Ian Morgan was for many years an actor with Song of the Goat Theater, Wrocław, Poland. James Slowiak is the director of New World Performance Laboratory, Akron, Ohio. Both also worked directly with Jerzy Grotowski.
 - 3 Kirsten Hastrup, *Action: Anthropology in the Company of Shakespeare* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004): 214–19.
 - 4 Rosemary Malague, “Getting at ‘The Truth’: A Feminist Consideration of American Actor Training,” PhD dissertation (CUNY Graduate Center, 2001). This project later became Rosemary Malague, *An Actress Prepares: Women and “the Method”* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
 - 5 Hastrup, *Action*: 215
 - 6 Kim Marra, *Strange Duets: Impresarios and Actresses in the American Theatre, 1865–1914* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006): 143–75; Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007): 17–54.
 - 7 For a recent articulation of such an attempt, see Jonathan Cole’s application of “liberatory pedagogy” (a term taken from Paulo Freire and bell hooks) to the teaching and directing of theater, in “Liberatory Pedagogy and Activated Director: Restructuring the College Rehearsal Room,” *Theatre Topics* 18.2 (2008). Beth Watkins draws on some of the same sources when she writes about her own attempts to “decenter” directorial authority, in “The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education,” *Theatre Topics* 15.2 (2005).
 - 8 In some cases, the hierarchy of actor and director can be upset or even reversed by externally imposed circumstances, such as when the actor is a star and the director relatively unknown. But these are exceptional situations, and ones in which the productivity of the actor–director relationship may be rightly called into question.

- 9 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 92–6.
- 10 Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997): 167. Even when Foucault refers to power as working to increase the aptitudes and abilities of individuals, he always understands this increase as functioning in the service of domination. Thus, “disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.” This formulation leaves no room for a distinction between “discipline” in the sense of a coercive regime and another kind of “discipline” that more closely resembles the self-discipline of artists and athletes, who cultivate it for reasons that cannot be reduced to false consciousness or the effects of domination. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 138.
- 11 Foucault, *Ethics*: 292.
- 12 The term “laboratory of power” comes from Foucault, who uses it to indicate how institutions of power gradually increase their “ability to penetrate into men’s behavior” (*Discipline and Punish*: 204). I would like to extend the term to include situations, like the theatrical rehearsal process, in which people experiment with variable arrangements of power and hierarchy. The notion of theater as a “laboratory” is also linked to the work of Jerzy Grotowski, of course.
- 13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translation and forward by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): xvii.
- 14 Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1969): 25.
- 15 James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007): 96.
- 16 Lisa Wolford, “The Occupation of the Saint: Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle,” PhD dissertation (Chicago: Northwestern University dissertation, 1996): 269–70. The quotation about the circulation of forces is from Grotowski’s text, “Performer” in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (London and New York: Routledge, 2001): 376–80.
- 17 For an illuminating comment on the differences between these partnerships and the importance of distinguishing between the phases of Grotowski’s work, see Mario Biagini, “On the Cultivation of Onions,” *TDR* 52.2 (2008).
- 18 Thomas Richards, *Heart of Practice: Within the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008): 3.
- 19 *Ibid.*: 49.
- 20 In Grotowski, “Performer”: 376, italics original.
- 21 John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006): 24.
- 22 *Ibid.*: 2.
- 23 *Ibid.*: 66.
- 24 In Schechner and Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*: 194, 203.
- 25 Rosalynn Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York, England: York Medieval Press, 1999): 57.
- 26 *Ibid.*: 107.
- 27 Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*: 2.
- 28 Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*: 59

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29 Ibid.: 66–7.

30 Ibid.: 34.

31 Ibid.: 59.

32 Foucault, *Ethics*: 151.

33 For more on contemporary BDSM, including some of these terms and ideas, see Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, *The New Bottoming Book* and *The New Topping Book* (Oakland, CA: Greenery Press, 2001; 2003).

34 Easton and Hardy, *Bottoming*: 86.

35 Easton and Hardy, *Topping*: 17.

36 Ben Spatz, “A Series of Openings: The Year of Grotowski in New York,” *Slavic and Eastern European Performance* 29.3 (2009): 24.

37 This refers to the *ars erotica* and the *scientia sexualis* in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

6

DOCUMENT: FRAGMENTS

Citing Musicality (2013)

Audiovisual documentation of theatrical performance and embodied practice has existed for nearly a century, yet we are only just beginning to seriously explore its hermeneutics. The pieces in this section grapple with the epistemological relationship between embodiment and audiovisuality. In this excerpt, I undertake a close reading of a high-level practice research outcome, here archived in a now-outdated multimedia format: the printed book with bundled CD-ROM. Examining the different types of audiovisual material inscribed on that disc (performance documentation, training demonstrations, and documentary footage) and focusing on the relationship between what is seen and what is heard, I point to the specific affordances of the audiovisual medium for documenting embodied research.¹

Five knocks, and a small crowd of peasants rush onstage through the big doors, yelling and ringing bells, their eyes wide, their expressions grotesque. “We!” they shout together. A man in a dark coat removes his hat and continues the introduction: “We, the members of Plato’s family, know only that which is solemn, joyful, holy, sublime, heavenly...” He continues speaking rapidly of lofty things until an old woman, cupping

her ear as if hard of hearing, shouts back: “What?” The man repeats himself. This time the old woman repeats his words, appending her own comment: “Aha!” As if in response, another man stands and brays like a donkey: “Hee-haw! Hee-haw!” The final vowel of this outburst is taken up by the entire group, which transforms it into a melodic “Amen,” complete with extended melisma and choral harmony. Just as the song fully blossoms, another woman blurts out an exclamation: “I immediately cry!” Melody and rhythm are stopped in their tracks, the man in the dark coat begins his speech again, and the entire cycle repeats—four times in all.

The company is Gardzienice. The man in the dark coat is Mariusz Gołąj; the old woman Ania Dąbrowska; the donkey Tomasz Rodowicz; the tearful lady Elżbieta Rojek. The man who knocked on the door to summon the group into the space is Włodzimierz Staniewski, founder and director of Gardzienice since the late 1970s. The performance is *Metamorfozy*, a “theatrical essay” loosely based on Apuleius. Lasting only a few seconds, this extraordinary sequence enacts a complete summary of the birth of music from speech: from spoken text into semi-musical exclamation—then a rhythmic, onomatopoeic cry—and finally into full-fledged song—then back again to speech. Linking sacred and profane, theatrical and musical, Greek and Polish histories, this moment, which begins the performance, contains and concatenates a wealth of knowledge, experience, and composition. How to read its depths? How to articulate its value? How to place it in the context of other performances, other companies, and other experiments within and beyond theater itself?

The existing multimedia documentation of Gardzienice’s work could be a useful starting point for imagining the future of the scholarly multimedia archive. What would a critical edition of Gardzienice’s archive look like? How might one select, annotate, and make available these materials with an eye toward future reference? How could the citation of multimedia documents expand our understanding of Gardzienice’s work, highlighting what is unique to them while also making useful comparisons with other practices? I will begin to answer these questions through reference to the *Hidden Territories* CD-ROM.² This is a published work, easily available for purchase, which therefore constitutes part of the scholarly archive as much as any printed book or journal article. Although it contains neither the most recent nor the highest quality documentation of Gardzienice’s work, it is the most easily accessible. For the purposes of

this article, it is important that any reader can easily obtain the excerpts I cite and examine them to confirm or trouble my analysis. The possibility of returning to a cited source is a fundamental dimension of rigor in the production of scholarly knowledge. With that in mind, I will attempt to articulate some of Gardzienice's knowledge as contained in its multimedia archive, thereby offering a possible model for practice as research outcomes on a larger scale.

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- 1 Excerpt from Ben Spatz, "Citing Musicality: Performance Knowledge in the Gardzienice Archive," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 7.2 (2013): 221–35.
 - 2 Włodzimierz Staniewski and Hodge, Alison, *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice*, with CD-ROM produced by Arts Archives (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

Ethics of the Scribble (2016)

This excerpt from a talk considers the epistemological relationship between practice and documents, not in relation to video but through writing and drawing—the focus of a special issue of the journal *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*. I return to Rheinberger, adapting his phrase “economy of the scribble” and looking for a middle ground between his softening of scientific objects and the relative hardening of embodied research objects that I propose. Written in a conversational style and edited for clarity, this excerpt suggests that a change in the form or medium of research—for example, to include diagrams, drawings, or video—also implies a change in epistemology.¹

One of the things that I think this issue “On Showing and Writing Training” is doing is getting at a kind of middle ground in terms of the hardness or softness of the objects of inquiry in these practices. And I think it's moving away from—almost pushing back against—a previous tendency that was at the extreme end of the romantic paradigm, which asserted that there was no object of inquiry. I'm referring to the idea of performance as ephemeral, the ephemerality of dance, the ephemerality of practice. But also to what the photograph does, because it's so detailed and can draw you very much to the individual practitioner. Or even to a specific moment. It's so detailed that we can't see a separate object of inquiry, because we just see that person in that moment.

I brought, as a show-and-tell object, one of the books I've been looking at, which is a study of science from the perspective of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, who was a scientist and then became a historian of science. There is a wonderful little essay at the end, called "The Economy of the Scribble," which is about the scribbles that come out of scientific laboratories. He's taking the attention off the science journal publications, where they declare the hardness of the objects of inquiry, saying: "We have found the Higgs boson. It exists." And he's looking instead at the economy of the scribble: handwriting and diagram-type stuff. So he's softening the objects of scientific inquiry in a way that speaks directly to what I'm trying to do in hardening the objects of embodied research. There's a kind of middle ground that we can meet on.

In the first instance, it's merely a case of saying: There are objects of inquiry. These traces, these documents, these diagrams, are not depicting—or not only depicting—my practice, or your practice, or what you did on that day. They're depicting some object of inquiry, some structure of practice, which is to some degree—this is the question of how hard it is—separable from the practitioner, from the unique moment, from the unique practice, from the unique body. To some degree separable. Why is that important? What does that do? Well, in this writing on science, there's this idea that laboratories or experimental systems or structures of experimentation are *machines for making the future*. And this phrase, "machines for making the future," comes about because of the idea—well, the fact, the historical fact—that in a laboratory, you can do very small, detailed things, but because those things are separable from the individuals who are practicing them and from that experimental event, because of that separability, that reliability, what you do, even if it's tiny and detailed, can transform the whole world. If it was not separable, if it was just that I did something in my body, then it wouldn't have this kind of world-making power. It has that power because it is separate, because the object of inquiry is separable, it has hardness.

1 From "Ethics of the Scribble," an invited talk at "On Showing and Writing Training: A Symposium." Royal Holloway, University of London. The symposium was convened following the publication of the special issue "On Showing and Writing Training," eds. Mary Paterson and Dick McCaw, *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 7.2 (2016). Audio recordings are available online: theatredanceperformancetraining.org/2017/01/showing-and-writing-training-special-issue-of-tdpt-7-2-audio-recordings-from-symposium-30th-november-2016-run-by-mary-paterson-and-libby-worth-with-dick-mccaw/.

What Do We Document? (2017)

This excerpted book chapter is a manifesto for what I was then calling “dense linear video.” After more than one negative experience with an emerging web platform—either my work was rejected after I had spent days tailoring it to match a specific format, or the platform itself was shut down—I turned toward the video file as a linear container for nonlinear content. Here I do not merely read archival video for its embodied research contents, but also assert the need to develop a new rhetoric and style based on the relationship between embodiment and audiovisuality. Referring to one of my own earliest research videos, I ask how this medium could attain the kind of “density” offered by scholarly writing.¹

Excitement about the possibilities afforded by nonlinear, web-based platforms is at a high point. Yet in the slew of recent publications addressing digital performance documentation and archives, one apparently simple approach to documentation has gone curiously unremarked: that of video itself as a linear framework with potentially nonlinear content.² While platforms like the Research Catalogue and Scalar offer exciting design potentials, publications developed for those digital environments are not guaranteed to last beyond the lifespan of the platform itself.³ Video files, in contrast—as one of the basic building blocks of digital space—are more technologically robust. They can be easily transferred from one platform to another, hosted on multiple platforms at once, and scaled down to smaller resolutions as needed. While all digital media must be continually ported from one technological generation to the next in order to remain accessible—and this is a serious issue for digital archivists—an MP4 file produced in 2015 is more likely to be readable in 2020 than a custom-built interface.⁴ Additionally, what platforms like Scalar and the Research Catalogue offer in formal innovation is exchanged for the well-tested rhetoric of the linear motion picture, which has more than one hundred years of history. Why then is the *scholarly video essay* not already accepted as a basic form of contribution to the major peer-reviewed journals in our field? Why is there no journal of performance studies that accepts contributions only or primarily in this form?⁵ It would appear that, in our zeal to explore the ever-expanding nonlinear spatiality of the web, we have skipped over the apparently simpler genre of the audiovisual.

I take the density of a document to be the richness of information found in any given frame or excerpt. The density of prose can be increased by the

use of footnotes, parenthetical annotations, citations and references, specialized language, longer or more elaborate sentence structures, and other textual complexities that tend to distinguish academic writing from popular nonfiction. A similar range can be elaborated for video: What we might call a simple linear video is one consisting of a single take, an uninterrupted recording that documents a moment of practice. Beyond this, there are myriad ways in which the density of a video document might be increased. The training video “Sequence of Four Exercise–Actions” contains several different types of textual annotation running across the bottom of the frame, including the names and roles of practitioners; names and descriptions of the exercises shown; references to books and articles that analyze related practices; and pedagogically oriented commentary.⁶ It also includes excerpts of secondary video and one still image, which are embedded within the frame and run parallel to the main video. The embedded video comes from two sources: from the same training session—to show what happened before or after the four minutes documented in the main video—and from an earlier set of videos in which the same exercises are practiced by the person who invented them.⁷ At one point, three videos are juxtaposed within the same frame to demonstrate how a given exercise may be transmitted from person to person, traveling across space and time.⁸

The challenges facing those who might want to produce *dense video documents*, for example as research outcomes of an embodied research practice, are numerous. They range from logistical concerns—such as finding a workspace with a visually clean backdrop and compensating one or more skilled videographers—to those that are critical, aesthetic, and editorial. The spatial and temporal relationships among video channels, audio channels, textual annotation, and other media all must be considered in the context of a project’s scope and duration and what it aims to document. In a sense, none of these challenges is merely logistical. Taken together, they suggest a new *audiovisual epistemology* that arguably has already changed the way we understand what we are doing when we move, dance, sing, speak, interact, improvise, tell stories, walk through a city, or whatever else may be captured on video. In the two experimental prototypes discussed here, I aimed to create documents that would be dense enough to deserve multiple viewings and which might, like a good article, cause the viewer to stop and rewind while watching in order to more fully appreciate their layers of juxtaposed, intermedial content.

1 From “What Do We Document? Dense Video and the Epistemology of Practice” in *Documenting Performance: The Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving*, ed. Toni Sant (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017): 243–53.

- 2 Since writing this chapter, I have learned that the rhetoric and epistemology of the video essay are most richly explored in the growing field of *videographic film criticism*, which ought to be examined closely for its relevance to videographic artistic research.
- 3 Research Catalogue: www.researchcatalogue.net/; Scalar: scalar.me/anvc/
- 4 To produce edited video documents, of course, requires skill, as well as access to a computer and a video editing application like Adobe Premiere, FinalCut Pro, or iMovie. But such resources are well on their way to becoming as commonplace as the word processing and desktop publishing tools now used to produce books and articles.
- 5 At the time of this writing, I was in the early stages of putting together a new, entirely video-based *Journal of Embodied Research*. This is now available and in its second volume: jer.openlibhums.org/
- 6 Ben Spatz, “Sequence of Four Exercise–Actions” (4:19): urbanresearchtheater.com/2015/08/12/training-with-a-sequence-of-exercise-actions/
- 7 See “Irregular Rhythms,” this volume.
- 8 Spatz, “Sequence of Four”: 3:02–3:12.

Criteria for Assessment (2017)

To support the development of academic embodied research, I wrote a basic methodology text intended primarily as guidance for students. From my current perspective, this essay feels somewhat limited by its dry, procedural approach. Nevertheless, it seems to have been useful to researchers at various stages who are grappling with the apparent disjunction between embodiment and research. My favorite section, reproduced below, extends my earlier discussion of Michèle Lamont’s “epistemological styles” to offer a range of criteria by which embodied research projects might be evaluated. As a set of tools by which research designs and documents can be assessed in a post-positivist context, this proposal still feels relevant.¹

The assessment criteria discussed here are based on what Michèle Lamont calls “epistemological styles.”² Lamont describes four different styles of knowing and argues that different academic disciplines are partially defined by how they rank the importance of each. In the present context, I will assume that embodied research can make use of all four epistemological styles and that it is up to the researcher to determine which ones are most important for a given project. Not every project will aim to produce results according to all four of these. In fact, it is probably quite rare for a project in any field to be successful according to all four epistemological

criteria. In many cases, a significant success according to just one of the criteria might be sufficient. The four evaluative criteria are: *comprehensive*, *constructivist*, *positivist*, and *utilitarian*. Here, I am adapting them from Lamont, to make them applicable to embodied research.

The *comprehensive* criterion asks whether a project comprehensively explores a well-defined area of embodied technique. Thoroughness is an important aspect of research, as I mentioned at the very beginning of this methodology. To conduct comprehensive research, it will be necessary to precisely frame your area of exploration. The researcher will probably want to use several of the framing strategies discussed earlier, specifying what area of technique will be explored by reference to historical and cultural lineages, personal experience and training, and technical analysis. Once this is done, the researcher has their work cut out for them: to thoroughly explore the territory indicated by that detailed historical and technical framing. Research that emphasizes the comprehensive criterion above everything else is sometimes called “pure” research because it does not need to engage with contexts external to a precisely established frame. There is something straightforward (although not necessarily easy) about conducting research with an emphasis on the comprehensive investigation of a defined area. The risk with such an approach is that, if the framed territory is not clearly relevant to current movements in society and culture at large, the research may be dismissed as an esoteric exercise. On the other hand, research that is successfully comprehensive provides an overview of its area of investigation that others can rely upon for their own work. Historically, the comprehensive approach was highly valued as a hallmark of academic research. Today, some of the most substantial debates over the future of academia have to do with the relative importance of the comprehensive criterion.

The *constructivist* criterion asks whether the area of embodied technique that the project explores could be of help in the development of a better world. The constructivist position assumes that all research is based on a set of implied social, cultural, and political values. Because there is no such thing as a purely objective perspective from which to carry out an investigation, the choice of what and how to research is therefore always laden with values and choices. This criterion emphasizes the broader significance of these choices. It suggests that we should not choose an area of technique to research simply because it interests us personally or even because it has been highlighted by others as deserving exploration. Rather, we should make a conscious effort to bring balance to the landscape of academic knowledge by directing our efforts to areas of technique that will best

serve future generations. The risk here is that, if the research identifies itself too closely with an existing social or political movement, it may be criticized as not maintaining sufficient academic distance. Too much emphasis on the constructivist criterion can lead to a failure to maintain rigor according to the other criteria, as is seen when a political goal—no matter how noble—leads researchers to distort their findings. The constructivist criterion has always been controversial because of its direct connections to society, culture, and politics. However, it is difficult to deny that one of the most important functions of research is to provide knowledge in the service of constructing a more just or sustainable society.

