Gloom

Scenography as Praxis of Imperceptibility

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Submission to PhD

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I declare that the present thesis is my own work.

……
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Abstract

How and what can we discern through the aesthetic production of hazy phenomena? Although historically secreted from architectural formats and protocols, scenography deviated from them by advancing visual attenuations, the evanescence of spatial borders, and the malleability of imperceptibility, up to making black box theatre spaces.

Intersecting practices and theories from various spatial arts, the thesis inquires into the precedents and legacy of this scenographic gloom to advance an understanding of its sensory and cognitive difficulties. In particular, the work explores how the blurring of bodily and spatial substances pertains to a phenomenal domain of transformative and interactive spatio-corporeality or bodily space. In this fluctuating field, the crisis of visual legibility exerts pressures on perception, representation and language bringing them down to a speculative threshold.

By further interrogating this threshold practically and philosophically, the thesis unfolds a reconsideration of experiential and authorial subjectivity in embodied terms that constitute a vertiginous detournement of ontological and epistemological traditions. Resulting from such discursive disorientations, scenography is reposited as an architectural *mise en abyme* that is a *mise en abyss* where the gloom sheds light upon an ethical praxis of reciprocal and affective relations and beings.

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I am most grateful for the outstanding support received from my supervisors Prof Simon Shepherd and Dr Patricia Lyons as well as Dr Ana Sanchez-Colberg, Dr Penelope Haralambidou, Pete Brooks, Romeo Castellucci, Claudia Castellucci, Chiara Guidi and Matt Jakob Dal Pozzo.

Have you ever been in love and had the feeling that the street before you suddenly expands, that houses grow, sing, lose themselves, and it seems to you that the street darkens drastically, levitates, and becomes transformed into a cloud? (Craig in Baugh 2005: 126)



1 Edward Gordon Craig, *woodcut print for King Lear*, 1920

[A] form is a form only if its inhumanity touches our humanity (Castellucci 2001: 183; present author's translation).

Introduction

Sceno-graphy, as its etymology suggests, may be said to draw from a historical and graphic tradition of linking imagery and text, vision and meaning. This is well exemplified by illuminations or illuminated manuscripts wherein the visual is cognitively coded under the assumption that light (*limnen*) is a function of discursive intelligibility. In scenography, this graphic condition is constituted on the basis of the visual translation of text in space. Scenographic visuality would then be founded on a discursive clarity that also comes to be known as representation. Yet, from haze-machines and scrims, through to Magic Lanterns, the history of scenography is punctuated by devices producing visual disturbances inasmuch as vision is attenuated and representation less than certain. The creation of visual uncertainty in scenography culminates in the twentieth century with new developments in electric lighting that propelled even more radical visual discrepancies such as the cyclorama and the larger revision of the interior architecture of theatre-houses that is the black box. Through developing an understanding of the scenographic as a growing desire to advance imperceptibility, thereby disentangling vision from representation – up to turning the visual against the discursive – the thesis seeks to delineate the experiential and conceptual implications of such endeavour. This will include the exploration of questions such as: What are the perceptual complications inferred by visual attenuation? How does the demise of representational stability alter the production of meaning?

The thesis will argue that the sensory domain of imperceptibility offers experiential and cognitive problems relating to the positionality of both the observer and that which is observed. Perceptual and discursive disorientations embed the body differently in the materiality of its surrounding. As relations between body and environment shift, the traditional frameworks of human cognition and subjectivity are dispelled, allowing for epistemological and ontological reconsiderations which have also been found in some twentieth-century theories and philosophies. As these offer constructive ways of thinking the human subject in the tumult of a discursively undefinable material world of actions, scenography here serves as a particularly relevant platform of intersection and investigation of the practical and theoretical potentials of a praxis of imperceptibility which I am calling here ‘gloom’.

What follows traces the historical lineage of the gloom. That tracing is accompanied by an analysis of the concepts and philosophies that may be said to pertain to gloom. Taken together the historical lineage and its conceptual elaboration suggest the context through and upon which contemporary practices may be understood and from which they may be further developed.

Part 1 traces a genealogy of historical developments in which visual clarity is incrementally eroded up to the conception of the black box. Because the graphic in general is part of an aesthetic tradition governed by representational systems, including visual creations such as painting, sculpture and architecture, scenography will be analysed within a cross-disciplinary perspective. The argument of the thesis will therefore deliberately place scenography alongside other visual forms, from which it draws and to which it offers a challenge. This method of contextualization and contrast should enable a deeper insight into scenographic development.