The *positivist* criterion asks whether the research undertaken has produced a clear outcome in the form of new transmissible technique. The assumption behind this criterion is that fields of research are coherent enough, and communication between researchers transparent enough, to allow for a definitive assessment of when something new has been discovered. A positivist emphasis will focus less on the framing of a project, or even the actual methods used, than on the concrete transmissible outcomes that arise from it: written documents, data sets, measurements, audiovisual recordings, and the like. Do these contribute substantially new knowledge to an existing field? Positivism has historically played a much smaller role in the arts and humanities than in the sciences, but the development of multimedia technologies that can digitally capture the details of embodied practice suggests that this may be changing. The risk in emphasizing the positivist criterion is that its assumptions about disciplinary coherency and communicative transparency may conceal or devalue unexpected strategies for research. Because positivism places its faith in the historical achievements that have led to the present moment, it may unintentionally uphold the status quo, foreclosing truly innovative research without realizing that it is doing so.

The *utilitarian* criterion asks whether and how the new technique generated through embodied research will be useful to others outside the field of research and outside academia entirely. This criterion is similar to the constructivist criterion in that it aims to assess research in terms of a wider social context rather than on its own terms. However, while the constructivist criterion locates ethical and political responsibility for research with the researcher, the utilitarian criterion is concerned with the match between the research project and existing social and institutional settings. It requires the researcher not to articulate her own values but to align the research program with values upheld and articulated by society at large. Both positivist and utilitarian criteria emphasize the concrete outputs of

research. For positivism, this refers to stable and transmissible documents, whereas the utilitarian emphasis is on the application of research outside academia and in the short term. The risk in emphasizing utility is that such research does not offer fundamentally new approaches or avenues but merely extends those that are already accepted. However, to the extent that a society has managed to articulate its goals for the future, the success of research can undoubtedly be assessed at least in part through reference to those goals.

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- 1 From Ben Spatz, "Embodied Research: A Methodology," *Liminalities* 13.2 (2017): 1–31. This item is licensed under a CC-BY-NC-SA: Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License. My earlier discussion of Lamont's work appears in *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015): 236–8.
 - 2 Michèle Lamont, *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 54.

THE VIDEO WAY OF THINKING (2018)

Written in the midst of the laboratory phase of the 2017 Judaica project, this essay opens the door to an entirely new practical territory of embodied research through a radical shift in the epistemological positioning of audiovisuality. If the pieces excerpted above argued that video affords a new and distinct kind of access to embodied knowledge, this essay attempts to firmly depose writing as the assumed medium of knowledge and thought. It points to the ways in which writing and especially printing technologies have altered human consciousness and argues for *videographic thought* as a mode of knowledge that is largely still to come. I find the style here somewhat stilted, due to the influence of Giorgio Agamben, to whose “thought” (that is, writing) this piece responds. I seem to have picked up here, from Agamben, the habit of making bold generalizations that blur the line between history and ontology—a tendency that may be received as either frustrating or exciting. But the points made here are crucial for my current work.¹

This essay rethinks the concepts of *zoé* and *bios* proposed by Giorgio Agamben in relation to the history of technology. It argues that the relationship between embodiment and the audiovisual is only beginning to be understood alongside the recent and increasing omnipresence of digital audiovisual recording technologies in everyday life. Just as writing completely changed human society’s understanding of speech, the development of audiovisual media over the past century has profoundly affected and

perhaps even founded our contemporary understanding of embodiment and embodied knowledge. Questions of performance documentation that have circulated in performance studies barely scratch the surface of what amounts to a new way of understanding life, embodiment, and knowledge, which I here begin to call the “video way of thinking.”

1.

When philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes that “language presupposes the nonlinguistic” and that “law presupposes the nonjuridical,” he begins from the conceptual premise that language and law are the first phenomena to be explained while that which exceeds them comes later.² This is what I have called the “trope of excess”: a habit of thought in which affordances that ought to be considered primary are rendered secondary to those which in fact ought to be decentered.³ In this essay, I attempt to rethink Agamben’s well-known categories of *zoē* and *bios* from the standpoint of a third mode of life: *technos*.⁴

What we find in video—by which I mean *the audiovisual*—is that certain aspects of embodiment (understood as *first affordance*) become newly available for inscription into a transmissible and relatively stable technological archive. If we did not have hundreds of years of writing and print culture with which to compare the emergence of video, we might be tempted to suspect that the audiovisual now delivers to us the main truth of embodiment itself, even if we still acknowledged secondarily that there are some modes of bodily “excess” (notably touch and smell) that remain untraceable by the new medium. However, in the context of the history of technology, it is evident that neither writing nor the audiovisual delivers embodiment, in the sense of first affordance, to the archive. Rather, each is able to trace and document particular dimensions of living first affordance. What interests me here is the way in which the new possibilities of audiovisual inscription interact with writing, thought, and action.

It is not that writing, or indeed video, is barred completely from particular zones of embodied life. Writing can and does inscribe taste and smell into the archive through language. But it has been discovered (notably this discovery coincides with the rise of the audiovisual) that writing has two aspects, which are sometimes called the signifier and the signified, or the semiotic and the semantic.⁵ Writing first of all inscribes a verbal technique, the technique of speech. Only because it does so with clarity is it then able to access, by way of reference to speech, other areas of life. The word “lavender,” for example, refers first of all to the embodied

technique of verbal production by which that word is spoken and heard. It then also refers, via that technique, to a particular plant or color which may be matched to that spoken word.⁶

From the perspective of the audiovisual, it becomes possible to recognize that there is such a thing as a *writing way of thinking*. Indeed, much of what we call philosophy is not more than the development of a particular way of working with the technology of writing.⁷ How often do we refer to the “thought” of a particular philosopher when what we mean is precisely their writing? The *writing way of thinking* has become so dominant that today we often call it “thinking,” but to be more specific, we might use the term *logos*. With the rise of the audiovisual, we are beginning to experience a new kind of thinking, which I will call the *video way of thinking*.

I think we begin to see the emergence of a video way of thinking in disciplines like performance studies, which despite its rich engagement with the audiovisual has mostly elected to remain bounded within the older medium of writing as far as its products and publications are concerned. The more recent emergence of artistic research and “practice (as) research,” with their endless debates over performance documentation, are still early inquiries that push the matter of the audiovisual further into the territory of knowledge production and toward the institutional heart of the university: its engagement with the archive. I even suspect that the spread of embodiment as a key concept across the humanities and social sciences over the past several decades is closely related to the rise of the audiovisual and its new ways of thinking. Yet for all this, I do not think that the video way of thinking, whatever it might be, has fully arrived. Cinema is its prehistory but aesthetically and epistemologically limited by the economic constraints of that technology. Just as writing could not give us the modern university when it was bound to the economic and political elite but only as it became more widely available after the advent of printing, the era of the audiovisual does not properly begin until video meets the internet.

2.

Now let us think through these developments in terms of what Agamben calls *zoē* and *bios*. Please note that I am not attempting to reduce Agamben’s theory of the political to the history of technology. Rather, I think that a glance now at the history of technology can help us imagine the future of politics. Just as I intend “language” to refer not merely to the technology of writing but more importantly to the *way of thinking* afforded by that technology, I ask you here to understand by the audiovisual not specific

new digital video technologies but the domains of life which these new technologies allow for the first time to be inscribed in an archive and—perhaps even more importantly—the ways of thinking and doing to which that new possibility of inscription points.

Agamben traces to the ancient Greeks—one of the origin points of Europe's *writing way of thinking*—a division of life between *zoē* and *bios*. I want to rethink these categories in a way that does not begin from writing and the law and work backward toward embodiment (understood through the trope of excess as “the nonlinguistic” and “the nonjuridical”) but which rather begins from embodiment and asks about the relationship between writing/law and the audiovisual.

Recall that embodiment here means no more or less than first affordance: “the first site at which the dialogue between agency and materiality takes place” and thus “the first site of that negotiation which makes possible all other negotiations and affordances.”⁸ Embodiment in this sense is a teeming, lively thing, both with and “without organs,”⁹ more than the body but less than a full ecology. Aristotle's city or *polis*, which is the etymological and philosophical root of politics, emerges from the development of a new technology—writing—which captures in a relatively stable and hence transmissible form a certain aspect of embodiment, namely the technique of speech, and allows it to appear as a stable system of what then becomes law or *nomos*. In this moment, the “word” as such comes into existence as that which can be written. *Logos* then refers not to the word as spoken utterance but to the written word and to the cut by which writing separates word from sound, cry, and song.

In the city, the full life of *bios* becomes distinguishable from the much older mere or bare life of *zoē*, which humans share with other animals.¹⁰ Agamben tells us that the culmination of this division, two millennia later, occurs at the site of the fascist death camp, wherein *zoē* is radically severed from *bios* in the absolute debasement of human beings. We are thus shown an opposition between *zoē* and *bios* in which the former is a horrifying reduction. But what if the apparent binary opposition of *zoē* and *bios* is an artifact of the writing way of thinking? If *bios* is the written life, then, from the perspective of writing, *zoē* (unwritten life) is merely an excess or remainder. I would instead refigure *zoē*—as Alexander Weheliye begins to suggest¹¹—as the full body, as embodiment in the sense of first affordance, which precedes writing and the writing way of thinking (and living) by hundreds, thousands, or millions of years. The death camp is then not so much the site of *zoē* as the site of *zoē*'s abuse at the hands of *logos* (writing) and *bios* (written life).

In the sites of embodied activation studied by anthropology and performance studies, where writing is either not historically dominant or intentionally postponed, could we hope to find something like a relatively free manifestation of *zoê*? Or at least *zoê* in a state of equilibrium with *bios* rather than *zoê* as produced by the violent subtraction of *bios*. But it is not enough to look for places in which *zoê* appears on its own terms rather than as the remainder or excess of a violently metastasized *bios*. What we need to ask is why *zoê* seems to be appearing for us now in a new way, that is, why other aspects of life are newly entering into philosophical, political, and scientific discourses at this time. To answer this question, we may need to expand our ancient ontology with a further entity, which I will call *technos*.

3.

In the idealized *polis* or city—which here stands for all kinds of institutionality, including the national and the international, that are made possible by inscription and its archives—*zoê* is not meant to be opposed to *bios*. Rather, the city should allow for *bios* as a harmonic relation of *zoê* and *logos*, of life and writing, in which pre-writing ways of thinking and doing are structured and supported by writing ways of thinking and doing. In this imagined *polis*, writing and *bios* both constrain and enable *zoê*, to be surely ranking different forms of life (citizen, woman, slave, animal) but not in order to destroy or annihilate any of them. In the death camp, on the other hand, this harmonious relationship between *bios* and *zoê* is overturned as the former seeks to exterminate the latter. In the camp, *bios* and *zoê* are radically split, as prisoners are debased to a state of pure *zoê* and guards are required to act as pure disciplinary incarnations of *bios*.¹² (This is not to say that the split is ever completely achieved. Even in the most horrific situations, victims and prisoners find moments of dignified thought and action. The concentration camp is merely the most extreme example of the potential to divide life in a violent hierarchy of law and body.)

We now have *zoê* and *bios*, united in the *polis* and torn asunder in the anti-*polis* space of the camp. What then if another form of inscription, a wholly different way of incorporating *zoê* into *polis*, appears? What should we call the audiovisual in this sense, understood not as a specific set of technologies (photograph, phonograph, cinema, video, hologram) but as a distinct mode of contact between *zoê* and *polis*? It is telling that we do not have a word that specifically incorporates the auditory and the visual aspects of embodiment in their moving conjunction. The linking of recorded sound with motion pictures in the twentieth century produced a

new kind of inscription that unites what were previously understood as two different senses or zones of embodiment: audio + visual. There is no compound word that names both the sonic and visual aspects of embodiment as practiced, that is, those aspects of embodiment which are traced by audiovisual technologies. We may call this domain the audiovisuality of the body, audiovisual embodiment, or most concisely the *audiovisual body*. This embodied audiovisuality is neither *zoê*, in the sense of first affordance, nor that *bios* which is produced through writing and textuality. It is rather a distinct territory of potential inscription, which I will argue is part of the larger domain of *technos*.

How appropriate is *technos* as a term for the audiovisual and its associated ways of thinking and doing? Scholars of ancient Greece may correct me, but is it not *techné* just exactly that kind of knowledge which is deemed “practical” because it is not easily inscribed in writing? Is it not *episteme*, in contrast, knowledge that can be written, knowledge articulated through the embodied technique of the verbal, which itself is retroactively defined by its availability for inscription by writing? Remember, this does not mean that *episteme* knowledge is actually written down but only that it can be expressed verbally, that is, within the writing way of thinking. And is it not *alethia*, truth, that kind of knowledge which cannot be inscribed by any means, which precedes all writing and which for us would be linked to *zoê*? Then is it not *techné*, which we more recently refer to as the “how” of knowing (“know-how”), a kind of knowledge that appears between or alongside *episteme* and *alethia* and is not synonymous with either of those?

The ancient Greeks did not have advanced audiovisual technology of the kind I mentioned earlier. How then could they have encountered this category of knowledge as distinct from both *episteme* and *alethia*? But is not *techné* precisely the kind of knowledge that can be shown in drawings, that is, with the help of analogues of life (such as maps and charts), and the techniques of interpretation they require, rather than through symbolic alphabets? And is not *drawing* the ancient precursor of the audiovisual? If so, then perhaps *techné* really is the right word for the kind of knowledge that is made by possible analogue (analogous) inscription and the mode of thinking and doing that is afforded by this knowledge can with some accuracy be called *technos*. This *technos* would then refer to ways of thinking and doing that arise in relation to all manners of analogue inscriptions, from ancient drawing to contemporary digital video.

We then have *alethia*, knowledge that is present without inscription, and the mode of life (*zoê*) afforded by that knowledge; *techné*, knowledge arising from analogous inscription—the audiovisual in a broad

sense—and the ways of thinking and doing, the mode of life (*technos*), made possible by that knowledge; and *episteme*, knowledge arising from symbolic inscription (writing or *logos*) and its associated ways of thinking and doing, its mode of life (*bios*). At long last the ancient hierarchy is reversed and *logos-bios-episteme* is no longer our starting point. Beginning instead from a triangulation of *zoê*, *bios*, and *technos*, we can now perhaps begin to grasp the enormous significance of a video epistemology or *video way of thinking*.

4.

If *technos* begins with drawing, which predates writing; is surpassed by writing at the founding of the ancient Greek and Jewish traditions; is further rendered secondary following the advent of print technology; and then begins a new ascendancy with the photograph and phonograph, which culminates in their synthesis in digital video—then what is its future? Does the new era of the audiovisual bring us closer to *zoê*, to life itself as primary affordance and origin of all inscriptions and archives? Or does *technos* merely supplant *bios* as a new system of domination, exploitation, and abuse, a new technological mode through which to control *zoê*?

It is not at all clear that the death camp, the site of total abjection and annihilation of *zoê*, was dominated more by *bios* than by *technos*. The Nazi system was surely a culmination of some kind of horrible power found in the *logos*, which from Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* to the printed schedules of the death trains allowed for the coordination of genocide on an unprecedented scale. And surely, the racialized logic by which the victims of the Holocaust were ejected from the *polis*, violently deprived of *bios*, and reduced to bare life (*zoê*) followed the mechanisms of racialization that were developed by European colonialism via the ascent of *logos* during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. But Nazi propaganda, as in the films of Leni Riefenstahl, was powerfully audiovisual. The Nazis themselves documented their own camps with audiovisual recordings. We should therefore in no way carry an expectation that *technos* will depart from the violent history of *logos* unless the specifics of emergent history guide it to do so.

It is not difficult to imagine a tyranny of the audiovisual that would rival or surpass that of the *logos*, from colonial genocides to the Holocaust. It is not difficult to see how *zoê* might be absolutely objectified before a new law or *nomos* that consists not in written rules, orders, and policies, but in a set of absolutely charismatic audiovisual commands and exemplars.

Contemporary forms of biopolitical violence such as mass shootings and terrorism in general, including the terrorism of the state, seem to speak clearly of this potential horror. The question is whether we can imagine a different future in which *technos* is enlisted to right past wrongs: a *technos* in service of *zoê* rather than the reverse.

Perhaps there can be a new *polis*, necessarily planetary, based on a triangulated practice of care in which the gifts of *logos* are combined with those of *technos* not in order to further discipline and control *zoê* but in order to support and sustain it. If globalization was made possible by the unrestrained zeal and zealotry of the *logos*, could the rise of *technos* become linked, historically, not with an increase and expansion of global exploitation but with the development of a planetary democratic or socialist politics? In short, will the opening of the audiovisual domain help us move further away from life and earth, as some proponents of virtual reality seem to desire, in a final nihilistic spree before the crash?—or could it instead bring us back to earth and to life? This is much less a question of the inherent politics of *technos* or *bios*, as in some kind of technological determinism, than of how politics is unfolding today in the still new domains of the audiovisual.

We have already begun to see the public audiovisual documentation and dissemination of governmental and international debates. With Facebook “Live,” political events of all kinds may be streamed directly to mass audiences who comment individually upon them in the old medium of writing. This is already a shift in the operation of the *polis*, but certainly not yet the full arrival of *technos* to work alongside *logos* in the custodianship of *zoê*. What will happen to the role of the politician as the audiovisual continues to ascend? How will the very concept of law or *nomos* be transformed when it becomes possible to write and sign legal documents in audiovisual form? It is easy enough to track the rise of celebrity culture and its horrors, from Reagan to Trump, but also necessary to link the growth of alternative and radical movements and lifeworlds, such as the World Social Forum and Black Lives Matter, to the audiovisual.

Can we dare to hope, with anarchists and other ambassadors of embodiment, that instead of a shared sovereignty between *logos* and *technos*, to the further detriment and imprisonment of *zoê*, the rise of the audiovisual may yet create a crucial opening through which a social and political movement might appear that would displace the primacy of inscription and initiate a return to the sovereignty of *zoê*, with *logos* and *technos* in merely supporting roles? Would this be desirable?

What, after *technos*, is the *zoê*?

5.

The exploration, intensification, and expansion of the audiovisual seems to be unstoppable and needs no supporting argument. Barring a level of global catastrophe that destroys the internet, the audiovisual domain will continue to grow. Let me then offer a reminder of what else there is.

As scholars of performance and embodiment have been saying for more than two decades, the audiovisual is not life itself; *technos* does not deliver *zoê* to the archive. The video way of thinking and the writing way of thinking coexist alongside older, pre-writing modes of life (*zoê*). Whenever we see the latter figured as an excess of the former, we should remind ourselves of the order of things, not only as a chronological history of technology and mythopoetic origin story but perhaps more importantly as a set of ethical commitments that must be renewed in every moment: embodiment, not writing or the audiovisual, is *first* affordance. When we refer to writing or video as thought, we are taking on board the entire history of inscriptive technologies. Perhaps, in the present era, it would be wiser to continue to distinguish between thought proper, which is a function exactly of *zoê* and not available to inscription, and those powerful modes of inscription (*bios* and *technos*) that allow thought to cross vast geographical and historical distances in the form of archival traces.

The pre-writing way of thinking undoubtedly persists as embodied technique and through the embodied transmission of knowledge. Activities organized by memorized repetition, including the repetition of memorized words in poems and songs, continue to structure performing and other embodied arts. Writing has been ascendant for so long that we now often think of words as if they derive their meaning from their inscription. Theater then becomes a sanctuary for the pre-writing way of thinking in which words are memorized and not merely inscribed. As the audiovisual continues to rise, we will more often think of our own movements, gestures, and sounds (including spoken words) in terms of their inscription and recording in *technos* rather than as written words (*bios*) or as structures of repetition. Yet, the relationship of the audiovisual to embodiment is not the same as that between *bios* and *zoê*. While *bios* is based on a symbolic logic, *technos* is analogical (even or especially when it is digital). I would not ascribe to this difference any kind of deterministic political valence, yet it must be reckoned with. The analogical mode of inscription that defines *technos* could be seen as risking a dangerous substitution in which the video way of thinking is understood to replace living thought. On the other hand, the same analogical power might be figured as a powerful sensory return to life itself after a millennium of *logocentrism*. In fact, these are not

two different possibilities but the same one: It is precisely the unique power of *technos* to trace embodiment analogically that makes it both so tempting and so risky.

Among our priorities during this period of increasing audiovisuality should be the defense of the *logos*—as found, for example, in the institution of the university. If we consider the current neoliberal attack on universities as an attack of *technos* upon *bios*, we can immediately see that the destruction of books and laws and their general replacement by images and sounds is not a path we should risk treading. If the video way of thinking is to develop in a historical arc toward sustainability and justice for *zoê* (and there is no reason to limit *zoê* here to human life only), it will do so in dialogue with the *logos* rather than by replacing it. We must not, in a heady march into the audiovisual, abandon the writing way of thinking. Rather, writing and the audiovisual must be counterbalanced in service to life. This is what I have attempted to propose in the form of “illuminated video,” in which uncut audiovisual documentation of experimental practice is overlaid by textual annotations and citations.¹³ In these videos, which reverse the relationship between *techné* and *logos* that was found in medieval illuminated manuscripts, we not only approach *zoê* from the standpoint of the audiovisual but also attempt to find a proper place for *logos* within and alongside *technos*. The juxtaposition of audiovisual and textual inscription makes clear in a new way that what we are witnessing is not merely video documentation of practice but an entirely new domain of inscription in which other aspects of embodiment can circulate: the video way of thinking.

In this essay, I have attempted to articulate the meaning of the audiovisual through writing. In some emerging documents of artistic research, writing finds a new home inside the audiovisual (or more broadly, the analogue) way of thinking: *technos*. I do not think it is a coincidence that the invention of illuminated video as a new medium of thought appeared within the context of a project aimed to investigate Judaism through the embodied technique of song. Judaism is the other mythic origin point, along with the ancient Greeks, of the European *logos*. As we have seen, *logos* is not the spoken, sung, or danced word but the written, inscribed, or inscribable word. There could not be any clearer statements of the ascendancy of the *logos* over *technos* during the past two millennia than the commandment against graven images (drawings) and idols (sculptures) and the appellation “people of the book.” My attempt to rework the relation between *zoê* and *bios* through university-based research led to my stumbling upon a third term in

this equation: the mode of *technos*, which between 1440 and 1927 was merely an addendum to writing but which has now entered into a new period of ascendancy. There is no returning to a time before the *logos*, but there may be some hope for a time after it: an epoch in which *technos* points back to *zoê*, an era that honors not the medium of video but the video way of thinking.

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- 1 Originally published as “The Video Way of Thinking,” *South African Theatre Journal* 31.1 (2018): 146–54. This item is licensed under a CC-BY: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. The insights shared here arose following a series of laboratory sessions with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, Agnieszka Mendel, and Caroline Gatt, to whom I am extremely grateful. For the further development of these ideas, see Ben Spatz, *Making a Laboratory: Dynamic Configurations with Transversal Video* (New York: Punctum Books, forthcoming).
 - 2 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 20.
 - 3 Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015): 56–60.
 - 4 This essay is an extended speculative meditation on the concepts of *zoê* and *bios* as developed in Agamben’s best known work, *Homo Sacer*. It intersects Agamben’s work transversally and does not attempt to treat his larger oeuvre. Significantly, my use of *technos* to refer to modes of analogue audio-visual inscription—as distinct from the textual inscriptions I associate with *bios*—relies upon my own theorization of technique rather than the work of Heidegger, Agamben, or others who have worked with cognate terms. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for inviting this clarification.
 - 5 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: 25.
 - 6 What I am saying here applies to alphabetic writing and print. To what extent it applies also to other writing technologies is a matter for further consideration.
 - 7 Certainly, the turn “towards” materialism, and the fight that speculative realism picks with Kantian correlationism, would not be thinkable without the original turn “away” from matter that is grounded in the writing of the word.
 - 8 See “Embodiment as First Affordance,” this volume.
 - 9 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
 - 10 I do not engage here the question of whether other species also share partially in *bios* or in what I will call *technos*. It is not at all necessarily to my argument to set the human species absolutely apart from others. On the contrary, I think that a better understanding of technique and technology in the human may be part of the turn to a richer species and ecological perspective.
 - 11 Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
 - 12 The fact that the isolation of *zoê* does not imply its debasement is evident in the superficial similarity between the prison cell and the monastic cell. Both attempt a return or reduction to bare life, but only one of them is an act of violence.

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- 13 For examples of illuminated video, see Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, Agnieszka Mendel, and Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz, “Diaspora (An Illuminated Video Essay),” *Global Performance Studies* 2.1 (2018); and Ben Spatz with Nazlıhan Eda Erçin, Caroline Gatt, and Agnieszka Mendel, “Triptych: Genesis, Kavana, Sabbath,” *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 2.2 (2018). Additional videographic works are available from Urban Research Theater: urbanresearchtheater.com/; and from the *Journal of Embodied Research*: jer.openlibhums.org/

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POLITICS: FRAGMENTS

neverland (2002)

neverland was “an unscripted theater piece about terrorism and a retelling of Peter Pan” that drew on a short story by Angela Carter to explore fantasies of anarchism, violence, and rebellion. Its theme was the uselessness of small scale politics, the illusion of making a difference—explicitly with reference to radical leftist terrorism and also, by analogy, to theater itself. Like *the desert*, the earlier *neverland* lacked a repeatable structure. Each performance was radically different, filling a tiny room on the top floor of one of Manhattan’s last remaining squats with a mixture of drivel and genius, radio broadcasts and newspaper clippings, and (mostly imagined) blood and alcohol. Not until 2017, during a laboratory session using a new audiovisual embodied research method, did I feel I had arrived again in a room of such density and potential.¹

Performance excerpt

- X. A Bowie knife. This big. Chrome. Sharp as shit. A groove in it where the blood dribbles down. Nice red drop of blood glistening. You can almost see your reflection in the drop of blood.
- A. How big?

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X. About this big.

C. Is that the blade or the blade and the handle?

X. That's the fucking blade, and this is the handle.

C. Wow.

X. Okay? I took a nap this afternoon. First time in two months. Had a vision.

A. Bowie knife.

X. Of what this fucking world is going to be like, after the Bowie knife, and when there's no grownups.

A. It's me. Interesting.

X. Is it?

A. Very interesting.

C. You suck, A.

A. Shut the hell up in there.

A & X. One, two, three —

X. Looks like you're the assassin, A.

C. How do you feel?

A. I feel fucking good.

N. It's your vision, and you should be strong enough to do it.

X. A, you're the assassin. N, you pick the politician. C, you get the knife.

And I go along with you, and after you knife the politician, you drop the knife and I pick it up and I take the fall.

A. His vision is just so out there, it's amazing...

C. Can we fight pirates now?

X. Yeah.

C. Okay, you gotta take it easy on me. I know you're much better than me.

X. Oh!

C. Did I hit you?

X. Nope.

C. Okay. Kill me quick.

X. Argh!

C. Oh, I am struck. Okay, but can I win next time?

A & X. Roll out the barrels and we'll have some fun! Roll out the barrels and we'll have some fun!

A. Excuse me sir, can you please roll out the barrels so we can have some fun for God's sake?

- A. I want to teach my kid so many things.
- N. Like what?
- A. I want to teach him to fly, I want to teach him to do whatever he wants.
I don't want him to live in squalor. I'm gonna take him out to the park,
like my parents never did... I'm gonna be a good father.
- N. Do you think X would be a good father?
- X. Look at this shit!
- A. X, when are we going to do it?
- X. Tonight. We'll go to his house. You and I. We'll hop in through the
window, you cut his neck, you run out, and I wait for the cops to
show up.
- A. Is everybody gonna know it was us?
- X. No, they're gonna think it was me.
- A. I know but, aren't we going to be famous for this?
- X. Nope.
- A. No?
- X. No. But there'll be one less politician.
- A. No rules.
- X. More pot-holes.
- C. More flying. Less driving.
- X. C? I've been waiting to tell you this. It was like, what, two or three days
ago? A? Two days ago or three days ago. Your mom stopped by. I told
her to fuck off — not literally. I sent her away. I said you didn't live
here. I said I didn't know who the hell you were, you're probably off
to college in America somewhere.
- C. You told my mom to fuck off?
- X. No, no, no. I just told her you were probably off at college or not like
at this place or whatever. But I don't know, she was looking for you,
she seemed totally stressed out, she said something about your dad,
um... But I don't think it was anything serious. But I didn't really
inquire. I mean, was that the right thing to do? I mean, I kinda sent
her away...
- C. My mom...
- X. Who are you? Who the fuck are you?
- A. I'm the man who kills little boys. Hook.
- X. Fuck! C!
- C. My mom...
- A. Tell me a story, dude.

24 October 2002

I do not want to create a new script. Instead, I want to put the process of transformation on stage: the multi-level work of reading, writing, research, and downright corruption that takes us from the original to the post. This work, normally hidden from public view, is as performative and as interesting to watch as any scripted show. This is what I am calling “improvisation,” but it is not like any improvisation I have seen.

27 October 2002

The Never Land is Peter’s world. But isn’t there another important sense in which it is actually Wendy’s fantasy? In the same way, the myth of revolution is upheld by the charismatic leader, but actually it is the fantasy of the followers. If it were not, they would not follow. So who is responsible for the illusion, the one who creates it or the ones who believe?

6 November 2002

The form must come from the sources, just as the contents do. The six “neutral” viewpoints must be discarded in favor of viewpoints tailored to the specific project.² The ideas must determine the structure. The material must determine the ideas. The action must be genuine. The work must be real. The ticking of the clock. Tank tops and blood capsules. Everything I thought I knew is out the window. Dirty jeans and a tape recorder and a Polaroid camera.

2 December 2002

At an event. Someone in the audience asked the panel members to articulate their most radical longings, their most profound desires, their most inspirational visions. I got to thinking about mine, and I came up with an image: a laboratory of meaning, a room where the moment-to-moment transformation of culture is visible. Humans make meaning all the time. The history that I understand is the history of the production of meaning. First you have to wear these clothes, then those clothes, then no clothes at all, and meanwhile we talk about what the clothing signifies, how it should be changed, who should wear what, and why... Brought into the laboratory of theater, all of that history is the work of costuming. And every element of theater—shape, story, text, design, dance, song, psychology, imagery, etc.—is the performative study of an aspect of cultural history.

- 1 Excerpts from performance transcripts and associated journal entries. *neverland* was performed at ABC No Rio, New York City (2002) with Kody Blue, Vedant Gokhale, Michelle Goldsmith, and Mattitiyahu Zimble. It was based on J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904) and Angela Carter's "Elegy for a Freelance," in *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974).
- 2 See "A Thousand Tiny Viewpoints," this volume.

A Charismatic Moment (2009)

In these excerpts from an unpublished essay, I wrestle with Michel Foucault's support of the Iranian Revolution and with the fascination theater artists like Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook have shown for non-western ritual forms that to them seem to suggest a possible pathway beyond the secular. I do not focus enough here on the underlying colonial dynamics and the binary distinction I draw between religious and secular forms is certainly untenable. Nevertheless, my question about the danger of seeking a truly political theater—what I call here "Dabashi's paradox"—is real. In that sense, this essay marks a turning point between my conflicted grappling with the realness of theatrical experimentation, as in the *neverland* fragments above, and my thinking about the politics of artistic research.¹

What I am calling Dabashi's paradox can now be reformulated as follows: It is impossible to perform visions of justice and equality, since justice and equality appear in the absence of strong performances.² One can perform a movement toward justice in a specific case by championing the down-trodden, but such performances are only valid until political action is successfully taken. Powerful religious and revolutionary narratives like the martyrdom of Hussein (or the "Founding Fathers" in the United States) only serve the interests of justice during the revolutionary moment. In that moment, performance can be used to spur political action. Once political action is taken, however, those same articulations become institutionalized prejudices that can only be diminished over time through the development of a more secular and less performative legal system.

This means that the relationship between art and politics within secularism can only ever be a parallel one. Art can reflect, encourage, promote, complicate, challenge, or demand political action—but it cannot merge with political action, cannot become politics, cannot infuse the operation of the state with visionary power by performing shared intensities that unite national or local communities. Secularism succeeds when the power

of religion—that is, of shared articulations of intensities—is demoted to the status of art and thereby separated from politics. “The arts” provide a framework in which intensities can be articulated without being shared (or shared without being articulated) and in this way they are essential to the operation of secular society. Indeed, the goal of increasing actual democracy and justice in the world through the spread and support of secular legal systems (replacing charismatic ones) goes hand in hand with the proliferation of “the arts.” A secular politics of the arts, then, demands that the arts do not understand themselves as synonymous with the political.

It is no wonder that theorists and artists from Michel Foucault to Peter Brook have been fascinated with *ta'ziyeh* to the point of apparent jealousy.³ There is, in secularism, a strong tendency toward a nostalgia and yearning for the shared articulation of intensity, since this is what secularism has given up in the name of peace. In secularism, art and politics complement one another such that they can never be unified, for art and politics are partners in secularism only insofar as they do not overlap. A romantic person would say that this gives rise to a kind of loneliness that pervades secular society, as can be seen in the difference between religious mourning rites mentioned earlier and what transpires in a secular grief-counseling group. In the latter, there may be a sharing of lamentation, but there cannot be a sharing of its articulation, because the reason for each person's grief is unique. Rituals of collective mourning, however, provide more than just “psychological relief” to those “living in a culture where saving face and hiding one's failures are important social customs.”⁴ In place of individual loss they offer a shared articulation of loss, which theater artists in particular will understand is much more than the sum of its parts. Neither the particular story of Hussein's martyrdom nor the individual losses remembered by the mourners are the key to collective lamentation—and what Foucault and Brook similarly admired in Iranian culture—but rather that very possibility of sharing in a unified performative articulation of such intensities.

A good many artists and scholars of theater are hypocritical—or at least naïve—in this regard, expressing a desire for more political or more effective theater without thinking through to the question of whether the instigation of a new visionary revolutionary movement is really their goal. Perhaps unfortunately, it is not possible to produce a theater-as-politics without being religious-revolutionary in the sense I have described. Instead, theater may be “political” in the limited sense I have indicated: It may refer to politics, if in doing so it marks its own visionary intensity as distinct from politics; and it may articulate intensities as long as it does not attempt to share them (no proselytizing!). The merging of theater and politics, then, is something that we must continue to explore and test but—at least for now—probably

cannot attempt to fully accomplish. We might think of theater and politics as two magnets drawn closer and closer together by a pair of hands. It is delicious to hold the magnets with just a tiny space between them, and to feel the invisible force of attraction between them. So long as theater and politics remain separate, we, as artists, retain a degree of control over the political effects and meanings of our work. Should our fingers slip, however, and the magnets snap together—art and politics giving birth once again to religion—it may be no easy matter to pull them apart again.

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- 1 Excerpts from “Intensities and Articulations: Theatre at the Crossroads of Art, Politics, and Religion,” unpublished essay (2009).
 - 2 This essay was inspired in part by Hamid Dabashi, who wrote: “Shi’ism is a religion of protest. It can only speak truth to power and destabilize it. It can never be ‘in power.’ As soon as it is ‘in power’ it contradicts itself.” Hamid Dabashi, “Ta’ziyeh as Theatre of Protest” *TDR* 49.4 (2005): 91.
 - 3 Foucault was so enraptured by the Iranian Revolution that he failed to perceive the dangers carried within it, claiming in 1978: “Khomeini is not a politician. There will not be a Khomeini party; there will not be a Khomeini government. Khomeini is the focal point of a collective will.” Quoted in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 222. On Brook’s fascination with *ta’ziyeh*, see Peter Brook, “Leaning on the Moment: A Conversation with Peter Brook,” *Parabola* 4 (1979), quoted in Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 80.
 - 4 Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*: 48.

Touching Landscape (2016)

In autumn 2015, I worked with thirteen undergraduate students to devise an original performance based on George Monbiot’s polemic nonfiction book, *Feral*. My initial plan was to bring the students into the relative wilderness of West Yorkshire on two different occasions: first, alongside a local volunteer organization to plant trees, and then again to explore a mode of engagement with the natural landscape inspired by twentieth-century performer training practices. While the first of these proved unfeasible, it is easy enough to find information about projects that bring young people outdoors to experience nature through volunteer work. Far less common are outings that emphasize the embodied, somatic, or phenomenological dimension of being in and with nature. In an era when even Monbiot’s common-sense proposal to integrate wilderness expeditions into school curricula seems radical, who can imagine additional time being set aside for movement and attention-based practices?¹

Our expedition into the Peak District was organized by a practice structure that we developed in class over several preceding weeks. This “immersion” structure was designed to explore several different ways of engaging with a landscape or physical milieu. Specifically, our immersion structure contained four elements in sequence, each of which proposed a different way of relating to place and landscape: (1) *turning*, the first element in the Motions exercise developed by Grotowski;² (2) *running*, which can be sustained for any length of time before gradually slowing, still in unison, and coming to a stop; (3) *touching landscape*, during which the group unison is broken as individuals sit or lie down and feel the ground through their bodies; and (4) *documentation*, which originally included drawing and photography but eventually settled on the act of taking out a mobile phone and recording short videos or photos of the surrounding environment.³ These four elements were always performed in the same order but had no specified length, so each repetition of the structure could last anywhere from three to ten minutes or longer. Prior to the expedition, the structure was developed through a process of testing and revision within a studio setting and outdoors in the urban environment of the University of Huddersfield campus and the nearby town center.

All but one of the students working on *Feral* participated in the expedition, which took place on 20th October 2015. The thirteen of us met at 6:15 in the morning at the Huddersfield bus station and took the 184X bus to the Brun Clough Reservoir in Diggle, located along the northern edge of the Peak District. As the bus passed through the semi-urban area of Marsden, I asked the students to cease their conversations and they fell silent. This silence would be maintained for almost two hours, as we practiced several cycles of the immersion structure. At first, I participated in the practice, taking on the role of leader and guiding the group as to when to move from one element to the next. This had the advantage of maintaining discipline and focus within the practice, with everyone closely attuned and listening for my next move. It also allowed me to ensure that we did not take inappropriate risks, especially at first when the sun had not yet risen and the landscape was quite dark. However, I felt it was crucial that the students also have an experience of practicing the immersion structure on their own and without any designated leader. At a fork in the path, I spoke to them quietly, dividing them into two groups of six. These two groups then went on their separate ways without me. I could see them running and turning in the landscape.