The first part of the thesis posits the developments of scenographic imperceptibility against an increasingly prevalent tradition of visual clarity. With a focus on practices from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, this first section argues that the reinforcement of traditional aesthetic strategies and their underlying ideologies is paired with their subversion by ways of elaborating tactics of visual incompletion and unrest. The more the stage was visually framed the more practitioners sought to unframe it and 'return perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment' (Garner 1994: 1). This perceptual domain will be defined within the disorienting terms of a multisensory and multiperspectival construction of spatio-corporeality, or what Stanton Garner calls 'bodied spatiality [: a] phenomenal space, governed by the body and its spatial concerns, a non-Cartesian field of habitation which undermines the stance of objectivity and in which the categories of subject and object give way to a relationship of mutual implication' (Garner 1994: 4).

Garner's formulation of bodied spatiality leads us into one of the key concepts of the thesis. The production of bodied spatiality may be said to infer that it is not possible to posit or position the body distinctively in and from space. From here we can say that, since the instantiation of the body as of space cannot be granted by any ideological assumption, we are at a juncture. I call this a speculative threshold. The speculative threshold of spatio-corporeality is one in which the realization of both spatial and bodily forms may be drawn from the most unrealizable conceptions.

In summary, Part 1 of the thesis argues that the history of the discrepant gloom developed through an incremental cultivation of bodied spatiality and the challenges it brings forth to 'perception and the constitution of meaning, objects and their appearances, subjectivity and otherness, presence and absence, body and world' (Garner 1994: 3). From here Part 2 of the thesis will argue that, although this history was initiated from the subversion of the dominant tradition of visuality in spatial art forms, the emergence of the black box both circumvents and yet propelled further developments that can be seen as radical departures from the tradition. Unfolding the body from such a speculative threshold makes it possible to reconsider its cognitive and subjective relation to the world by means of a multipositional entanglement in space. By observing late twentieth-century and contemporary developments, the second part of the thesis initiates and consolidates an understanding of the epistemological and ontological vertigo bestowed by the speculative threshold. Indeed, how are we to comprehend cognition and subjectivity when 'the image is a thorn in the eye and bodies write a text that defies publication, the prison of meaning' (Müller in Cody 1998: 291)? And, from here, how are we to understand the human condition when the images created do not attempt to frame such a condition in discourse?

Methodology:

The research undertaken and the structure of the thesis are informed by various methodological features. These concern the tripartite combination of historical, theoretical and practical inquiries, the role of practice as a reflective, historically derived, process of speculation, the positioning of the author and his subjective stance, and the functional articulation of various key concepts.

The research employs three modes of inquiry into the subject of scenographic imperceptibility: theoretical, historical and practical. These are correlated within the terms of an approach that seeks to produce a praxis of the gloom. As the thesis will demonstrate, such a praxis implicates a change in sensory perception and the disruption of an individuated conception of subjectivity, a subjectivity positioned in singularity. The profitability of such disruption is analyzed conceptually in the text through the elaboration of notions such as bodily space, speculative threshold and polyphonic subjectivity. However, these serve as constructs – 'ideas consciously and systematically thought up […] for specific purposes of explanation' (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 135) – rather than concepts 'generalizing idea[s] or term[s], useful for classifying

phenomena', and thus do not seek to formulate a 'taxonomic definition [–] a device for restricted comparison' – but a 'componential definition [:] a device for elaborated comparison' (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 93).

Accordingly, the subjective position of the present author is progressively intersected with other authors in a polyphonic way whereby no authorial classification and hierarchization is orchestrated. In other words, neither the author nor any other author referenced in the text effectively predominates over the others. In order to carry out this project, no individual is biographically depicted nor are their ideas presented within a complete rendering of their intellectual approach. This leads, for example, to a deliberate and incremental erasure of the normal scholarly apparatus whereby quotations from sources are introduced with the names of their authors (as in the quotations above). This organizational method is intended to reflect and sustain key conceptual and ethical components discussed in the work, but at the same time it serves the purpose of constructing a genealogical network of a legacy of which the relevance is not found in anecdotal historicism but rather in its appropriation as a continuing determination to unfold and expand. In other words, all instances of past practices and ideas are here dissected with a view to informing and activating contemporary practice and thinking. To this end, the citational structure of the thesis seeks to disrobe the singularity of the individual voices that are called upon, thereby allowing for the imbrication of the author's voice within a dialogic perspective that dispels all individual subjectivities and strives to nurture an intersubjective domain of reflection and experience. As such, this genealogy of the gloom does not claim nor seek to be exhaustive.

Similarly, the personal practice undertaken as part of this research is derived from appropriating past practices within a proto-processual exploration of the gloom's contemporary potential for further growth. As such, the practical aspect of the work does not attempt to formulate a privileged model of a praxis of the gloom but rather lies in a desire to develop a practical process of creation solely focused on the production of phenomena of imperceptibility. This is done in order, firstly, to comprehend further the processual issues at play creatively as well as, secondly, to experience first-hand and test the limits of the effects of the gloom on the body and the self. As a result, the work could be accused of 'systematic bias […] where the enquiry is known and planned to lead in a particular direction' (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 127). Although '*bias*, the skewing of an enquiry in a particular direction, will always occur in some form'

(Murray and Lawrence 2000: 127), I have sought to minimize its breadth and effects by maintaining an 'attention to detail in checking and rechecking the enquiry process as it proceeds […] as help to contain bias' (Murray and Lawrence 2000: 128). To do so, I have followed Schon's reflective practitioner (1983) in consistently balancing, within each phase of the practice, iterations of tacit praxis (non-discursive and intuitively evaluated progression through sensation) with ad hoc or first-hand discursive reflections on practice, further punctuated with second-hand, post hoc, evaluations (detached from the contextual conditions of the practical phase under scrutiny). To this extent, the practice is particularly predicated upon a process of 'tacit transmission' (Rust 2007: 73) or translation of past images into present and new images of which the ownership cannot therefore be located in one singular being but, rather, within a legacy that helps formulate a critical and cogent mode of co-authorship.

Indeed, the authorly dimension of this study lies in how it manages to conduct a personal journey that is, at the same time, not individual; that testifies to the productive potential of the gloom as a deindividuating factor of creative authorship and experience. Co-authorship lies at the heart of any praxis of the gloom whereby the process of authoring is engaged from the start with the material world, the outside or the other, as an undefined and as yet unformed landscape of possibilities. Engaging with one's lack of autonomy as an enactive and creative interdependency with others (whose autonomy must also be suspended) is in this thesis embodied in terms of the author disaggregating his subjective position as a function of his process of creation and reflection.

In the chapters which follow, then, there will be both an analytical account of the historical evolution of scenography within a larger visual and philosophical context and, at the same time, the gradual dissolution of the authorial presence which controls this journey and its analysis. The account of the gloom has, in some sense, to be itself a praxis of gloom.

1 Void

> Once upon a time, stage scenery was architecture. A little later it became imitation architecture; still later it became imitation artificial architecture. Then it lost its head, went quite mad, and has been in a lunatic asylum ever since (Craig in Baugh et al. 1999: 1).

> In the absence of walls that once seemed secure, nothing remains separate or isolated; everything becomes permeable screens (Taylor 2003: 231).

> If architecture is a huge three-dimensional sculpture in an outdoor situation, so then scenography […] is a sort of reversed sculpture inside (and sometimes outside) any concrete space (Malina in Howard 2002: xiv).

> [U]nfolding the body as if pulling black velvet curtains to expose a stage (Schneider 1997: 2).

Within the field of theatre, scenography is often conceptually framed under the umbrella of an interdisciplinarity predominantly seen as a 'seamless synthesis' (Howard 2002: xx) of body, space, light and sound. In this conception, the hinge or node of these constituents is the actual and visible presence of the actor (States 1987; Fischer-Lichte 1997; McAuley 2000; Howard 2002; Baugh 2005). This 'centrality of the actors' (McAuley 2000: 282) conceives of them as 'dynamic agent[s] responsible for energizing the performance space […] endowing it with meaning and drawing meaning from it' (McAuley 2000: 282). The production of meaning, though reliant upon space, is attributed first to the actor, and as such the actor embodies the discursive clarity, legibility and intelligibility of text: 'it is through the actor's corporeal presence under the spectator's gaze that the dramatic text actualizes itself in the field of performance' (Garner 1994: 1). Thus, the scenographic would be 'the measured space of […] a meeting point between actors and a potential audience' (Howard 2002: 1) thereby participating in the alleged 'specificity of theatre [that] consists essentially of the interaction between performers and spectators in a given space' (McAuley 2000: 5).

In this section we shall begin to look at attitudes to this given space. This will lead us to some preliminary formulations about the body presumed by such a space and its problematics.

In the conceptual model of scenography described here, its relational function as a ‘meeting point’, a hinge for ‘interaction’, would then be predicated upon cognitive clarity and discursive understanding that start with a space that is ‘measured’ and ‘given’ on a par with, yet secondary to, the presence of actors: thus when devoid of bodies, the scenographic space would be ‘silent, empty and inert’ (Howard 2002: 1).

To understand scenography in this way implies that its spatiality adheres to architectural and everyday spaces inasmuch as these orchestrate and regulate human encounters: it would then participate in ‘describ[ing] the experience of reality according to a model provided by theatre’ by merely emulating the so-called ‘theatricalization’ of ‘everyday life [where] town planning, architecture, and design shape our environment as a kind of theatrical backdrop, against which individuals and groups display themselves and their lifestyles’ (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 218). Yet, everyday spaces like the stage can be seen to pre-order human relations even before they are inhabited and experienced accordingly. As such, they cannot be deemed silent or neutral when empty and, as a result, the aforementioned model of the scenographic should imply a set of socio-political assumptions and ideologies about human interaction.