Following the expedition, I interviewed the participants in groups of three. The purpose of these interviews was to find out how the students would describe the event and in particular how they would distinguish our embodied, silent, non-instrumental engagement with landscape from previous experiences outdoors. The students agreed that the practice structure—including the silence it required—had a profound impact. They spoke of a “different quality to the silence” that derived from the choreographed actions and of a sense of shared connection that was distinct from their previous experiences of being in nature. According to one student, the immersion structure

brought a lot more focus. I started noticing things I would never notice before by casually strolling through the moors... As you're turning, you're looking at all these different things. You can see the blades of grass swaying in the wind, you can hear the wind, you can feel the cold, and the warmth while you're wearing your jacket. ... When you're just walking by things, you never notice them. You're focused on where you're going, so you've got like a tunnel vision. But when we were given the freedom to actually run, you noticed everything. Even while I was running, I was noticing...

It was clear from my discussions with students, as well as from my own experience of the expedition, that our engagement with the landscape was qualitatively different from that fostered by nature walks or by environmentally oriented activities such as tree-planting. When viewed from the perspective of our experience, it is equally clear that apparently instrumental nature activities such as tree-planting actually function not only as direct actions for sustainability but also as pedagogical approaches to human subjectivity and praxis. In other words, the “environmental” impact of such activities is not limited to their concrete effects on the sustainability of society. Perhaps even more importantly, they are part of a pedagogical movement that aims to transform the ways human beings perceive, understand, and relate to natural ecologies. The question then is how embodied practices like those explored here function in related but distinct ways. Do approaches stemming from performing arts reproduce conventionally anthropocentric humanism, or might they suggest alternative posthumanist, transhumanist, and ecohumanist ways of being?

1 From “Touching Landscape: Intersections of Embodied and Ecological Pedagogy,” Paper Presented at the “Inspire!” Conference, University of Huddersfield (2016). The project described was based on George Monbiot, *Feral*:

Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life (London and New York: Penguin, 2014). On the Colne Valley Tree Society, see Geoffrey Cox's documentary film, *Tree People* (Huddersfield, 2014).

- 2 See I Wayan Lendra, "Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process," *TDR* 35.1 (1991): 113–39.
- 3 The initial reason for the unorthodox introduction of technology was our desire to incorporate video recordings into the final performance. I also felt that it was important to take this step in order to test the presumption that the introduction of documentary technology is inherently incompatible with deeply embodied engagement.

Duration and Kinship (2018)

The politics of embodied research are not those of protest, litigation, or election. If embodied research has a politics, this is most palpable in the ways it pushes and squirms against the institutional structures that simultaneously support and restrict it. In this excerpted essay, I argue that genuine *practice (as) research* is functionally impossible within academia today, because the stretching of institutional frameworks it implies would radically transform the university. Two related dimensions of practice in particular—duration and kinship—are as fundamental to life as they are inaccessible to the contemporary university. A university that could support research in these areas would be a different kind of institution.¹

The radical implications of conceiving practice as research are evident as soon as we think about duration. I recall André Gregory's somewhat sharp reply to Stephen Wangh's use of the name Grotowski in his book on actor training. "There is something very important you somehow leave out of your book," Gregory writes, "namely the question of time."² The question of time is one of the key factors that shapes and limits undergraduate education. This is not only because of its overall duration but more fundamentally because of the limitations on how time can be structured in university life. How can we speak of "practice" in the broad sense and then confine our research to the kind of temporal structures that academic institutions support? If we structure our practice around a standardized work week, do we not immediately foreclose many of the most powerful techniques of temporality, such as those related to sunrise and sunset, to the experience of staying awake overnight, and to the change of seasons? Ritual calendars are laid out by hours of the day, days of the week, seasons of the year, and sometimes longer cycles. How then could a university-based laboratory,

with its rigorously seasonless time, undertake experimentation in practice? It is difficult enough to study a long-term phenomenon like kinship or identity using sociological methods that require tracking individuals across many years. How much more difficult would it be to explore such phenomena through longitudinal experimentation?

Duration is the opposite of a symbol because it cannot be detached from its materiality. Duration cannot circulate as a sign of itself because it always takes exactly as long as it means.³ As an alternative, one might engage with kinship or identity by extracting and working with a mere slice of technique. This is surely more feasible, but if the goal is to intervene substantively in the practice of life—producing new forms of kinship, new identities, new lifeways—then surely more than a slice of technique will be needed. To work experimentally on kinship or identity is first of all a logistical problem: How can the methodological clocks of long-term experimental practice be aligned with the institutional clocks of the university? But it is also an ethical and even a spiritual problem. More than we realize, secularism is produced through a detachment from seasonality that prevents us from making full use of the hours of the day. Perhaps, then, it is not that contemporary academic institutionality just happens to block durational experiments. Rather, durational experimentation is explicitly proscribed in institutional contexts because it is enormously powerful. To experiment with duration is to risk destabilizing kinship, identity, and other fundamental building blocks of human ontology. It is not that university timetables happen to be incompatible with other approaches to temporality, but that they are intentionally designed to prevent alternatives from being realized. It is already risky enough to assert the validity of diverse lifeways from a sociological or anthropological perspective. Can we imagine going further, to instantiate such alternatives within a framework of university research?

Here again, we find that the concept of performance, with its constant referral of practice back to the public sphere, works to provoke experimentation and at the same time to contain it in harmlessness. Performance makes space for durational acts that push the limits of contemporary practice, as in the work of Tehching Hsieh and Marina Abramovic. At the same time, defining these practitioners as *performance artists* distances their potentially world-breaking durations from the domain of practice and contains them within the more restricted domain of performance. On inspection, it appears that performance can be used as a kind of “cover” insofar as the performing artist is understood as not *actually* transgressing accepted norms of sexuality, religion, racial identity, or kinship structure, but

merely putting *images* of such transgression into the public sphere (where they may be debated and perhaps condemned). In this way, the centripetal pull toward theater protects the transgressive embodied act by referring it back to representation, decreasing its apparent reality and repeatability as a practice. The question here is whether a context of research could serve to cultivate and protect radical acts in a different way, not by framing them as representations but by establishing their methodological rigor at the level of practice.

Are we willing to go beyond the performance of kinship, identity, ritual, or any other powerful human territory, in order to engage them experimentally at the level of practice? Can we imagine alternative lifeways touching upon sexuality, religion, racialization, and economics being practiced within an academic framework, not as performance but as research and justified not in terms of public representation but on methodological grounds? If not, I suggest, then we are not yet ready to undertake practice as research.

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- 1 From “Mad Lab—or Why We Can’t Do Practice as Research” in *Performance as Research: Knowledge, Methods, Impact*, eds. Annette Arlander, Bruce Barton, Melanie Dreyer-Lude, and Ben Spatz (London and New York: Routledge, 2018): 209–23. For a broader discussion of how “chrononormativity” blocks alternative techniques of duration and kinship, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
 - 2 Stephen Wangh, *An Acrobat of the Heart: A Physical Approach to Acting Inspired by the Work of Jerzy Grotowski* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000): 323.
 - 3 The apparent ephemerality of performance is an example of this, but it is not at all unique to performance. Conversely, when duration is treated symbolically—as in prison sentences, which attempt to map the severity of a crime onto the duration of an incarceration—then we are in the presence of a particular kind of violence.

NOTES FOR DECOLONIZING EMBODIMENT (2019)

The most recent essay reprinted in this volume charts what for me is the future of embodied research: its engagement with critical race theory and the politics of decolonization. Building on my prior definitions and reworkings of embodiment, I put forward a concept of embodied arts that embraces not only performing arts but also martial, healing, ritual, sexual, and other “arts” as fields of knowledge and practice. The middle part of this essay is intended as a kind of primer or brief literature review in decolonial theory for embodied researchers grappling with their own postcolonial and neocolonial positions. The final section points to the decolonization of white bodies as a contradictory obligation facing all of us who work in predominantly white institutions. I close with a call for artistic and embodied research to learn more from cultural studies, black studies, indigenous studies, and other fields in which the notion of embodiment may be equally central but very differently understood.¹

It is increasingly common to declare a breakdown of boundaries between the previously established genres of performance and performing arts. Theater, dance, and music are no longer separate forms but more like lineages or genealogies—as, for example, a postdramatic theater piece may closely resemble a work of contemporary dance or music, the main difference being the different canons with which each engages. The aesthetic and ontological divisions that structure both professional industries and scholarly disciplines of theater, dance, and music are increasingly recognized

as limited insofar as they can be traced to specific historical developments within Europe and their ongoing influence through colonial and neocolonial infrastructures. If divisions between theater, dance, and music have never made much sense outside the Eurocentric canon, one could hope that a political decentering or “provincializing” of Europe in the world would include a radical reconfiguration of concepts like script, narrative, score, and work, which structure disciplinary divisions in performing arts.² To a certain extent, this has been the promise of performance studies, but as I have noted elsewhere, it is a promise that remains unfulfilled insofar as the broad spectrum of performance offers no corresponding field of practical experimentation.³

While it is essential to recognize the contingency of these genre boundaries, they all share and are built upon a fundamental assumption that is equally or more Eurocentric; namely, the divide that separates an audience of spectators from a company of artists—or, more precisely, the divide separating events defined by an audience/artist division from events in which the distribution of participation is more complex. In this essay, I argue that the breakdown of genre boundaries between theater, dance, and music is incomplete if it does not also incorporate a more radical breakdown of the epistemological and ontological boundaries separating artists and audiences. My suggestion here is that notions of *embodiment* and *embodied arts* offer something specific to decolonization efforts, which cannot be subsumed under the concept of performance. Unlike performance, which carries connotations of measurable efficacy and immediately evident force, embodiment has the potential to initiate or reinvent an ethics and politics in which life, survival, vulnerability, and ecology would be key terms.⁴

My intentions in this essay embrace both a literature review and a provocation. I have been asked more than once recently to recommend readings in decoloniality and critical race theory that might support work in theater and performance studies, especially in the emerging academic fields of artistic research/practice research. In addition to surveying such sources in a kind of primer, I want to point toward what I think might be some of their implications for these fields. I do not claim any particular authority over the concepts of decolonization or decoloniality (the difference is discussed later), but approach them with humility in order to ask how and whether the basic assumptions suggested by the idea of embodiment can be disentangled from the multiple legacies of colonialism that manifest in structures and forms of whiteness, patriarchy, and capitalism. As performers and embodied practitioners, I argue, we must strive to decolonize not only performance but also embodiment itself. What might this look like?

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of embodiment as the key term underpinning the idea of embodied arts. Drawing on my own prior research and referring to some of the ways in which embodiment currently circulates in scholarly thought, I argue that embodied arts must embrace much more than the performing arts of theater, dance, and music. I distinguish embodiment from performance and indicate where I believe embodied arts can take us that even the implied object of performance studies cannot. In the second section, I survey some recent examples of decolonial thought, asking how these writings both rely upon and trouble the idea of embodiment. It emerges that embodied arts as a concept has both decolonial and neocolonial potential, depending on how it is understood, but that this concept unquestionably does important work in decentering certain still-dominant assumptions within theater and performance studies. In the third section, I apply the foregoing discussion to a difficult problem that demands attention from theater and performance studies, embodiment theory, and decolonial praxis alike: the (im)possibility of decolonizing white bodies. With this in mind, I conclude by speculating on the future of embodied arts in theater studies and artistic research.

Thinking embodied arts

The divisions separating theater, dance, and music—which continue to structure not only academic departments but also performing arts venues and funders—are not only artificial but also culturally narrow, owing to the development of text-based drama and visually choreographed dance in Europe and its colonies. When in Europe and North America we speak about theater and dance as distinct genres, we are carrying forward assumptions about speech, narrative, gesture, and composition that derive from European forms. There is every reason to unmake these divisions, not only because they prevent us from understanding related forms elsewhere in the world but also because they continually reinscribe colonial cultural categories in our own lives. A similar point can be made with regard to music: Here again, it is only the specific cultural development of European-influenced “art” music, with its ontology of notation and fantasy of pure sound, that allows us to conceive of music as distinct from theater and dance.⁵ The breakdown of boundaries between these genres and the rise of interdisciplinary performing arts practice since at least the 1960s could be seen as aligned, at least potentially, with efforts to decolonize academic and cultural institutions. Yet, it would be far too simple to assume that these movements always work in tandem, as interdisciplinary arts

can easily remain within the fundamental parameters of Euro-American whiteness, especially if they allow themselves to regroup under the banner of performing arts.

There are countless “global” forms and traditions in which narrative, speech, song, melody, movement, and gesture are woven together in ways that pay no heed to European genre distinctions. Indeed, attempting to generate a list of these would be counterproductive, taking the European categories for granted as the background against which otherness is defined.⁶ Our task should not be to collect examples in which theater, music, and dance are blended, but rather to acknowledge that those distinctions never carried weight beyond the cultural formations in which they appeared. This is a core problem continually faced by Western academic fields that study non-European forms: European history remains implicitly centered as long as “world dance” refers back to “dance,” “ethnomusicology” back to “musicology,” and performance studies back to “theater.”⁷ As these disciplinary relationships demonstrate, underpinning the separation of theater, dance, and music is an even more fundamental division, which may perhaps be addressed by considering the rubric of performing arts alongside that of embodied arts. In a more technical and philosophical context, I have defined embodied arts as “concrete ways of *grappling with*, getting a *grip upon*, and *coming to know* the materiality of human embodiment through processes of direct and detailed material negotiation.”⁸ In the present context, what is at issue is an ongoing tension in theater studies and elsewhere between ontologies of embodiment and ontologies of performance.

In her introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*, Nadine George-Graves demonstrates some aspects of this tension. On the one hand, her emphasis on “corporeality as an idea that unites the work of dance and theater scholars” suggests a focus on embodiment that could have radical implications for these and other fields.⁹ On the other hand, in her bid “to define an emerging field,” George-Graves maintains a set of modernist distinctions that work in some ways against this potential. This is particularly evident in her dismissal of sports, where she suggests that only the competitive element “holds our attention,” and of yoga and exercise, which “rarely involve an audience.”¹⁰ Like Phillip Zarrilli, George-Graves here implies a valorization of performing arts as a domain of heightened or even transcendent awareness, dismissing other areas of specialized embodied practice, such as sports, by linking them to the banality of everyday life, which she associates with “basic survival.” In Zarrilli’s writing, this model of art—as transcendence of the everyday—is carried into the theorization

of embodiment via the idea, developed by Drew Leder, that one is usually unaware of one's body and only becomes aware of it through specialized undertakings such as those of performing arts. Art as transcendent consciousness thus works on both levels, culture and embodiment, in contrast to the banality of everyday life and the routine disappearance of the body.¹¹ While such valorization of the "arts" has its uses, it also has the unfortunate side effect of denigrating a much wider range of practices that do not follow a strict division between embodied arts and everyday life.

In fact, the divisions that separate performing arts from physical culture and other specialized embodied practices sometimes do not accurately characterize the practices they aim to describe. Zarrilli, for example, dismisses Western sport only to replace it with a south Indian martial art, which has no more obvious relationship to the theatrical works he has since created than does football.¹² George-Graves, in her own research on African American performance, crosses boundaries not only between "theater, dance, comedy, music, etc.," but also between performing arts and other fields such as gender, spirituality, and "the repertoire of culture," implementing a disciplinary flexibility that is "rooted in and spidered out from the body."¹³ Certainly, the contributions to the *Oxford Handbook*, which range from social dance to political protest to academic practice as research, do not follow simple distinctions in terms of the presence or role of an audience. That such frameworks are nevertheless invoked suggests that we have not yet developed models through which to understand the full range and actions of embodied arts.¹⁴ As I understand it, the division that must be broken down in order to develop the concept of embodied arts in a decolonial way is not between theater and dance, or between these and music, but between *performing* arts—defined by the presence of a spectator figured as external to the "work" of the event—and all those embodied arts that do not involve performance in this sense. To think embodied arts, we need to go beyond the dissolution of disciplinary divisions that structure Western performing arts and recognize the blending and overlapping of performing arts with martial arts, healing arts, ritual arts, and sexual arts, etc.—all the fields of artistry and knowledge in which the affordances of embodiment itself are foregrounded.¹⁵

Such connections have been examined and explored, yet our theories and methods largely remain stuck within archaic, colonial divisions for political, institutional, and epistemological reasons. Ronald Grimes proposed "ritual studies" in the early days of performance studies and Jerzy Grotowski called a phase of his post-theatrical work "ritual arts," yet these terms have not become widespread.¹⁶ Zarrilli conducted pioneering work

on martial arts from a performance studies perspective, which is still cited today, yet only in the past few years is an interdisciplinary field of “martial arts studies” developing.¹⁷ Countless authors have worked across performance studies and gender studies in recent decades, yet the division between theatrical performances of sexuality on the one hand, and sexual practices or identities on the other, remains substantially intact. How can we further hasten the deconstruction of the underlying assumptions that separate ritual, healing, martial, sexual, and other embodied arts from performing arts? I take this as the challenge suggested by the term “embodied arts,” in relation to which the dismantling of distinctions between dance, theater, and music can only be a preliminary step.

The field of performance studies moves in this direction, but cannot escape the problem of the audience and the colonial structures of spectatorship that come with it, because its central term still finds its primary definition and grounding in those assumptions. If performance implies spectatorship and thus grounds itself in the “techniques of the observer” and of distanced spectatorship that underpin patriarchal and colonial epistemologies, then perhaps alternative models, frameworks, and techniques could be developed through a turn to embodiment.¹⁸ With this in mind, I have argued at length that embodied practice is structured as much by knowledge as by habit, demonstrating how this insight allows us to reveal the contiguity of physical culture, performing arts, and the construction of identity as fields of embodied technique, wherein the hierarchical valuing of “aesthetic” performance over mundane or everyday practice does not apply.¹⁹ In this framing of embodied arts, where “art” refers to knowledge in the sense of *techne*, spectatorial methodologies are displaced and—following arguments for situated embodiment in other fields—it is the artist or practitioner who is recognized as having contestable but undeniable epistemic privilege in relation to the meaning of events.²⁰ To clarify, I am not suggesting that we replace performance with embodiment or pit performance studies against embodied arts. As Juan Manuel Aldape Muñoz’s thoughtful critique of my own work points out, the word *performance* in “performance studies” and “performance as research” carries specific “animate and political possibilities” and cannot simply be replaced.²¹ Embodiment without performance risks tending toward a purely introspective mode, a kind of “work on the self” that never arrives to any public sphere and can be critiqued as a withdrawal from politics. I therefore want to offer not an argument against performance studies but a case for embodied arts as its essential companion.