Such perspective is consistent with the historical tradition of stage design as it was often undertaken by architects pursuing everyday architecture and its grounding conception of body-space relations in the theatre. Although, from Ancient Greek theatre onwards, stage design can be seen to utilize and destabilize architectural norms by adding to them uncertain visual phenomena based on flying machineries (*mechane*) and smoke-making devices, ideological subtexts drawn from larger societal concerns can be seen to be reinforced in theatre by way of further defining it visually as ‘an architecturally closed form in the Renaissance, in which the ideal city was represented on stage’ (Stemmrich in Douglas & Eamon 2009: 94). This predominant strategy can be seen to culminate with Richard Wagner’s conception of a scenographic interdisciplinarity grounded practically in the reenforcement of the opera house’s proscenium arch and conceptually in the increasing ideology of Nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe.

This historical tradition of connivance between scenography and architecture suggests that the ideological dimension of the centrality of the actor in the scenographic

phenomenon is implicitly related to the everyday positionality of the human subject. Thus the empirical and live conditions in which the visual phenomenon unfolds would not consider the materiality of the body at its origins but its societal inscription. Yet such bodily materiality, which can be called corporeality, remains experientially and phenomenologically determinant inasmuch as it remains the cognitive agent of the performative event. As such, it cannot be altogether erased but only disguised and disregarded. Critiques of such an ideological masquerade can be found currently within the field of architecture:

> bodies are absent in architecture, but they remain architecture's unspoken condition […] the body is there in an incontrovertible way. The point is to affirm that it's there and to find the right kind of terms and values by which to make it profitable for architecture to think its own investments in corporeality (Grosz 2001: 14).

However, similar injunctions that sought to expose a corporeal dimension untainted by ideological subtexts were made by scenographers such as Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia over a century ago. Thus, Appia's wish to explore the potential for scenography to be 'inspired by the human body' (Beacham 1993: 110) not only denotes a schism between scenography and architecture but also refers to a threshold from which the human subject can be reconsidered and a whole 'new social practice' (Appia in Beacham 1993: 109) imagined. By conceiving of a scenographic interdisciplinarity that hinges on a critical corporeality, Appia, like Craig, brought attention to a kind of spatiality that could no longer simply be a backdrop on a par with the architectural frame and tradition. In subverting constructions of a spatiality based on a socialized and politicized body, they proposed to reconsider the material dimension of spatio-corporeality away from societal orders, thereby exposing how the body

> functions almost like as a 'black box': it is acted upon, inscribed, peered into; information is extracted from it, and disciplinary regimes are imposed on it; yet its materiality also entails a resilience and thus also (potential) modes of resistance to power's capillary alignments. It is a kind of passivity capable of being mobilized according to the interests of power or in the forms of subversion (Grosz 1994: 146).

In doing so, Appia and Craig elaborated through scenography possibilities for a dissident domain of bodily life whose material perceptions and actions required new types of spaces and phenomena such as the black box. Though these have now become rather ubiquitous, their historical contextualization within a scenographic subversion of

the architectural framework and their currency as such have received very little analysis. The present section undertakes such an analysis by way of tracing points of convergence and divergence between scenography and other spatial arts with a view to clarifying the conceptual and practical qualities of a scenographic domain conceived as a spatio-corporeal mode of resistance to (inter)disciplinary regimes and ideologies of the body and being. I shall start firstly with analyzing how scenographic interdisciplinarity shifted from an ideologically coded domain to its inversion that is based on a speculative threshold which informs a historical schism between scenography and other spatial conceptions.

1.1 The aesthetic ideology of visual representation

Interdisciplinarity in performance and its scenography found one of its most blatant affirmations and theorizations in the nineteenth-century artist Richard Wagner. His fusion of music, space, light and the body followed his concern with advancing a kind of performance grounded in a higher aesthetic consensus: a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art' (Bonnier in Crary 2001: 253). Wagner hoped to create performances that did not fall into any one genre but conflated them all into a new kind of theatrical event – what he coined 'music-dramas' – that would be superior to all others as they would offer 'the fullest possible perception' (Bonnier in Crary 2001: 253) and thus be relevant to all kinds of audiences.

Wagner sought to produce consensus both aesthetically and cognitively by linking the dramaturgy of European myths with perceptual experiences that would be quasi-identical for each and every audience member. To this end, Wagner chose to enhance the delimitation of the stage and its imagery by way of constructing a theatre, the Bayreuth Festspielhaus (1876), in which the orchestra was now concealed in a pit, thereby making the borders of the stage clearer and neatly separated from the auditorium. The distinction between these two areas in the theatre was further reinforced by the extinction of all lighting within the auditorium, 'focus[ing] all eyes on the stage [and thus] tying [the spectators] with invisible bonds that prevented them from looking to left or right' (Wiles 2003: 229).