Of course, like performance, *embodiment* is an English word that carries the burden of Anglophone linguistic dominance and colonization,

both historical and present.²² If performance carries assumptions of spectatorship and transcendence, then embodiment may equally carry assumptions of individuality and biologism. Why draw a line around the body or bodies? Do we not thereby exclude craft arts, culinary arts, herbal and plant-based arts, and other fields of knowledge that work not only with the body but with the close and continuous material flows of wood, stone, plants, textiles, and other “materials”?²³ In fact, I have never seen embodiment as synonymous with “the body,” but always as pushing back against it: existing in contradistinction to its constituent parts;²⁴ proliferating multiple bodies in place of a singular body;²⁵ or even defined retroactively as an ethical pivot between ecology and technology.²⁶ What I call the “trope of excess” figures embodiment as an excess of the body,²⁷ affirming that “there is always a real or a withdrawn dimension to the body that is in excess to medicine’s and philosophy’s and theory’s ever more complex and precise accounts of the body.”²⁸ While this trope highlights the need to avoid reducing embodiment to the body, it still begins from “the” body in order to posit embodiment as an excess. Turning this around, I would prefer to define the body secondarily, as a derivative of embodiment. Embodiment, then, is not the excess of the body; rather, “the body” is a set of overlapping and contiguous fields through which we work in partial ways with the affordances of embodiment.

Either way—as epistemic mapping or via the trope of excess—it seems that at the root of theorizing embodiment and embodied arts is something like an impulse to undo the distancing, spectatorial technique that structures so many bodies and institutions in the colonial milieu. Anthropology as a discipline, perhaps because of its historical engagement with indigenous worlds and cultures, undertook during the twentieth century a deep reckoning with colonialism that continues to shake its foundations.²⁹ Theater studies as a discipline has not yet done this: While it has radically expanded the scope and objects of its analysis, theater studies has not yet fundamentally questioned the spectatorial method and subject/object split that defines and distinguishes it from theater practice. The turn to performance may have displaced the centrality of the written text as the object of study in theater, but textuality still reigns when it comes to methods of analysis and forms of publication. This has everything to do with the limitations of performance as a concept, insofar as it posits a spectatorial position in relation to which the meaning of the event takes place—a position which easily becomes synonymous with that of the theorist or critic. We therefore cannot avoid asking whether and how embodiment itself might

be decolonized in a field where the body is absolutely central and yet still not recognized. Does the idea of embodiment have decolonial potential today? Can it be distinguished from the biomedical and objectified body with sufficient precision to make it a decolonial tool? Is embodiment just another one of the “master’s tools,” which will never dismantle the master’s house, or can embodiment be counted among the techniques that might dismantle the house of “the body”?³⁰

In the next section, I offer a necessarily incomplete survey of recent postcolonial, anticolonial, and decolonial literatures, searching for clues as to the role or absence of embodiment in decolonial projects. In addition to developing my argument for embodied arts, this abridged review is intended as an introduction to decolonization and decoloniality for theorists and practitioners of performing arts who may or may not be familiar with those terms. I apologize for the fact that, due to my own limitations of geography and language, I refer here only to Anglophone texts and the examples they consider, including a handful from the Global South but surely missing many of the most vital contemporary actions and conceptualizations of embodiment.

Bodies in decolonial thought

The literature on decolonization has exploded in the past decade, so that for almost every major scholarly topic, one can now find a book or article that considers how to “decolonize” it. Given the rapidly increasing prevalence of the term, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s much-cited warning against its use as a mere metaphor seems a good place to begin. In “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” Tuck and Yang argue against the casual use of “decolonization” in contexts beyond indigenous claims to sovereignty, which they see as a dilution of the concept’s political bite:

When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks.³¹

With this caution in mind, we must be on the lookout for how the idea of decolonizing embodiment could serve to diffuse or water down more directly political engagements. However, this cannot be an excuse for giving

up on critical or theoretically oriented decolonial processes. It might therefore be useful to juxtapose Tuck and Yang's "decolonization" with the idea of "decoloniality" that Walter D. Mignolo has developed following the work of Anibal Quijano.

For Mignolo, decoloniality is a complementary mode or even perhaps a successor to political decolonization. Whereas decolonization refers to the transfer of political power and sovereignty from a colonizing society to an indigenous one, decoloniality names a more thorough and complex transformation of knowledge and its institutions. Decolonization movements aim to overturn a system of colonial rule; decoloniality, by contrast, is an ongoing praxis that unmakes and reinvents techniques, institutions, and logics. As a result, while decolonization can be accomplished at least nominally through political revolution, "Decolonial delinking cannot be done all at once but shall focus on specific domains, levels and flows" of the "colonial matrix of power."³² Decoloniality is not a metaphor for decolonization but a more distributed and tactical version of it, which may attack coloniality via cultural institutions like museums and universities, as in the call to "Decolonize This Place,"³³ or via extractive infrastructure such as oil pipelines, as in the Canadian movement Idle No More and the protests at Standing Rock. The call to decolonize universities comes at all levels, from research methods to curriculum and fees.³⁴ Such movements tackle the colonial legacy of the university while also reclaiming it as a site of struggle. Even K. Wayne Yang, in a more recent book, argues that decolonial potential exists within the university.³⁵

Perhaps the difference between decolonization and decoloniality can help us draw a similarly vital distinction between decolonizing bodies and decolonizing embodiment. At this point in history, the decolonization of *bodies* could only properly mean the abolition of a racist and otherwise unjust prison-industrial complex; the opening of borders that forcefully maintain neocolonial divides; substantive programs of reparation for slavery and of land transfer to restore indigenous sovereignty; economic reforms geared toward environmental justice; and other such large-scale political and legislative transformations. Systems of violence, as well as the actions taken against them, involve embodied arts at every level, but they are also manifestly technological. Colonization itself is never primarily an embodied art and, therefore, nor can decolonization be. Just as racism is more than prejudice, colonization works through embodied technique but is maintained only by the unequal distribution of advanced technologies—especially weapons and walls.³⁶ Nevertheless, if we ask ourselves how political actions for decolonization can be supported by a wider movement of

decoloniality, we find that embodiment and embodied arts have a central role to play in the transformation of logics, techniques, and institutions. This decoloniality would be related to the literal freeing of bodies not metaphorically but at various levels of social and material interaction. For example, when we develop alternatives to the Western biomedical body, we open possibilities for new conceptions and implementations of health.³⁷ When we offer decolonial understandings of gender and sexuality, we intervene in patriarchal and colonial systems.³⁸ Such decolonial interventions necessarily accompany decolonizing political action; otherwise, as Mignolo forcefully argues, new borders and prisons are soon erected to replace the old.

Mignolo emphasizes that embodiment is not limited to human bodies, as “not only Man/Human has a body: plants have bodies, fish have bodies, birds have bodies, vegetables have bodies, fruit have bodies.” *Body* for Mignolo means living organisms, which, as I suggested earlier, “de-ontologize the entity *body* (molecular self-regenerative system) and restore it to the irreducible processes in the praxis of living.”³⁹ While the distribution of embodied agency beyond the human is a core argument of new materialist philosophies, it also resonates with many indigenous and animist ontologies according to which jaguars, mountains, and fogs are relatable as beings or persons.⁴⁰ Embodiment here troubles the category of the human, as human corporeality overlaps in so many ways with non-human being. Using embodiment as a leverage point from which to cut ties with the colonial order of “Man/Human” also demonstrates the ways in which humanness has been hierarchically positioned as the pinnacle of racial and sexual orders that classify racialized and sexualized others as less fully human. This crucial point links indigenous decoloniality to contemporary work on blackness, which comes at decoloniality from a different perspective: starting from the legacies of chattel slavery rather than of native dispossession, but no less committed to the radical deconstruction of the concept of the human. What Katherine McKittrick calls the “counter-humanism” of Sylvia Wynter emphasizes “the ways in which the figure of the human is tied to epistemological histories that presently value a *genre* of the human that reifies Western bourgeois tenets” and asks “how we might give humanness a different future.”⁴¹ Likewise, when Denise Ferreira da Silva defines “affectability” as the “condition of being subjected to both natural (in the scientific and lay sense) conditions and to others’ power,” she links embodiment—as that which is affectable—to both material and social power and in particular to the colonial construction of race as a hierarchical differentiation between those who possess reason or “rationality,

the divine's gift to man," and those who are "merely affectable."⁴² In these works, it is clear that the concept of embodiment cannot be decolonized without a full reckoning of its racist, patriarchal, and colonial histories.

The most totalizing articulations of racism, sometimes grouped under the name Afro-pessimism, argue that anti-Blackness is not merely integral to but constitutive of contemporary social existence.⁴³ This articulation of blackness as "both a lived impossibility and categorical exception" goes too far when it attempts to reduce all forms of embodied subjugation to anti-Blackness, perhaps precisely because it ontologizes race at the expense of embodiment.⁴⁴ Yet, other threads of black studies, drawing on some of the same sources in black feminist thought, take up the task of redefining embodiment from the perspective of blackness. For example, Alexander Weheliye develops a concept of the *viscus* or "flesh" that "insists on the importance of miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life." This "differently signified flesh" is founded on the recognition of an irrepressible dignity that attends life even under the most oppressive conditions: a "natural sweetness" of "life itself"—figured as embodiment or flesh—that roils with political resistance and potential.⁴⁵

A range of recent journal issues focus on decolonizing the transgender imaginary, decolonizing sex and sexuality, and decolonizing media.⁴⁶ Within theater, dance, and performance studies, decoloniality may appear through works that trace the appropriation of European embodied techniques across the world or that articulate methods and theories developed from more or less explicitly decolonial perspectives.⁴⁷ My own recent artistic research explores the decolonization of Jewish identity, drawing on many of the sources cited earlier as well as on work that makes this intention explicit.⁴⁸ Taking my own grappling with whiteness as a reference point, I turn in the next section to a difficult problem that scholars and practitioners of theater/performance studies, embodied arts, and decolonial praxis might each consider: the challenge of decolonizing white bodies. Although I do not wish to center whiteness in a conversation about the decolonial, this problem needs to be addressed, both as a limit case for the arguments offered earlier and in the context of predominantly white academic departments and institutions in the US and Europe.

Decolonizing white bodies

White bodies pose a specific problem for decoloniality. For revolutionary decolonization, outright war against whiteness in the form of the colonial

state seems justified. But for more thorough processes of decoloniality, the complexity of embodiment demands an engagement with the impossibility of neatly categorizing bodies.⁴⁹ The problem of whiteness cannot be solved through military or political action alone. On the one hand, white bodies incarnate coloniality. Their constructed whiteness is the fortress around which other bodies are subjugated and oppressed. On the other hand, white bodies are also *bodies*, and from the arguments cited earlier, it is clear that processes of racialization cannot account for the fullness of lived embodiment. No bodies are entirely white; there is no body that has been fully saturated (drained? bleached?) by whiteness. This is not because whiteness is located at the surface of the skin with something else hidden inside or underneath—it is not—but because whiteness infuses bodies as knowledge, culture, and technique: fractal veins that permeate but never entirely fill embodiment, never fully determining what a body can do.⁵⁰ It follows that there are differing degrees, levels, and qualities of whiteness, and this raises the question of how to unearth the nonwhiteness of bodies that have been racialized as white. The famous “knapsack” of white privilege is not one that can be taken off at will, because like all racializations it is strapped on by others through entrenched social systems.⁵¹ As a result, there are limits to even the most radical white “race traitor.”⁵² How, then, “can white people be responsible for their complicity [with whiteness] if they cannot choose to be not white?”⁵³ What is the future of whiteness, its making and unmaking?⁵⁴

While I obviously cannot offer any conclusive responses to these questions, I would like to consider the historical significance of white attempts to escape whiteness, including the harm these have unintentionally done, and ask what contemporary deconstructions of whiteness might do to avoid the trap of reproducing whiteness when trying to get away from it. Following Philip Deloria’s work on “playing Indian,”⁵⁵ Shari M. Huhndorf has examined the white fantasy of “going native” across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States. To a large extent, such stories “reveal white America’s aspirations to hegemony, specifically through that society’s attempts to obliterate Native peoples, cultures, and histories.” In this sense, “going native” extends the violent conquest and appropriation of indigenous lands and bodies into the realm of cultural identity. Yet, Huhndorf also asks: “To what extent does evoking ‘nativeness’ destabilize the notions of race, gender, and history which the dominant culture seeks to naturalize?” If these “complex workings of culture reveal the conflicts and fissures at the heart of” American identity, then “perhaps in these contradictions lies the potential for decolonizing knowledge.”⁵⁶ These issues

remain crucial today and continue to operate even in mainstream politics.⁵⁷ Contemporary debates over cultural appropriation index the tension between a mode of exchange with the potential to transform relations and an extractive relation in which the “borrowing” of culture masks a deeper exploitation.

There is an important point to be made here about the relationship between embodied arts and political awareness and action. One of the problems with the white fantasies of “going native” that Huhndorf traces is that, even when they lead to an ostensibly deep transformation of the white person and their way of life—as in some white New Age writers and practitioners—they mostly fail to engage with the histories of violence and the politics of sovereignty that structure relations between indigenous and colonial peoples. This superficiality with regard to native or indigenous knowledge supports an easy appropriation in which whiteness and coloniality are reinscribed under the guise of transformation: a change in personal identity without a change in allegiance. It might be worth distinguishing, then, between a mode of “playing Indian” that appropriates cultural elements from marginalized peoples and the potential for “going native” in a more fundamental or radical way that could open the door to political action as well as politicized identification. Such a distinction is drawn with care by Macarena Gómez-Barris in her discussion of New Age tourism in Peru. In the gulf separating touristic, neocolonial “spectacularized Andeanism” from an indigenous-centering vision of “Andean phenomenology,” she asks whether there might be some potential for “Decolonizing the New Age.” Politicized consciousness is undoubtedly a key part of this difference, but no less important is “embodied knowledge as the source of a future-oriented imaginary of the planetary.”⁵⁸ There are thus degrees, levels, or layers of transmission and different kinds of decolonial and neocolonial potential at play in such encounters—a point that might return us with increased urgency to the complementary ontologies of performance and embodiment introduced earlier.

Tensions between performance and embodiment came heatedly to the fore in the 2015 outing of Nkechi Amare Diallo—then and still known as Rachel Dolezal—and what was widely received as her appropriation of blackness. Diallo grounds her identification as black in her individual experience and, although she was politically active within the NAACP, has not responded to the criticism of her actions with an acknowledgment of the ways in which her white lineage troubles her claims. On the other hand, as some thinkers working across black and trans identity have acknowledged, racial categories are constituted in multiple ways—genetic lineage but also

adoption and other alternative kinship mechanisms, physical appearance, languages and cultural codes, political affiliations, personal experience, and more—and it is only by taking into account this complexity that someone’s “real” identity can be approached. As Kai M. Green asks, “When does passing stop being passing and become being?”⁵⁹ Responding to Green’s essay, Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides raise further questions: “What is Dolezal doing with her Blackness; how is she ‘Blackening’ racial categorizations? Dolezal allows for something new to be learned of race, of Blackness, and it is this contribution that preoccupies us.”⁶⁰ The main arguments over Diallo’s identity are thoughtfully synthesized by Aniruddha Dutta, who acknowledges the differences between racial and gender identification while refusing to accept an ontological division between them.⁶¹ While the majority of critics have treated Diallo’s claims as outrageous, these authors emphasize the impossibility of restricting white bodies to whiteness, as doing so—in the terms developed earlier—risks reducing embodied decoloniality to political decolonization.

Any movement away from an explicitly political contestation of nationhood and sovereignty and toward a decolonial engagement with knowledge, spirituality, or embodiment carries the risk of inadvertently diluting revolutionary decolonization. This is the point made by Tuck and Yang, with which I began the section on decolonial thought earlier. Yet, it is impossible to imagine a lasting decolonial transformation of society that does not involve epistemological and embodied decoloniality as well as structural and political change. The decolonization of bodies, which relies on stable identity categories to define the distribution of power, and the decoloniality of embodiment, which fundamentally deconstructs those categories, go together. Neither can be accomplished without the other. When it comes to decolonizing white bodies, this means that the obvious need for white people to support—financially, physically, and institutionally—movements and initiatives led by people of color must be supported and supplemented by embodied arts that work to unmake whiteness and to redefine the identities of those racialized as white.

Writing about whiteness in South Africa, Samantha Vice has argued for a mode of work that follows the Greek ethos of “care of the self” to develop a “personal, inward-directed project” organized around the conscious experience of shame and discomfort and the cultivation of humility and silence.⁶² In a special issue of the *South African Journal of Philosophy* devoted to the discussion of Vice’s essay, Alison Bailey extends Vice’s emphasis on shame and humility to encourage “white South Africans to make themselves epistemologically and ontologically vulnerable.”⁶³ At stake here

is a recognition of the embodiment that underpins whiteness and the need for techniques and practices that bring the vulnerability, openness, and affectability of embodiment out from beneath the mask of whiteness. It is this need for transformation at the level of the embodied self that leads to calls for white people to “clean up their own houses” and “work on their own stuff” first, before attempting more public antiracist or decolonial work—as Bailey argues, citing James Baldwin’s advice: “Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it.”⁶⁴ A similar suggestion is offered by Huhndorf, who seems to invite “those in search of alternative traditions to turn to their own pasts to solve their society’s problems.”⁶⁵ Heeding such calls, white practitioners of embodied arts have gradually begun to examine their own racialization and take steps toward deconstructing or at least better understanding it. This may involve rooting out whiteness as a kind of organizational culture or technique that can be found at work in any context.⁶⁶ Or it may require, as performer and theorist Esther Neff suggests, finding ways of “performing unwhitely.”⁶⁷

A further approach to decolonizing white bodies can be found in the “cultural somatics” proposed by Tada Hozumi. Drawing on Western expressive arts therapies, Japanese somatic traditions, and other lineages, Hozumi suggests that “oppressions such as white supremacy and heterosexism” be understood as “expressions of trauma in cultural somas (bodies).”⁶⁸ In a blog post titled “Why White People Can’t Dance: They’re Traumatized,” Hozumi explores the idea that whiteness not only enacts violence but is also an expression of trauma. Thus,

white-ness is traumatization itself. The white body is in freeze: a state of disconnection between mind and body. It is ungrounded and cannot feel the earth. We see this pained energy of white-ness play out in our society through violence towards sexuality, emotional vulnerability, and ecology, amongst other things.

Whether or not the term “trauma” is valid in this context, Hozumi is plainly not looking to absolve white people of responsibility for racism but to analyze the politics of somatics and the somatics of politics.⁶⁹ While Hozumi’s cultural somatics is not a form of direct training for white people to enact antiracism politically, neither is it a naively individualist application of somatic practices to white bodies. Rather, Hozumi aims to counter racism through embodied arts, proposing a specifically embodied approach to unmaking whiteness. Such an approach recognizes that, whatever

whiteness is, if it is thickly interwoven with bodies, then it cannot simply be eradicated but must be unlearned, retrained, and transformed.

Concluding thoughts

I have argued that dismantling disciplinary boundaries, such as that between theater and dance, should only be a first step in the direction of a more fundamental decolonial move that resituates performing arts in a wider context of healing, martial, ritual, sexual, and other embodied arts. Even if performance studies has to some degree allowed academic institutions to recognize the public and discursive dimensions of nominally private acts, we still need a richer framework for embodiment to help us decenter Western techniques of audiencing and spectatorship in our understanding of embodiment and practice. Tracing the notion of decoloniality through indigenous, black, and critical white studies, I have tried to show here that embodied arts are crucial arts of survival, “arts of living on a damaged planet,” arts of the past and future, and arts of the earth as well as arts of the body.⁷⁰ It is not possible to engage with the sources cited earlier and still imagine that embodied arts could refer only or even mostly to performing arts. We need interdisciplinary work across theater and dance and music, but we also need intersectional work across race and gender and religion, and this needs to take place not only in terms of what we study but also in the very structure of who studies, how, and where. The challenge to decolonize academia demands a reconsideration of the place and role of bodies—including white bodies—in its spaces.