Cognitive and perceptual unilateralism in Wagner's work can be seen as a reaction to the increasing presence of non-Western cultures and myths in the European society of the nineteenth century and the scientific discoveries that unsettled pre-existing

understandings of human perception, and vision in particular. Indeed, the 'holistic or atomistic nature of sensory perception' (Crary 2001: 155) traditionally instituted in vision was destabilized in the nineteenth century by findings such as Hermann von Helmholtz's identification of a delay in the neurological transmission and processing of visual stimuli in 1850. The existence of such an inexorable 'gap between stimulus and perception' (Crary 2001: 309–10) suggested 'the loss of direct vision' (Crary 2001: 226) and the 'disintegration of a faith in perception' (Virilio in Crary 2001: 226).

By 'invok[ing] the body not as a unified receiver of orderly representations but as a composite apparatus' (Crary 2001: 153), visual perception revealed individual disparities that made collective unity all the more difficult to achieve. Thus, stricter regimes of visual control emerged as attempts to maintain homogeneity and clarity in perception, as demonstrated by the specialist of graphology Austin N. Palmer, who defined in 1896 'practical writing for the people as a style devoid of all superfluous lines; made up of letters that can, to the greatest possible extent, be formed without lifting the pen, or checking the motion; an unshaded style' (Palmer in Schwartz 1992: 83–4). Similarly, Wagner plunged his audiences in darkness so that the stage became an escape from darkness: 'an Ariadne's thread' (Nietzsche in Harries 1997: 342) to vanquish how our individual conditions 'lack the strength to show us a way out of the labyrinth (Harries 1997: 342), to orient us so as to conquer 'the path into the labyrinth [which] is the path within the darkness we bear within ourselves' (Harries 1997: 346).

The theatre becomes a socializing environment inasmuch as it is a labyrinth in which one cannot get lost but, quite the contrary, is compelled by a clear direction out of it: a regime of visual 'attention [that is] a means by which a perceiver becomes open to control and annexation by external agencies' (Crary 2001: 5). By 'triumph[ing] over gravity' and 'banish[ing] the terrors of the labyrinth' (Harries 1997: 349), the theatre environment seeks to stabilize its audiences according to a positionality that is the same for all individuals so that 'it was through the collective act of seeing that the semblance of a community would come into being' (Crary 2001: 251). Undoubtedly, such visual precepts through which 'the human being [is made to] be first of all firm [like] stone' (Nietzsche in Harries 1997: 349) have later pervaded the formation of opaque and solid Nazi architectures and bodies as further anxious reactions to the increasingly heterogenous empirical realities of bodies: '*We, all of us, are no material for a society*' (Hitler in Harries 1997: 349).

In reinforcing the perceptual borders of the stage and its division from the auditorium as a strategy to exacerbate visual clarity, Wagner did not actually innovate as such but rather drew from and reinforced the historical and dominant tradition of visual perception in the theatre. Indeed, the sensory experience of performance had already been established in predominantly visual terms through the imposition of linear perspective.

> According to its etymology, perspective means rationalized sight or clear seeing, and as such it presupposes a conscious suppression of [other] senses […] and a consequent distancing from a more direct experience of the environment (Frampton 1998: 32).

Through the invention of the monoscopic device of the *camera obscura* in the Renaissance, linear perspective was developed as a 'mighty aesthetic organism of humanist hegemony in which all the component parts are ruled and informed by a single principle' (Eagleton 1990: 392). The gathering up of vision within a single point in space, the vantage point, was further accentuated in the Wagnerian event by visually effacing any perception of the material and actual complexities of the theatre (the peripheral spaces of the wings, the rig, the backstage areas, etc…). In return, the complex and stereoscopic sensory apparatus of the audience is similarly streamlined as monoscopic vision's 'all-at-oneness [is necessarily] founded on the cancellation of the empirical conditions of perception' (Krauss in Crary 2001: 46): it is 'the product of the chronic habit of civilized men of seeing the world as a picture', whereby the 'visual field' has become an '*alternative* to ordinary perception' (Gibson in Gombrich 1993: 277).