If decoloniality differs from decolonization in that it works at all levels of knowledge and power and not only through the explicit politics of sovereignty, then academia could be an important site for this work. Theater and performance studies moves in this direction when it engages with critical, cultural, and decolonial thought such as that cited earlier. Meanwhile, at another level, theater and performance studies is grappling with something like decoloniality at the level of method through emerging modes of artistic research, practice research, and embodied research. In the United States and Europe, these two strands of activity have mostly not yet come together. Those programs in the United States that are most steeped in critical and decolonial thoughts remain conservative at the level of method, while the methodologically radical development of artistic research in Europe is not generally oriented by a decolonial frame. This is hardly surprising if we consider how controversial each move has been on its own terms and that their combination would require an even more radical overturning of

entrenched epistemological hierarchies. Yet such an epistemological revolution is precisely what is needed.

While artistic research in Europe has radical methods, it largely fails to understand their political implications; and while cultural studies in the United States has articulated the most urgent politics, it seems stuck at the level of method.⁷¹ Artistic research, if it does not engage thoroughly with cultural and performance studies, risks failing to understand its own implicit and potential politics. On the other hand, decolonial thought and writing, if it does not find ways to radicalize at the level of method, risks articulating a critical program without a sufficiently developed program for institutional change.⁷² In the context of predominantly white academic institutions, I propose that we might see artistic, practice, and embodied research to a large extent as projects for decolonizing white bodies, which must be linked in solidarity with black-, brown-, and indigenous-led projects for unmaking whiteness and remaking the world. To realize such a vision, we will need to resituate performing arts alongside embodied arts, shifting onto-epistemic categories until we are able to declare in our own fields that, as Shawn Wilson proposes, “research is ceremony.”⁷³ Perhaps then we can begin to understand “theater” not as a site defined by the division between performer and spectator but as a home for transformative embodied praxis. The place of the critical scholar in that space, like the place of the white body, is not comfortable.

1 Originally published as “Notes for Decolonizing Embodiment,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 33.2 (2019): 9–22. This item is licensed under a CC-BY: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

2 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

3 See Ben Spatz, “Mad Lab—Or Why We Can’t Do Practice as Research,” in *Performance as Research: Knowledge, Methods, Impact*, ed. Annette Arlander et al. (New York: Routledge, 2018): 209–23.

4 On performance, see Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

5 See Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Marie Thompson, “Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies,” *Parallax* 23.3 (2017): 266–82.

6 The need to avoid such exoticization—arising, for example, when *rasa* is treated as “a culturally loaded and temporally specific concept that is predominantly experienced through interactions with Indian art” and thereby locked out of current Anglophone debates over “immersion”—has been carefully articulated by Royona Mitra, even if her conclusions on ocular spectatorship (which

- she likens to Jacques Rancière's "Emancipated Spectator") diverge from my argument here. See Mitra, "Decolonizing Immersion: Translation, Spectatorship, *Rasa* Theory and Contemporary British Dance," *Performance Research* 21.5 (2016): 89–100.
- 7 On the politics of world dance as a category, see Susan Leigh Foster, ed., *Worlding Dance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
 - 8 See "Embodiment as First Affordance," this volume.
 - 9 Nadine George-Graves, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 5.
 - 10 *Ibid.*: 6.
 - 11 Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009): 51.
 - 12 *Ibid.*: 23.
 - 13 George-Graves, *Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*: 3.
 - 14 This essay was inspired in part by a recent call for proposals from the *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, for a special issue on "the embodied arts." Taking *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater* as its starting point, the CFP glossed the embodied arts as "dance, theatre, performance art, or any hybrid form therein." See American Theatre and Drama Society, "JADT Special Issue—The Embodied Arts" (2018): www.atds.org/2018/06/07/jadt-special-issue-the-embodied-arts/ (accessed 5 August 2019).
 - 15 I use the phrase "healing, martial, and ritual arts" in Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 9, 249. I think Daniel Mroz suggested this framework to me. In the context of current trans, queer, sex work, and ecosexual movements, the inclusion of sexual arts among these fields of knowledge and practice seems essential, although its further discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. I leave it to the reader to continue to develop my intentionally incomplete invocation of embodied arts: "etc..."
 - 16 Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); Thomas Richards and Jerzy Grotowski, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 122.
 - 17 Phillip B. Zarrilli, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalaripayattu, a South Indian Martial Art* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Bowman, ed., *The Martial Arts Studies Reader* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Janet O'Shea, *Risk, Failure, Play: What Dance Reveals about Martial Arts Training* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
 - 18 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); and see Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
 - 19 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*.
 - 20 See "Colors Like Knives," this volume.
 - 21 Juan Manuel Aldape Muñoz, "Violence and Performance Research Methods: Direct-Action, 'Die-Ins,' and Allyship in a Black Lives Matter Era," in Arlander et al., *Performance as Research*: 315.
 - 22 "Art" is arguably no better, nor is "practice"—but one must choose some terms with which to work.
 - 23 Tim Ingold, "Materials against Materiality," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14.1 (2007): 1–16.

- 24 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 149–66.
- 25 Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 26 Spatz, "Embodiment as First Affordance."
- 27 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*: 56–60.
- 28 Christopher Breu, "Identity vs. Embodiment: A Materialist Rethinking of Intersex and Queerness," *Symploke* 24.1–2 (2016): 76.
- 29 For example, see the recent debates on method and colonialism, organized around the work of Marisol de la Cadena, in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7.2 (2017): 1–21.
- 30 Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007): 110–14.
- 31 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 3.
- 32 Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 162.
- 33 MTL+ Collective, "Decolonize This Place" (2016): www.decolonizethisplace.org/.
- 34 See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2013); Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (London: Routledge, 2014); and the social and educational movements organized around the slogans "Why is my curriculum white?" in the United Kingdom and "Rhodes Must Fall" in South Africa.
- 35 la paperson, *A Third University Is Possible* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 36 For a comparative history of colonization, see Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso, 2016).
- 37 Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).
- 38 Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson, eds., *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Silvia Posocco, eds., *Decolonizing Sexualities* (Oxford: Counterpress, 2016); C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 39 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*: 162.
- 40 See Diana H. Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
- 41 Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 11, 9.

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- 42 Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): xv, 49.
- 43 Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Racked & Dispatched, 2017): rackedanddispatched.noblogs.org/files/2017/01/Afro-Pessimism2.pdf (accessed 5 August 2019).
- 44 See Iyko Day, "Being or Nothingness: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Settler Colonial Critique," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1.2 (2015): 108.
- 45 Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 64, 12, 127.
- 46 See, respectively, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1.3 (2014); *JMEWS: Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14.2 (2018); and *Cinema Journal* 57.4 (2018).
- 47 Books in this area that focus specifically on training and embodiment include Jonathan Pitches and Stefan Aquilina, eds., *Stanislavsky in the World: The System and Its Transformations across Continents* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017); Sharrell D. Lockett with Tia M. Shaffer, eds., *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Royona Mitra, *Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, *Crossing Cultural Borders through the Actor's Work: Foreign Bodies of Knowledge*, (New York: Routledge, 2009).
- 48 Ben Spatz, "Molecular Identities: Digital Archives and Decolonial Judaism in a Laboratory of Song," *Performance Research* 24.1 (2019): 66–79; and see Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2017).
- 49 On the ontological implications of intersectionality theory, see Anna Carastathis, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); and Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 50 Spatz, *What a Body Can Do*, 44–48.
- 51 Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom* (1989): 10–12.
- 52 See *Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism*, launched in 1993: racetraitor.org/.
- 53 Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011): 3.
- 54 Linda Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., eds., *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
- 55 Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
- 56 Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 14.
- 57 For example, see Kim TallBear's statement on Elizabeth Warren: TallBear (@KimTallBear), "an updated statement on #ElizabethWarren DNA testing

- story. includes a slight clarification. [screenshot],” Twitter (15 October 2018): twitter.com/kimtallbear/status/1052017467021651969/.
- 58 Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): 61, 55, 49.
- 59 Kai M. Green, “‘Race and Gender Are Not the Same!’ Is Not a Good Response to the ‘Transracial’ / Transgender Question OR We Can and Must Do Better,” *Feminist Wire* (2015): www.thefeministwire.com/2015/06/race-and-gender-are-not-the-same-is-not-a-good-response-to-the-transracial-transgender-question-or-we-can-and-must-do-better/ (accessed 5 August 2019).
- 60 Marquis Bey and Theodora Sakellarides, “When We Enter: The Blackness of Rachel Dolezal,” *Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 46.4 (2016): 44.
- 61 Aniruddha Dutta, “Allegories of Gender: Transgender Autology versus Transracialism,” *Atlantis* 39.2 (2018): 86–98. I follow Dutta in using Diallo’s current name.
- 62 Samantha Vice, “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41.3 (2010): 324; see also Alexis Shotwell, *Knowing Otherwise: Race, Gender, and Implicit Understanding* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).
- 63 Alison Bailey, “On White Shame and Vulnerability,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 30.4 (2011): 480.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 475. The source of this quotation is given as James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985): xix.
- 65 Huhndorf, *Going Native*, 193.
- 66 Guidance on undertaking such a process is offered by Tema Okun in “white supremacy culture” and other resources available from Dismantling Racism Works (2001): www.dismantlingracism.org/white-supremacy-culture.html (accessed 5 August 2019).
- 67 Esther Neff, “Performing Unwhitely/Becoming Imaginary I: Theory 07/12/2016,” Medium (9 November 2017): medium.com/@esthermneff/performing-unwhitely-becoming-imaginary-part-i-theory-07-12-2016-48b04830f77d (accessed 5 August 2019).
- 68 Quotations are from Tada Hozumi, *Selfish Activist*: selfishactivist.com/.
- 69 A later post, identifying whiteness as a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder, was taken down after some strong negative reactions that criticized its use of biomedical terminology and emphasized the risk that attributing whiteness to trauma can erase the differences between oppressor and oppressed—in Tuck and Yang’s terms, extending innocence to whiteness. For example, see Lisa Vallejos, “The Dangerous Game of Calling Whiteness PTSD: A Response to Tada Hozumi,” Medium (13 November 2017): medium.com/@lisavallejos/the-dangerous-game-of-calling-whiteness-ptsd-a-response-to-tada-hozumi-d8bddccdc062 (accessed 5 August 2019).
- 70 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 71 I discuss Europe and the United States here because those are the contexts I know best and mostly work in. While acknowledging the irony of nation-state designations in this context, I am also aware of work in Canada, South Africa, India, Singapore, and New Zealand/Aotearoa that undertakes artistic research

in a decolonial frame—see, for example, Manola K. Gayatri, “PaR and Decolonisation: Notemakings from an Indian and South African Context,” in Annette Arlander et al., *Performance as Research*: 170–84.

- 72 For a history of these tensions in the United States, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2012).
- 73 Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point: Fernwood, 2008); and see Virginie Magnat, “Can Research Become Ceremony? Performance Ethnography and Indigenous Epistemologies,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 151 (2012): 30–6.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

Interview: Iben Nagel Rasmussen (2018)

This public interview took place at Ghent University as part of a specialist course organized by Adriana La Selva. It has been edited for clarity and length. Iben Nagel Rasmussen is a core member of the world-renowned Odin Teatret and leader of the Bridge of Winds project. She has taught and performed around the world and is a key reference point for any conversation about post-Grotowskian theater. I was grateful to have the opportunity to speak with one of the great figures in experimental theater and to ask her questions about power, identity, and process that remain urgent today.¹

What are the avenues that you're working on now? The Bridge of Winds project: What is happening with it? What is your current connection with Odin?

My work as an actress at Odin Teatret is still the same. I am participating in all the ensemble performances. Then I have my solo performances. Then, of course, I have the work with the Bridge of Winds which, I think, next to my work as an actress, is the most important for me, because it's my teaching. What are we training for? When you start to learn, you want to learn the skills, you want to learn the technique, you want to be a fantastic actress. But then...

I will tell my own experience. I went into the Odin Theater and it took me a long time before I was able to do anything. It took me two years, I think, of training, where I was following the exercises of Grotowski, which Odin Teatret had been using. At a certain point, I was nearly giving up my own training because I could not find the flow I could see in others. I was desperate. I thought: "I cannot do this training, I'm never going to succeed. It's horrible." So I went into the working space. And we were very free to do our own training in this period. Eugenio was not even there. It was a special period. We were in Aarhus in Denmark to perform and in the morning we had this training. And I came in and I thought: "What is a dramatic exercise?" It would be dramatic if I go down, for example. That's dramatic. It would be dramatic if I kicked somebody. It would be dramatic if I jump. And it would be very dramatic if I put my body out of balance. By finding my own exercises, I really got this flow, I could flow from one exercise to another, rise up again, and I could continue. I could find this flow, and I could even get energy back from the exercises I was making. Before that, it remained gymnastic for me. The outer thing was okay, but I could see it was not working. When I found my own exercises, I could see, this is really working for me. And that was when I first taught.

I had just a small group, at Farfa. They developed the exercises of going out of balance, and regaining the energy, and throwing the energy into the space. This is what I have been teaching the Bridge of Winds. Each seminar, each meeting, we also make a new performance. It's not a real performance, because we have only a month maximum to work. But I want them to experience how you use the training. The flow that you find in the training, you can use that for the performance. The performance length at the Odin, at that time, was normally one hour. So we trained in order to be able to resist and flow for one hour. That was the goal. I'm not training to be a policeman or a soldier or a postman. I'm training to be an actress. It can have a social—not political, but social—impact. It can have a social influence. Not only how to use the technique of the voice, the technique of the body, make a sequence that could be a montage. But also: Where do you put this performance? In what context? You can say the most fantastic political text, but if you put this fantastic political text in front of an audience who would be always agreeing with you, it's not very revolutionary. You don't change anything.

But you can put the same thing in a place where theater has never been before, like we did when we went for the first time to South Italy. We started to make what we called "barthers," so that our little outdoor performance, or dances, developed from the training, was the basis for a barter with the

people of the place. They had never seen theater before, but they would answer us spontaneously with their dances and with their songs from this area, very close to where Eugenio Barba was born. This is what I have been teaching also. And I think that is why the group, Bridge of Winds, is not like a school. It is something that *happened*, that the group has existed for so long. It's not that I thought: "Oh, I'm making a group that will exist for 30 years!" No, it's because I started something and it has been developing. And that is very important for Odin Theater also, for Eugenio: to be open to this serendipity, as in the south of Italy. This old man came one day and he was sitting, watching the training. Then the next day he came back with a child beside him. The next day, they were four. And Eugenio said: "Maybe it's interesting. Maybe we can make..." So we made for the first time an outdoor performance. Everything was happening like that.

There's a term I'd like to mention, which is "director." In the context of Bridge of Winds, when you make a performance—which you said is not a real performance—do you take on the role of the director? Do you become director in Bridge of Winds?

Yes, I am absolutely director. I am not acting. I am sitting on my chair. I am looking at the training every day. I am making the decisions for the montage. It's not a performance because it's not so elaborate. It is elaborated. It has a dynamic, it has a beginning, an end. It is very important that we show it to somebody, that it doesn't remain closed inside the group. It's not a laboratory in that way at that moment. So we open the doors. Somebody will come and see it.

The way I make this montage of these pieces is very much based on the dynamics of the work between the actors. I think maybe I lack a level as a director, the intellectual work of the research... I'm working in another way than Eugenio and I would never be able to work like him. But I have my own ideas. It's different, and of course, Eugenio has no experience whatsoever as an actor. I have these fifty years. My relationship to the actors is very different.

As a director, when you're working with the people in Bridge of Winds or in any other context, how you approach their differences from each other and from you? For me this is also a very important question, in thinking about difference and identity in work spaces.

I love the differences. I love that they are different. You also mentioned gender, for example. As a child I was climbing in the trees, I was running in the woods, I was really very active. My brother, who was a little

younger, was much more calm, much more in his own world. He could play alone for a long time. When I came to the Odin, there was no difference in the training between what the women should do or what the men should do. It was the same. We had to do the acrobatics, we had to do all the hard exercises, completely the same.

I speak of a transparent body. With a transparent body I mean that, when you are working, when you are training, when you are acting, you don't think of this body, this person, as a person I see, as in ballet or many kinds of dance. You don't concentrate on the beauty of the body. When I saw for the first time Odin Teatret—I saw Torgeir Wethal and also Else Marie Laukvik—it was like something else was burning through the body. When I came, they told me: "You make these ten yoga exercises," which Grotowski had developed together with Cieślak: ten yoga exercises that were transformed because of the imagination of the actor. I saw Torgeir doing that and Eugenio said: "You do the same." I said: "What do you mean, do the same?" What I saw was not a person standing on his head or a person making the bridge. I saw something completely else, and that is what I have been looking for. My whole research has been to find what makes the actor transparent. So I don't think, he has a big nose, or he has black or white skin, but he has something, something else is burning through this body. It's very difficult to find a name for it. You can say it's spirituality. I don't have a name for it. But that is what I have been searching for.

Did you not feel that differences such as gender that were significant in the outside world, that they did sometimes come in and break into the inner work of the studio? Was that really never a problem? But also, those differences that seemed to be left behind, were they not also part of the generative materials that were actually in the transparency? So maybe that transparency is not only a leaving behind of gender and race and age, but actually it's the catching fire of—the fruitful appearance of—these differences?

When I see the actors, it's not that they are not different. They are completely different. They are all so different. For example, there is an exercise called the "Wind Dance." In the beginning, they could dance for half an hour, one actor—because we did it in group and then one at a time—and I could simply watch this person. And they were *so* different, even though they were dancing the same step. That was what was interesting for me.

There's a lot in your description of the theater space as one in which this body appears: this transparent body or one that is "catching fire" or proliferating differences. As a performer, which are the moments when you feel that your inner experiences are coming out to spectators?

I don't know. Really, because I don't see myself, I never see myself. And I don't see my colleagues, because they are with me in the space, we are "in" something. Sometimes I am surprised because I think, "Today, it was a horrible performance. I'm so ashamed." And then you come out: "Oh, Iben, today it was really a fantastic performance. You were so illuminated." So, I'm not the one to judge. That's why we have the director.

I think the performance where I reach the maximum as an actress is the one called *Itsi Bitsi*. I'll take it from the beginning. I wanted to make a new performance. I created the material. I had this scene, this scene, and this scene. I had been doing it a long time. I presented it to Kai, an actor of the Odin Theater. We worked together with his music on the accordion. And then we presented it to Eugenio. Eugenio said: "It's fantastic! Yeah! We will make *Edipo in Colon*" [*Oedipus at Colonus*]. I said: "Eugenio, no. We don't. It has nothing to do with *Edipo in Colon*." And then he says, "Yeah, but you know, you can be Edipo in Colon, he's been traveling for a long time, he comes home. And one of the scenes can be you with your ex-boyfriend who died years ago when you were traveling in North Africa. It can be a fantastic scene." And I said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." So the whole performance was now about the drugs, about my experiences with the traveling, my relationship to him, and the different figures from my performances. And Eugenio said: "Iben, I don't know anything about drugs. Please write me something about it." So, I wrote one hundred pages. And I said: "It's just for your information." Then Eugenio, after his holidays, came back and said: "I've chosen the text now." What was it? The description of my experience with drugs! What made the performance so interesting was that me, Kai, and Jan—the actor and two musicians—we had been preparing all of the material for the performance. I had written the text and Eugenio had chosen pieces of it. I think that is something very important about the Odin. I would never have been able to do this myself, to choose this text and to put it on this scene.

I would like to follow up and ask you about the idea of the "technical" in performance. What is that domain that we call the technical? Do you think, for example, in the score of *Itsi Bitsi*, where

the score has this interweaving of layers, does it have a technical dimension that's separable? Because it's about your life, also, but put into a montage in a way you wouldn't have expected.

Eugenio rarely works on the inner side of the actor, what is inside you. As a director, I'm always correcting the technical aspect. You can, of course, make it softer, make it more angry. But I don't touch the inner life of the actor. In the beginning of the *Odin*—I don't know if it was because Eugenio was colored by his experience with Grotowski—we had these long improvisations where we had a theme, and it was this inner world that had to develop, by following images... But later on, I've been working very differently. It started already from Kattrin, the mute Kattrin in *Mother Courage*. I was working very technically with it. How is she walking, using the clogs? How is she using her hands? How is she sitting down? How is she jumping? How is she turning around? That was very technical. But the life, her heart, was already there. This childish personality was already there from the beginning. I didn't have to search for it. I invented her language, yes, but I felt that... I knew. She was just there. And many of the characters, I think, they grow together with the technique. I cannot separate them.

I'm interested in how we use this idea of the technical when teaching. On the one hand, you just described that the role grows; the technical structure of the role is interwoven with everything about the role and all of its meaning. But you also said that when you are teaching, you only give technical instructions. I understand what it is in practice to give only technical instructions. But I also know that, particularly as you come to know someone over time, a technical instruction is not just technical because you know the person. So there is a kind of respectful distancing. I am actually touching your inner life, but through certain agreements of what kinds of instructions I will give.

Yes. You can go back to the training again: In the beginning, when I came to the *Odin Theater*, we thought you could use any kind of exercise. You could use the classical ballet exercise, you could use a yoga exercise, it didn't matter. You could merge them as you wish. But after many years of working, I found out, it's not like that. It's not like that. A certain kind of exercise will, automatically, without you thinking about it, without you wanting it, will develop a certain kind of energy. So, today, we are working with four different kinds of exercises. Each of them is generating or developing a certain kind of energy.

I think you can destroy an actor, really, if you go and say: “No, your state of mind, I feel that you were being too jealous about what was happening, blah, blah, blah.” Instead, you say: “No, use the energy of the samurai.” You know what that is. Maybe you don’t have to do the exact exercise, but you know what that energy is. And you don’t give any psychological—I think that is most important—you don’t give any psychological indications. Which is contrary to the normal approach to the text, where you have to find the psychological life of your character.

Do you have the experience sometimes that some new material or new phenomenon is immediately speaking to you strongly—that it is connected to you, even though it’s new?

There was this exercise where the first step came from Gardzienice, from a girl who worked with the Polish group Gardzienice. She learned this special step, with breath, very loose in the body. She showed it to us and I said: “Okay, let’s try to develop it. Let’s see. Everybody can learn it.” It was very easy. So they learned it and we developed it. Now it’s completely changed, but the base is that.

The Wind Dance. It’s so simple. And it has everything. It has what I was looking for, for such a long, long time: to find the flow in the exercises. I never understood why the training was so tiring. Even Eugenio was asking some of us: “Why do the actors get so tired during training? And then, after the performance, they go out and they dance for three hours! Why can they dance for three hours when they’re exhausted after the day’s work?” Why, with these exercises I had before—why did I get so tired? And then, the first step, I did it with the first group I had, with the group Farfa, and we invented different dances. But it took a long time, because each member of the group had to develop his own dance in the training, and then we fixed it. It took a long time. So, in the first meeting of the Bridge of Winds, when this girl came and showed us the step, I thought, this is fantastic. Because you have a common step. The group is together. You have the flow from day one. You have it from the beginning.

So, there is this little seed that came from Gardzienice, which developed into the Wind Dance? That is fascinating to me on several levels. First of all because, in general, it’s really interesting to see a technical element, a little technical seed that comes and goes over here and is developed in another way. This is just to say again that what we are doing is research—this kind of phenomenon, which is

how all research works, is so palpable. But especially that it came from Gardzienice.

Odin has existed for a huge amount of time. And somehow, space has been made for various initiatives to develop inside it. The core ensemble has stayed together while individuals have also been able to lead their own projects. What are the ethics and economics of that?

At the beginning, when I started to teach on my own, Eugenio said: “You can have three pupils, but you are responsible. You get up at five o’clock in the morning, before we start our training. You train with them. Odin will not pay anything for them.” I don’t remember how we did it, but the Odin was not responsible. And it’s the same now.

So, yes. In Odin, you have this space. Often that doesn’t exist in other groups. That is how we have survived. But also because, I mean, we have been living together: not only the director, but the whole group, for nearly our whole lives now. I was twenty-one when I came. I cannot go and work with another director. Eugenio is very demanding, but I could not be satisfied with anything less. Like with the Bridge of Winds, you create a language together. It’s not like we’re simply interpreting and staging a text. We have created a physical language. The director doesn’t have to say very much. He says one thing and I understand what he means. That would be impossible with another person. And that’s also why, for Eugenio, it’s difficult to work with new actors.

One of the guests has asked about interculturalism and about how you are traveling with cultural materials: dances, songs, or other materials from other places. There has been criticism—specifically of Barba and also Grotowski and Peter Brook—that these materials are being manipulated from a position of power, a colonial position. That it mirrors in some way the appropriation of land, the appropriation of wealth, which allows a European institution to go and have access to all these materials: songs, dances, stories. In a barter, for example. A barter is based on an equality, but actually there can be a big power difference, a big economic difference. Have you grappled with that in Odin?

In the beginning, there was a big resistance in South America to the Odin from some, especially political groups. But that has completely disappeared. Odin Teatret is more known and recognized in South America than any part of the world. And we’re not only presenting barter. We’re presenting our performances. I remember, when we presented in Venezuela for the

first time, there was a big festival and we presented *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*—the play where I am a shaman. In this performance, the theme was the destroying of the Indians. The pioneers are coming and they are destroying. The battle at the Little Big Horn, where the Indians were massacred. They were touched by this, of course, but they didn't think that we took anything from them. On the contrary, they thought that we gave them something back.

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- 1 Specialist course: “What are you training for? On acting and performance techniques—Current directions for embodied research in the performing arts” (11 January 2018). Hosted by Ghent University and KASK School of Arts with support from KU Leuven; University of Antwerp; a.pass: advanced performance and scenography; Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium; and the IFTR Embodied Research Working Group.

Interview: Tim Ingold (2019)

This interview was conducted for the “Remember Your Body!” podcast, a component of the online Somatics Toolkit, which includes a series of interviews with senior researchers alongside audio tracks offering practical exercises for (re)introducing embodied practice into academic research. It has been lightly edited for clarity and length. Tim Ingold is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, a wide-ranging thinker whose work is increasingly cited in performance studies. I had long wanted to speak with him about the body in anthropology and to ask why the idea of embodiment does not figure more prominently in his writing.¹

I have been looking at the distinction between anthropology and ethnography in some of your recent essays. The idea of ethnography is something you have moved away from. Did you start with ethnography in the more traditional sense, and now you've moved away from it?

I could go right back to when I was doing my doctoral research: I had been trained in Cambridge and I went off to do field work, as you do. At that time, I didn't really give any thought to the issue about whether this was anthropology or ethnography. In those days, people simply called it anthropology. In British anthropology, the word “ethnography” wasn't used all that much. We simply called ourselves anthropologists. We went to the

field, we did our fieldwork, and we wrote it up. And the result would be an anthropological monograph.

I might be wrong about this, but my sense is that there's some difference here between the United Kingdom and the United States. In the United States, ethnography has always been a more marked term. I think when things began to change was during the so-called crisis of ethnography in the late 1980s. That was something that spread from the United States rather than from Britain. It was the moment when anthropologists were publicly questioning their authority to write about other people. You know the enormous debate that followed, the so-called "writing culture" debate. It was this debate that really brought ethnography out from being just a rather unproblematic word that people used from time to time into something that people really worried about. And for a long time, the result of these worries seemed to be that people felt they would rather call themselves ethnographers than anthropologists.

Anthropology had two connotations, two resonances, that people felt unhappy about. One was a sense of dealing with theory rather than with practicalities on the ground. A lot of people felt that ethnography is what you do in the field, and it therefore has to do with the real lives of people, whereas anthropology is something you might do afterwards in the armchair when you start theorizing and comparing and that kind of thing. But also, there was the tie-up of anthropology with old colonial mentalities. People did feel—a lot of critics in anthropology, too—that the word anthropology was too loaded with a kind of colonial mentality. So, it was around about that time that—in America first, and then here in the United Kingdom, following the lead of American anthropology—people started thinking of what they were doing as ethnography rather than anthropology. Or at least, they would use the terms synonymously but sometimes with a preference for ethnography.

I'm not sure exactly at what point I began to worry about this myself. It must have been in the noughties, the 2000s, and then it was in 2007, when I gave a lecture at the British Academy called "Anthropology is *not* ethnography."² I was really concerned about trying to pin this difference down. What I really wanted to do was to argue against the old idea that anthropology is theoretical—that it's what you do after you've collected your ethnography. I wanted to argue that anthropology *is* actually what we're doing in the field. We get the wrong end of the stick when we call it ethnography.

I still feel this now. There's nothing wrong with ethnography. It's a good thing to do. But it has a certain purpose, and that is to give as truthful, as nuanced, as sensitive as possible an account of how life is lived for some

people, some place, some time. That's a perfectly reasonable thing to do. And it requires sensitivity. It requires analytic skill. It requires a certain amount of theoretical acumen. My argument was simply that anthropology has a different purpose: it is a speculative inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life. And that speculative question about how we should live—how can we live?—although it might draw upon ethnographic material, does have different objectives. When we are working with people in the field, we're not actually making, or we shouldn't be making, studies *of* them, but we should be studying *with* them, working *with* them, on this question of how to live. Which makes anthropology into a collaborative exercise in which we are studying with other people.

Do you still have a sense in your current practice of going into the field and coming out of the field? Is there still this back and forth?

No, not really. In fact, quite to the contrary. One of the reasons why I've been trying to argue against the "anthropology *is* ethnography" model is because I think it reproduces a boundary between the academy and the field. As soon as we go outside the academy, we say: "Oh, now we're doing ethnography." When we come back into the academy: "Now we're having discussions and seminars with our colleagues or lecturing to students." I want to break that division down. "Field" is not a very nice word. What I mean is where we find ourselves working with people. And in my experience, it makes no fundamental difference: Am I working with students in the classroom? Am I working with people out there somewhere? Am I working with anthropological colleagues? It's all part of the same struggle.

You've written about the practice of playing the cello and about drawing. It seems to me that there is a lot of work on craft—which resonates strongly with me, although I usually think in terms of technique—which focuses on crafts that are working with materials.³ I want to ask you about crafts of the body. Obviously, this is not an isolated body: the body is breathing air, it is on a ground of some kind. But crafts that work with the voice or with bodily movement, such as dance or singing—how do those figure into your thinking about craft?

I didn't start thinking about craft. I started thinking about skill. So I came into the question of craft through the question of skill, rather than the other way around. Which is critical because I wanted to show—this was way back, through the 1990s, stuff that was published in *The Perception of the Environment*⁴—I wanted to show that a lot of the variations, a lot of the

differences that we were simply calling “cultural,” were actually differences of skill. But I also wanted to show that skill comes prior to knowledge, and that knowledge grows out of skill, and that the essence of skill lies in the coordination of perception and action.

That’s what skill, for me, means. I wanted to talk about how perception and action are linked in everyday practice. And, of course, those links are particularly evidenced in the sorts of practices we might label as “craft.” But they’re not exclusive to these. So skill is the more general idea that I’ve been working with. And while it took me into questions of craft, I actually framed them in terms of a concept of *making* rather than in terms of a concept of craft. And, particularly, making as a way of working with materials.

I’ve been rather careful because there’s a huge literature on craft. I didn’t want to get caught up in debates about art versus craft, or the institutionalization of craft. These are important questions, but I wasn’t really concerned with them. I didn’t want to frame everything in terms of craft. I wanted to frame everything in terms of how to understand skilled practice, and the nature of skilled practice. So, playing the cello is a skilled practice. Drawing is a skilled practice. Relating to other people is a skilled practice. But the key thing is that if we’re looking at what we do with our bodies—if I can introduce this term—if we’re looking at what we do with our bodies skillfully, then the key to this is how perception and action work together.

It’s interesting to think of, not only skill, but also *making* in terms of bodies. Do you think of that also—that we’re making not only the objects around us, but we’re also making our bodies through this process?

Well, what I have always done is to put an emphasis on *ontogenesis*. That’s to say, I’ve wanted to look at a human being—let’s just stick with humans for now—I wanted to think of a human being as a living organism, which it is, an organism that has to undergo metabolism, to respire, to move, and there have to be certain kinds of energetic exchanges that keep a living being alive. And I wanted to show how that living being is continually undergoing a process of ontogenesis, that is, a biological process of growth and development.

That’s really what I focused on. And it’s why I’ve been talking about humans, not as human beings, but as *human becomings*. Because that ontogenetic process is one that is continually going on, and it is, among other things, a process of enskillment. In the course of development, we learn to perceive in certain ways, we learn to move in certain ways. There are

relationships between the ways we perceive and the ways we move, and these underlie the development of skill. And that developmental process always goes on in an environment. What I've really been concerned with is how the living human organism undergoes development within an environment that is continually being changed in the process, and how certain skills, certain bodily capacities, are formed within that process. It's a developmental process. The ontogenetic process is really critical for me.

That relates to another question that I had, coming out of skill and making, which is the idea of *sedimentation*, which is quite important to me in thinking about processes of making our own bodies—in terms of the way that skills become absorbed and then become the ground for other possibilities that don't appear until certain skills are internalized or rendered automatic, put into automaticity. I've seen in a few places that you're maybe not convinced about the idea of sedimentation, or you would think of this process in a different way. Is it a question of emphasizing the change and the becoming over that which gets layered down underneath it?

This is a tricky one. I am very skeptical—or at least, I'm very suspicious—of the notion of sedimentation, as I am of the idea that as you keep on practicing a particular craft or whatever, it gradually becomes automatized. Let's just take an example. Cello-playing is the one skill I've got, apart from anything else. It's true that I can get my cello out, I can set it down, it goes between my knees, I pick up the bow, and everything is just there. I don't have to fiddle around. So my body sort of settles immediately into the task at hand. It's not an issue for it. But that doesn't make it automatic. The more I practice, in a way, the less automatic it becomes, not the more automatic.

Playing an instrument like a cello involves a heightened awareness of myself in my surroundings. In the vernacular we use the word “concentration” to refer to this. We might say, for example, that a rock climber who is climbing a rock face, without ropes, is absolutely concentrated on the task at hand. And of course it's not automatic, because he's having, constantly, to adjust every little finger movement in relation to an ongoing perception of the rock face. In just the same way, when I'm playing the cello, I'm all the time listening to the sound I'm making, and my fingers are finding their way across the fingerboard. It's a very tactile process; I can play much better with my eyes closed. And, so I'm finding my way around the fingerboard in relation to an ongoing listening of the sound I'm making. And I'm also keenly aware of everything that is around me. If there's a disturbance

in the surroundings, it really knocks me off course. So, I can't really believe that the skill is in any sense sedimented in the body. If you ask: "Where is it?" you wouldn't say it's in the body, rather than, say, in the instrument, or in the room, or anywhere else. Actually, if the skill has a location at all, it's in the whole setup. Me with the instrument in the room, with everything all around. The skill is a property of all that, and if you were to take any one of those components away, then the skill wouldn't be there.

I can see how that makes sense in a kind of experiential or phenomenological way—how a practitioner might approach the situation—but I'm still puzzled. There's a lovely phrase that you use in an essay recently, which really struck me. You wrote something like: When you sit down with the cello, the cello explodes when you begin to play it.⁵ That is an extraordinary way of expressing what I've called "unfolding," which is a term that comes from social epistemology. Exploding is of course a very fast and powerful unfolding. But if I go into your room, with your cello, in the same setup, it doesn't explode for me. And that's why I'm wondering about the extent to which something is in your body or your being, so that someone else, with a differently sedimented organism, interacts differently with the same situation.

I don't think the metaphor of sedimentation, or of layering, is right. I think it comes down to a question about memory; that's what we're really talking about. People might say, in a manner of speaking: I'll always remember X, it's sedimented in my mind, it's a layer. They might think of childhood memories, for example, as a sort of layer that was deposited back then and, if they can get through all the layers that have been deposited on top since then, they might be able to retrieve them. People do often talk in that way, in terms of a layering. I've been writing about surfaces and trying to unpack the layering metaphor and the deep influence it's had on modern thought. One of the things that I've been trying to do is to show how medieval people, for example, would not have thought of memory in that kind of way.

The image I've used to explain this is that of the palimpsest. In the old days, when people wrote on parchment, the material was very expensive, so you'd want to use the same piece of parchment over and over again. If you've written on it once, and then you want to use it again, you have to scrape it with a knife until you've got rid of as much of the old markings as possible, and then you write on it again. But you can never completely get rid of the old markings because they sink in. The ink sinks deeply into

the material. So when you write again, you're inscribing a new set of lines on some rather fainter lines. That happens over and over again. You get what looks like a superimposition of lines, which paleographers call the palimpsest. But the interesting thing about the palimpsest is that it doesn't work in terms of layers or strata, but just the opposite. What's happening, when you scrape the surface away, is equivalent to a process of erosion on the ground. The older marks rise up to the surface while the new marks go deep down. I believe medieval people thought about memory in the same kind of way: that what is done recently is very deeply written in, whereas older things are continually coming up and are about to disappear. It's the opposite of the layering metaphor. Maybe we can think about how memory works with people and with skilled practices in a similar way. That is another argument. But I think we do need to be suspicious of any talk of sedimentation and layers, because that's not how enskillment works.

That connects to the question of identity. I use the idea of layering or sedimentation to think about how identities are one of the key ways in which bodies become shaped. And that ends up being, let's say, the other side of the coin of skill. So you have the more intentionally framed, chosen identities, and then you have the identities that are given to you. That makes me wonder if there can be too much emphasis on change and mobility or movement. Does that emphasis align somehow with a position of privilege—that one can move freely or that, if things are not sedimented and it's all a question of memory, it is as if the self is fully accessible or fully available?

I've been trying to find a middle way: not a compromise but a middle way, between an approach that privileges individual agency, on the one hand, and an approach that considers what we do to be more or less determined by others on the other hand.