This 'longstanding privilege of vision and the one-point perspectival system upon which it is based' (Hansen 2002: 17) strongly linked scenography and architecture in the Renaissance with artists such as Alberti and Brunelleschi, who were keen to apply linear perspective in their architectural and scenic practices as well as to advocate it to all practitioners. As a 'kind of geometrisation of the space of the world [within which] we become observers of a world which has become an object of observation' (Romanyshyn in Nechvatal 1999: 219) linear perspective helped create 'space[s that are] both technically and mentally a window and a symbol [of] the scale of the world' (Lehmann in Baugh 2005: 218). As such, it consolidated the cognitive dimension of visual experience and its related requirement of a separation, a division, between the observer and the object of visual observation. Indeed, visual or 'classical representation,

from Alberti onward, define[d] itself by the fundamental subtraction of the body from the constitution of a visual field and by the related intellectual distinction between observer and object' (Crary 2001: 220): a 'withdrawal from the world in order to regulate and purify one's relation to the manifold contents of the *now "exterior" world*' (Crary in Nechvatal 1999: 391).

Discursively cogent, perceptual experience then establishes the material exteriority of the visual object as an inferior component to the intellectual interiority of the observer in which the production of meaning ultimately resides. Traditionally, then, scenography followed

> architecture [in] concretiz[ing] vision. The hierarchy inherent in all architectural space begins as a structure for the mind's eye. The interiority of architecture more than any other discourse defined a hierarchy of vision articulated by inside and outside (Eisenman in Hansen 2002: 16–7).

Wagner's innovations can thus be seen as ways of strengthening the perspectival window of the stage and precisely enhancing the hierarchical dichotomy between inside and outside. Immobilized in darkness and frontally presented with a luminous window, the Wagnerian audience could silently pay better attention to the stage image, observing and interpreting it with more precision. More importantly, 'the histories of perception teach us that every version of microperception is already situated within and never separate from the human and already cultural macroperceptions which contain it' (Ihde in Garner 1994: 9). Wagner's silencing of the audience and thus of its vocalization of individual responses establishes each and every audience member as a static receptor, solely viewing and listening, part of a mass of similarly behaved individuals. In this way, 'the sense of vision serves to reinforce one's place within the social whole' (Weiner in Crary 2001: 248) wherein the social whole is understood as a homogenic and passive group: the 'dream of the reciprocal affirmation of the unity of the individual subject and the unified object of perception' (Crary 2001: 160).

Indeed, Wagner endeavoured to strengthen the traditional 'logic of the fixed *gaze*' (Nechvatal 1999: 220) according to the assumption that actual correlations between 'perceptual attentiveness and social cohesion' (Crary 2001: 247) could be engineered. This socializing function to the 'hegemony of vision' (Crary 2001: 3) takes on a predominant position in nineteenth-century Europe as the arts become highly institutionalized. As Raymond Williams (1988) explains, the term *aesthetics* was coined in English by Alexander Baumgarten in 1750–58 in reference to its Greek etymology of

‘sense perception’ as the material realm accessible through *all* the senses. Yet the term went on to define the qualities of visual perception in and of art, producing institutionalized viewers called *aestheticians* in the nineteenth century, up to formulating the adjective ‘aesthetic’, which ‘is now in common use to refer to questions of visual appearance and effect’ (Williams 1988: 32).

With vision raised onto the pedestal of aesthetics, art theory has produced a term, ‘visuality’. This is now so ubiquitous in discussions ranging beyond solely artistic experiences and practices that it has come to be seen as a template for the very construction of everyday life. Such ‘aestheticization of social life’ (Eagleton 1990: 44) thus implies a model of everyday life in which collectivity is achieved through individuals who are solely expected to observe and listen. The arts then become one of many ways in which a certain understanding of ‘social harmony registers itself on our senses’ (Eagleton 1990: 37). Indeed, this model assumes that everyday life unfolds as a Wagnerian stage image so that ‘the subject itself is accordingly aestheticized, living with all the instinctual rightness of the artefact’ (Eagleton 1990: 41). Thus, the aesthetic dimension of Wagnerian scenography can be seen as the culmination of a reversal in the very function of art in society: from the conception of a language that seeks to apprehend the complexities of the multisensory compound of experience to the application of an ordering and reductive model for producing human beings as audio-visual subjects.

As such, the aesthetics of Wagnerian scenography provide a potent example of how ideology is ‘not limited to matters of direct political control but seek[s] to describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships’ (Williams 1988: 145). This rather more discrete facet of ideology is, to be more precise, conducted through visual representation, or how visual content establishes cognitive and discursive clarity. Grounded in ideological structures, aesthetic/visual representation then becomes ‘a form of power based on leadership by a group in many fields of activity at once, so that its ascendancy commands widespread consent and appears natural and inevitable’ (Hall 1997: 259). Wagner’s alterations of the visual environment that is the theatre were indeed replicated through many other theatres and have become ubiquitous, notwithstanding the subsequent emergence of cinemas. To a larger extent, the notion of scenography as an art that etymologically binds space and the visual with language and meaning is doubled-up, and reinforced as such, under Wagnerian precepts since its

graphic dimension (visual cognition) is now found both in the stage image and the environment that frames it. This has powerful ideological consequences for how we think about space and the body, to which we now turn in order to conclude this section.