I've been looking at this through the idea of the *middle voice*, the middle voice of the verb. It's not the active voice, as in "The boy kicked the ball"; or the passive voice, as in "The ball was kicked by the boy." In the middle voice, the doer, in this case the boy, is inside the deed and is being transformed by it. And that leads me to think of what we do with actions as in the nature of tasks. The thing about tasks—and this links back to what we were talking about earlier with craft, because, when people carry out craft, they tend to think about it as a kind of task—the thing about tasks is that they're not just things you do, but they're things that *fall* to you to do, and that you do because of where you're situated within a particular flow of

social relations. But in doing these tasks, in fulfilling these tasks, you also carry life on in some sense, and even transform it. So, I'm trying to think of a way of talking about action, activity, as initiated from the inside of a flow of relationships, which is, in a sense, ecological in that it overflows the boundary of any one individual and is embedded in a whole mesh of relations with the world around. I don't know whether that really answers the question, but identity is such a problematic term because of the way it conflates identicalness with difference and is tied to the specificity of the individual. It's a term I would prefer to avoid. I want to think about people as continually forming themselves and one another within a matrix of mutual activity, and how whatever forms there are emerge out of that process, ontogenetically.

How do you see your own body in the research practice? I'm interested in what you said about anthropology as a kind of a skill. But you also said that cello is the only skill you've got. So, is anthropology a skill? Is there something that you practice out of your being, out of your ontogenesis, that is kind of skillful, that is specifically anthropological?

I think anthropology *is* a skill. It above all lies in a capacity to observe. Some people are more skilled observers than others. When it comes to the training of anthropologists, we should insist that we do the observation ourselves. We don't use fancy instruments. The more skilled we are in observing, the more attentive we are to things that matter in the world, the better anthropologists we'll be. But we could also say that a botanist is very skilled at attending to plants, and a zoologist is very skilled at attending to animals. We're all attending to our different things. Certainly, we can talk about an anthropological sensitivity.

There is one more thing to it. To be at large as an anthropologist, one is not merely being very attentive to things, or having one's antennae out to pick everything up. You are also always asking the comparative question: "Why are people doing things this way rather than that?" What perhaps distinguishes anthropologists from any observant person going about their business in the world is that they're always questioning. They're always wondering: "Why are people doing things this way? Over there, they do things differently. I wonder why they're doing it this way rather than that." And then you try to find out. That's the sense in which I think anthropology is fundamentally comparative. It doesn't mean that we're comparing this culture with that culture, as though they're objective things that we could line up and compare. But it does mean that we're always looking

over our shoulder and thinking: “Hmm, that’s odd. Over there, they do things differently. Why this way rather than that?” That sort of questioning approach is fundamental to an anthropological attitude. Anthropology, in that sense, is an attitude we can try to inculcate in our students. It’s an attitude that you can take into anything, into any walk of life, into anything you’re doing.

What we’re trying to do with the Somatics Toolkit is to propose that certain techniques—of the breath, but also of observation, including observation of the self, or mindfulness—might be an underexplored dimension of anthropological skill. In the sense that one can train to observe and, as you said, constructively compare others and look at motives across cultures, without necessarily being able to turn that observatory power onto one’s own being, in order to see what one is bringing and how one is undertaking the act of perception. Would you agree that this is underexplored in anthropological training?

It is probably an intuitive thing, and hard to justify, but I do think too much reflexivity can get in the way—that what is pejoratively called navel-gazing is not on the whole a good idea, because it tends to distract from paying attention to what’s going on around you. You keep asking, what do I think about my own body? Well, I don’t know. I see my body when I get up in the morning, and I look at it in the mirror, and I say, “I don’t like that shape at all.” I have no idea what my body is. Because most of the time, it seems to be running away from me in all sorts of different directions. If I’m out for a walk, I’m walking, but where my body should be are all the things that I’m seeing along the way. Or maybe the feeling I have of my feet hitting the pavement. There’s no way of thinking of my body separately from the particular actions that I’m involved in at the moment.

Just at the moment, you can’t see me, but I’m in my study at home, and I’m sitting on a chair. The chair is tipped up on its front legs because, for some reason, I always feel more comfortable like that, and I’ve got my head in my hands, so I’m thinking hard, and my hair is flying all over the place because the fingers of my hands are going through my hair. So, if you wanted to say, where’s my body, well, it’s all that stuff going on. But I just can’t get my head around the idea of a body. I feel I’m a living person and whatever I know about my body is founded in the way either different parts of my body are making contact with one another, like my fingers in my hair, or a slightly sore feeling in my buttocks against this rather hard chair, or other things like that. But it’s all mixed up with movement and

posture and this table and... I just can't grasp the idea of this body as an object of reflection.

You've recently finished a large European-funded project called "Knowing From the Inside." When you're structuring a large research project like that, I suppose that you have some opportunity to implement other forms of the university. For me, that's one of the most fascinating things, because it goes to an institutional level and potentially to a political level. How can the university be changed and transformed and restructured, given all of what you've been sharing about other ways of understanding being and knowledge and movement? What does publication mean? How do we produce knowledge? What should be the shape of the institution?

That's a huge question. I have big ideas about education and about anthropology *as* education, the subject of my last book. But restructuring the university system is such a massive task that I sometimes despair as to how we're ever going to achieve it.

There are two views on this. One is to say that the universities we have at the moment are so corrupt, and so tied to a neoliberal agenda, that you might just as well leave them to collapse like everything else will collapse eventually, and then build something completely different. I mean: reinvent an entirely new set of institutional practices to do what universities should be doing but are not. The other—and I think I'm of this second view—is to say that, no, we have our universities and they're a priceless asset, and we should try our best to find ways to reform them from the inside. Of course among ordinary people, like you and me, who've been working at the coalface in universities, you'll find a lot of common ground in terms of how we should be doing things. But as you know, we're working within the framework of a system that is doing its very best to eradicate all those green shoots that we're trying to plant. How we break the cycle, or whether we ever will, is something I just don't know at the moment.

1 The Somatics Toolkit was an eighteen-month project at the Universities of Coventry and Huddersfield, funded by the United Kingdom's National Centre for Research Methods. The project was led by Eline Kieft with myself and Dorte Weig. The "Remember Your Body!" podcast is produced by Chris Garrington at Research Podcasts. The Somatics Toolkit, including a (differently edited) audio version of this interview, is available online at: somaticstoolkit.coventry.ac.uk/

- 2 Tim Ingold, "Anthropology is *not* ethnography," British Academy, Radcliffe-Brown Lecture in Social Anthropology (2007), excerpts online: www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/08-ingold.pdf
- 3 On this point, see "Embodiment as First Affordance," this volume.
- 4 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 5 "[T]he cello is not just a transducer. In one sense it is, as it converts my manual gesture into a line of sound. But in another sense—at the moment I begin to play—the cello seems to explode. What had been a recognisable, coherent entity becomes something more like a bundle of affects, a meeting of bowhair, rosin, metallic strings, wood and fingers, coupled with resonant air. Bundle them together and sound erupts as through a fissure." Tim Ingold, "Interview with Marisabel Marratt" in *Correspondences* (Aberdeen: Knowing From the Inside, 2017): 111, available online: knowingfromtheinside.org/

PERFORMANCE TEXT: *RITE OF THE BUTCHER* (2013)

This “poem” was developed as part of a creative performance process centered around song-action. As an open-ended theatrical script, it was intended to serve as a framing device, providing a narrative container for a series of invented, nonlexical songs while linking their affective landscape to contemporary themes of war, migration, and memory. The text therefore contains several gaps in which songs or other affective moments of expressivity could be inserted. In its final incarnations, I described the solo performance *Rite of the Butcher* as “a visceral fable about the power of fantasy, as told by the Butcher—refugee, criminal, shaman—through poetry, martial dance, and folk songs in an invented language.”¹

1.

There was a man.
There was a man
who wished to be immortal.

He wanted to live forever
in the heart of the sun
where knowledge is infinite
and the soul is annihilated
and there is only bliss.

He said:
I am willing to give up everything
to arrive in that place of power.

So he killed a crocodile
and replaced his own eyes
with the eyes of the crocodile.

Now he could see big things:
Desperation. Fear. Delirium.
But he wanted more.

So he killed a hawk
and replaced his crocodile-eyes
with the eyes of the hawk.

Now he could see bigger things:
Landscapes. Hunger. Multitude.
But he wanted more.

So he killed the god of the sun
and replaced his hawk-eyes
with the eyes of the godhead.

Now he could see everything:
The world reduced to a bubble.
Time reduced to an arrow.
All of life reduced to music and color.

Now he stood in the sun's chamber
where knowledge is infinite
and the soul is annihilated
and there is only bliss.

He looked at the world
and he understood.
He alone, finally,
understood.

But he was lonely.

There, in the sun's chamber
in a world made of heat
he felt cold on the inside
and he did not want to be so alone.

He, the immortal one
who had found nature's secret,
become all power, all freedom.
He, who had passed through a thousand worlds
to achieve what no one can achieve.

He was not satisfied.

So he began to lay down his power.
He gave up his freedom, his omnipotence.
He divested himself of the knowledge he had gained.

He took out from his skull
the eyes of the godhead
and he descended
from the chamber of the sun.

Until he arrived again
in the place where he had started.

But he could not find his eyes.
His own human eyes,
those eyes that had been innocent,
those eyes that had suffered and lived and cried.
He could not find them.

He began to wander.
He began to walk through the world.
Sometimes with the eyes of a crocodile.
Sometimes with the eyes of a hawk.

Begging, cajoling, entreating.
Tempting, seducing, enticing.

"Who will sit in my place?" he asks.

“Who will go up into the heart of the sun, and leave me their eyes?”

“I can offer you knowledge, power, and freedom,” he says.

“I only want your eyes...”

2.

My father told me that story as a lesson:

Don't be greedy.

Don't try to achieve too much.

Be wary of people who say they can give you
power, knowledge, and freedom.

And don't stare into the sun.

Don't stare into the sun.

But there's no need to stare at the sun
when the sun is all around.

We lived in the desert.

As close as you can get to the sun
without burning up.

My father used to say:

Remember the man in the sun.

Remember the man in the sun.

He used to sing...

3.

I am sorry.

All of this is coming out wrong.

I did not intend —

It was not my intention —

I had no intention —

The things we do

They overtake us

When we are pushed.

As many times
as I try to tell this story
it comes out wrong.

You do not speak my language.
No one does.
My language has been forgotten,
erased.

Tongues of my ancestors
blood of my mother
chains of syllables
that nursed me
before I knew their meaning.

Shattered like so many windows
on the pavement
of broken days.

Still
I keep trying.
Starting over:
beginning —
middle —
end.

I was born in a small village
full of people like you.
Living their lives,
carrying their concerns.
And not like you at all.

When I was eight years old
my father brought me a bone.
A lamb shank,
good for cooking in soup.

Its flavor filled our house for a week.
I could taste it for years afterwards.
I can still taste it now.

Some things you don't forget.
Certain spices.
Certain smells.

This bone, my father said —
it is from the butcher.
A present for your birthday.
Eight years old.

Brown meat falling off a white bone.
Lamb slaughtered just for me.
My birthday.
My holiday.

These kinds of things can have meaning
in times of peace
when there are homes
and families.
When life is lived.

4.

When I turned eighteen,
there was no gift.

Things had changed.
No more butchers, tailors,
farmers, shopkeepers.
No more bread, onions, sugar.
No more meat.
No more butterflies.

The pavement was hungry.
The grass turned grey.
Everything seemed to disappear
except the sun.

And we knew that the army was coming.

I remember
the strip of a sidewalk:

white hot, shimmering,
pathway to nowhere.

Silence.

And silence.

And silence.

Until even the insects were silent.

The sun was silent.

It was so silent that it hurt to listen.

In that moment, we knew they were here.

Later there would be marching. Orders. Gunshots.

The dismantling of the world.

But all of that I could hear, long before,

in the way it was silent.

It was during that time

that I began to dream of the man in the sun.

5.

I dreamed that he came to our town,
in the middle of the day when the sun was high.

He walked in and no one stopped him.

No one noticed.

No one cared.

He was hunting for a greedy child.

A child like me, who was not content
with his home and his family.

He would take this child and put him up into the sun
where the child would grow old and die alone.

I was terrified of this man,
this hunting man.

I always feared he would come for me with his dogs.
He always had a pack of dogs with him, in my dream.
The sound of those dogs...

6.

My dream always ended in the same way:
He would find me, wherever I was hidden.
Out behind the old shed,
under the porch,
in the basement.
He would find me with his dogs.

As he came for me,
I began to call him names:
Witch-man. Murderer.
Demon. Traitor.

I knew that if I called him by his rightful name
he would go away
and the dream would end
and I would be safe.
But I did not know his name.

So they would come upon me:
Man, dogs, teeth, biting, tearing,
and I was screaming
and it was too late.

Only then,
when it is too late,
do I know his name.

He is the butcher,
And he is carrying his knife.

7.

It was summer,
and the army was outside our town
waiting for us to die of hunger.

We killed the cows
one by one.
We rationed out the meat.

One by one
the cans disappeared
from the grocery.
The wheat was used up.
The cooking oil finished.
Until we had only water.

Water prolongs hunger.
Death comes slower,
but it still comes.

I don't want to speak about that.

Let me tell you instead about the quilts.
The quilts that the children made
to keep themselves busy.

Beautiful, complicated quilts.
We hung them in the windows,
making every street beautiful
as we were dying.

And let me tell you
about the songs they sang
to keep themselves awake
as we waited for death.

8.

I cannot tell you how I escaped.

Sun. Insects. Pavement.
Running. Crawling. Burrowing.

In the desert I was drinking my own thirst,
eating sand and hallucinations.
Mother. Father. Wife.
Did I even have a wife?
Or was that also a dream?

A scorpion stung me.

Or was it I who captured and killed a scorpion?

It was a long time before I saw another person.
Long enough that I forgot my own name.
Forgot my place of birth.
Long enough that I no longer came from anywhere
or was going anywhere.

A caravan found me
in the burrow I had dug in the sand,
where I was not so much living
as failing to die.

This caravan:
They had never heard of my town.
They had never heard of my family.
They had never heard of me.
But they knew about the war.
Everyone knows about the war.

And they have an idea for me.
There is something I can do for them.
They believe I can be useful
In exchange for my life.

Walking.
Walking.
I do not remember if I was in chains.
Perhaps you will find me less guilty
if I say that I was in chains.

But I must be honest.
I do not remember.
I only remember that we walked forever.

And here the story ends.
After this there is not a story.
Just a dirty joke.
A filthy joke.

How I came to achieve freedom.
How I came to achieve freedom, knowledge, and power.
How I was given a second chance
and began a new life
that was more terrible
and more bloody
than the one I had left behind.

No story.
Just fences.
Holes in the ground.
Fields labeled deadly.

Grey buildings that one could not enter
or could not leave.

Whole mountains,
whole areas of land
that were poison to touch
or to visit.

No story.
No landscape.

I am given tools to work with.
An apron and a set of knives.
Now I will no longer be a victim.

Each knife has its own name and purpose.
Boning. Carving. Paring. Cleaver.
Steak. Butter. Bread.

It's not hard to see how they fit
with the parts of the body.

So I go to work.
Diligent. Mindless. Pure.

Only later I understand
what I have become:

I am the man in the sun.
I am his dogs.
I am his knife.

Poor childhood.
Poor innocence.
I think I could have been a good man
in some other life.
Only time has changed me.
Time has made me a monster.

9.

To create
from nothing
new proportion
new dimension
little houses
little people
made of color.

To give voice
to a voiceless creation
I myself
individual
king
pulling, churning, dredging up
my insides
to uncover
those necessities
that make possible
such beginning.

Colors like knives
I sing into being.
Each new soul
born naked and tiny
swaddled in sand
coming up
in the containment of my song

and I am the godhead.

Spewing fire out of orifices
all-singing, all-dancing
heat of the world
beastlike, terrible
thirty-fingered
vengeful god.

Capricious, jealous,
this my territory,
these my peoples.
I brook no desecration.
Watch over my people:
Father, mother, ancestor in one.

I am the god of meat.
The god of flesh and bone.
Meat is the heaviest nourishment,
dense with recent life.
The twist of muscle.
The jiggle of fat.

Meat is the living body
Sucked of life.
Meat is the great organ
the great pulsing
the pulse itself
the source and end of life,
the dead fact of what we are not.

I remember the feel of the meat as I carved it.
It's the job of a butcher to carve the meat.
Once on the edge of a cleaver, balanced,
I saw death on either side.
Death in the chopping.
Death in the eating.
And still I went on.

But desecrated meat is ranker than shit.

Putrefaction, rancid carrion,
drawing parasites out of the earth and sky.

And we become this.

You. I.

We become death.

We become meat.

It was my wish to be immortal.

To stop time.

To live in a single moment

or a single grain of sand

that I call the desert.

Is it so wrong to wish for power?

To have a taste for that?

I was willing to give up everything

to achieve that freedom.

To stand in the place of power.

To speak with my ancestors.

10.

And so, in my dreams,

I take my revenge.

Since I cannot have my family back

I will take theirs.

I am the man in the sun.

The one they call butcher

because I am responsible for violence.

But even in my fantasy

this is never enough.

Nothing can heal this wound.

All I know is that when I close my eyes

I am here in this room with your hungry faces

struggling to tell a story that is not even my own.

And when I open them
I am in a basement somewhere —
standing over a body —
human —
animal —
and I don't know what to do.

I only know that it is very hot
and there is a knife in my hand.

But I didn't tell you about the songs.
In our tradition —
the one I have forgotten
and which never existed —
to sing a song is the same as to weave a quilt.
The same word is used for both.

Other words are also the same:
The color of fabric and the color of the voice.
You have this in your language also.

But you don't have a word
for the difference between the same song
sung by different people
or by the same person at different times.

And you don't have a word
for the sound of a song
that you last heard
in the throat of someone who has died.

And you don't have a word
for the moment before a song begins
when the mouth opens
before the vibration.

So many things
you don't have words for.
So many conversations we can't have.

All of history is a history of what has been lost.

Now they ask me if I want to go back
but there is nothing there.
And there is nothing left to do here
but to practice dying.

11.

Every desert is one desert.
Just a few steps to the testing
of that first atomic bomb.

Those dark weapons
buried in the earth
waiting for footsteps
to open bodies.

Those guns left baking in the desert sun,
barrels up-ended,
pricking the sky
like the legs of dead insects.

The desert is teeming with voices
with unmarked pathways
lines disappearing in its surface.

Smoothing out the surface of the earth's dry skin
erasing time and memory
laying flat all our horizons
undoing all our feeble accomplishments.

I would like to flee into such a wilderness.

But
for some reason
this body does not die.

It lives.
I cannot kill it.
So:
Dance.

Dance
you wretched body.

Dance for me
you carcass
you corpse.

You animal. You thing.
You bag of needs.
You old bushel of bones.

No more running, now.
It is time to dance.

One last time
push up from the earth
sigh your impotence away
and do what must be done.

We must dance together.
Because we have no choice.
Because the meat is the man and the man is the meat.

And I have no choice
but to heave the old sack up
and see if I still control the joints.

1 Versions of *Rite of the Butcher* were presented at Medicine Show Theatre (2010); Movement Research at Judson Church (2011); United Solo Festival (2011); SOAK Festival (2012); Lincoln Center Rubinstein Atrium, with projections by Manuel de la Portilla (2013); and Réplika Teatro, Madrid (2013). For a detailed analysis of the Movement Research version, see “Colors Like Knives,” this volume. For the earliest seeds of this project, see *the desert*, this volume.

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