Within the ideological 'dream of a unified, homogenized, wholly transparent society' (Habermas in Eagleton 1990: 406), the *sceno-graphic* division between and autonomization of inside and outside, intellect and materiality, body and space may then be posited as a paradigmatic emulation of broader everyday structures of experience that have been fathomed/explored/interrogated under the pervasive spell of aesthetic or graphic ideologies. Through such an understanding, we may see the visuality of space as a geographic 'closure of the map', the loss of '*terra incognita'* (Bey 2003: 100) and the rise of 'a fetishism of the space itself … as de-eroticization' (Jay in Foster 1988: 27). Similarly, the visuality of the body finds its climax in 'pornography [as] the body's chaste and unerotic dream of itself' (Ballard in Crary and Kwinter 1992: 271). Either way, the graphic stands for a 'concept of reality based on an original self-presence' (Vasseleu 1998: 3) and aimed at maintaining the 'reflexive or specular autonomy of self-presence' (Derrida 2005: 290) that is an illusion of 'uninterrupted-organic-sameness-present-to-itself-in-its-wholeness-and-singularity' (Wills in Smith 2001).

However, drawing from both Marxist theories and Social Constructionism, ideological interpellations that 'subject and qualify subjects by telling them, relating them to, and making them recognize: 1. *what exists*… 2. *what is good*… 3. *what is possible*' (Therborn 1982: 18), form a *system* striving towards '*hegemony*' (Gramsci in Eagleton 1990: 17). On the other hand this 'strategy' of domination can be prone to producing dissident and subaltern 'tactic[s]' (de Certeau in M. Carlson 2003: 44–5). Thus the 'internalised repression' which Horkheimer (in Eagleton 1990: 28) sees as being produced by ideological interpellation may at the same time give way to its own 'counter-claim' (Therborn 1982: 106). To bring this back now specifically to visual aesthetics, hegemonic 'strategies in which individuals are isolated, separated, and […] disempowered' would find 'potential for resistance [in] counter-forms of attention' (Crary 2001: 3) as 'emancipatory force[s]' (Eagleton 1990: 28).

These counter-forms could then be said to fall under the category of distraction inasmuch as 'attention and distraction cannot be thought outside of a continuum in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other' (Crary 2001: 51). If attention is a focused, immobilizing, consensual and meaning-making process of observation, then

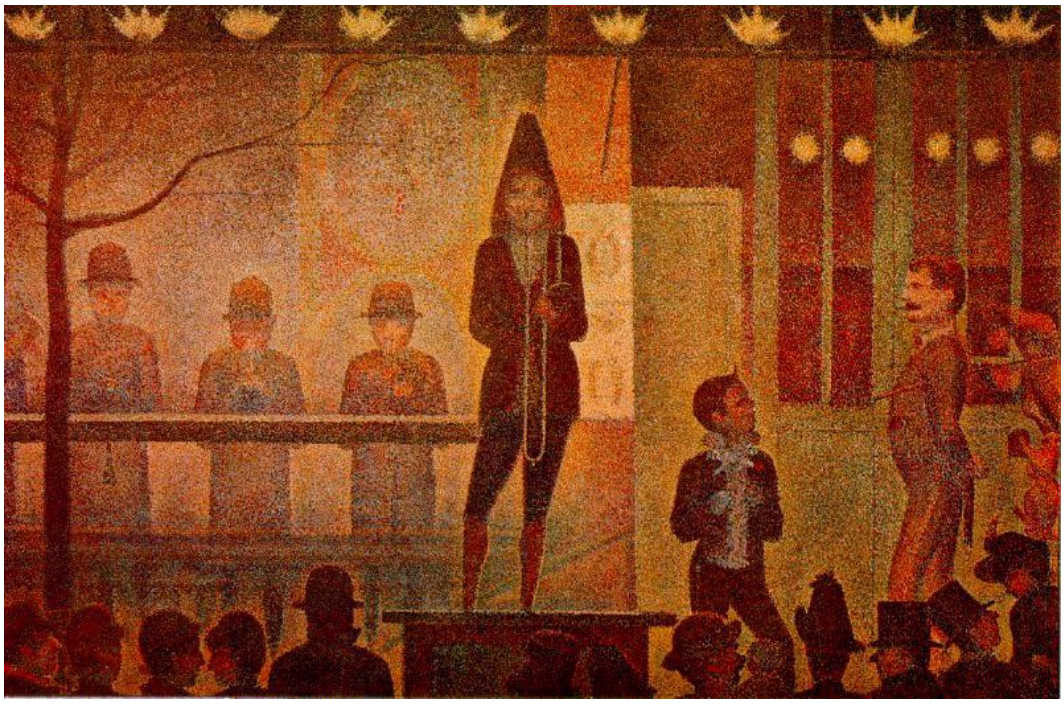
visual distraction should be unfocused, invigorating, *dissensual* and *meaning-confounding*.

So we have established that the Wagnerian moment brings to a point of intensity the domination of the visual, together with its ideological efficacy. From here we have suggested that such ideological efficacy may at the same time generate its own counter-claim. To put this in Crary's language of visuality, attention always has a relationship with and contributes to the potential of distraction. If we now take this insight back into the historical journey of scenography, we need to posit some questions: can we then find examples of such tactics of distraction taking place in the late nineteenth century and which could initiate an understanding of their critical take on cognition and meaning? Furthermore, in light of the predominating legacy of Wagner in theatre and scenography, how did such tactics evolve and impact upon later generations?

1.2 Subverting Wagnerian predicaments

In the second half of the nineteenth century – while Wagner exacerbated 'the illusion of detached spectatorship for which perspective is a conceptual metaphor' (Bleeker in Baugh 2005: 215) – the 'subversion of a Renaissance-based pictorial order' (Crary 2001: 153) can be found in various artistic practices such as in the paintings of Edouard Manet and George Seurat. '[T]he demise of the punctual or anchored classical observer' in Manet's works seemed to refuse 'the standardization and regulation of attention', and instead 'embodied another path of invention, dissolution, and creative syntheses that exceeds the possibility of rationalization and control' (Crary 2001: 148). Similarly, the Pointillist paintings of Seurat were subversively premised upon traditional 'scenographic values [such as] the consummate demonstration of one-point perspective', as they moved 'between two scopic regimes [:] between the metric and homogenous tableau loosely synonymous with classical space, and a decentered and destabilized perceptual regime with its mobile and embodied observer' (Crary 2001: 190–91). For instance in *Parade de Cirque* (1888), Seurat positioned a figure at the centre of a scene populated by more figures yet

> we are denied one of the key elements that determined the coherence of classical scenography: we cannot see the literal location of figures on the surface of the stage or on the 'checkerboard' ground of perspectival painting […] none of the figures […] are 'grounded' in any visibly legible way (Crary 2001: 190).



2 George Seurat, *Parade de Cirque*, 1888

This positional uncertainty is also exported to the viewer: since Pointillism offers an image at a certain distance from the canvas which becomes a blur at other distances, the viewer is impelled to move back and forth accordingly. The work ‘disavows the stable identity of either the image or the observer’ (Crary 2001: 153). It can be said that Seurat ‘reversed traditional perspective by making the viewer the vanishing point’ (McLuhan in Crary 2001: 200) insofar as this viewer is understood as a mobile and active agent. *Parade de Cirque* thus implements the ‘uprooting and dislocation of vision from the stationary relations of a classical model of geometrical optics’ without the ‘reterritorializing [or re-] disciplining of perception’ (Crary 2001: 320). Seemingly immersed in its audience, the central figure in the painting then suggests the situation of the observer whose perception oscillates between the perception of an image and immersions into its hazy and fragmented structure. The spatial dimension of the work is then stretched beyond the sole canvas as the volumetric space surrounding the painting offers differing visions of the space depicted with paint on the canvas. The situation of the viewer, then, like the centrally located yet ‘antiscenographic character’ (Crary 2001: 191) – the ‘figuration of an undifferentiated being’ by spatial means – constitutes an ‘attempt to recover a perception prior to any “divisionism”’ (Crary 2001: 209) between

the viewer and the viewed, between body and space, so that 'identity and reference are marginalized in favor of exchangeability and flux' (Crary 2001: 199).

Seurat's 'antiscenic space [–] like shadow figures, puppet theatres [– belongs to] a countertradition of magical display and behind-the-scenes manipulation of optical appearances' (Crary 2001: 191) which were re-emerging in the late nineteenth century infused by scientific and technological discoveries in the domain of optics, electricity and lighting. This 'cult of light' (Valery in Crary 2001: 227) signals a significant moment of transition in European society as the advent of electricity suggested possibly important yet uncertain changes in modes of communication, transportation and everyday living in general. This is embedded in Seurat's work as '*Parade de Cirque* itself is a field of different kinds of artificial light: the gas lamps, the apparent aura or halo around the figures, and the photochemical interaction of Seurat's pigments' (Crary 2001: 225–6). The collision of old and new lighting phenomena then results in a blurred vision, an uncertain outcome that sought 'to reveal a void, glittering but menacing' (Crary 2001: 227).

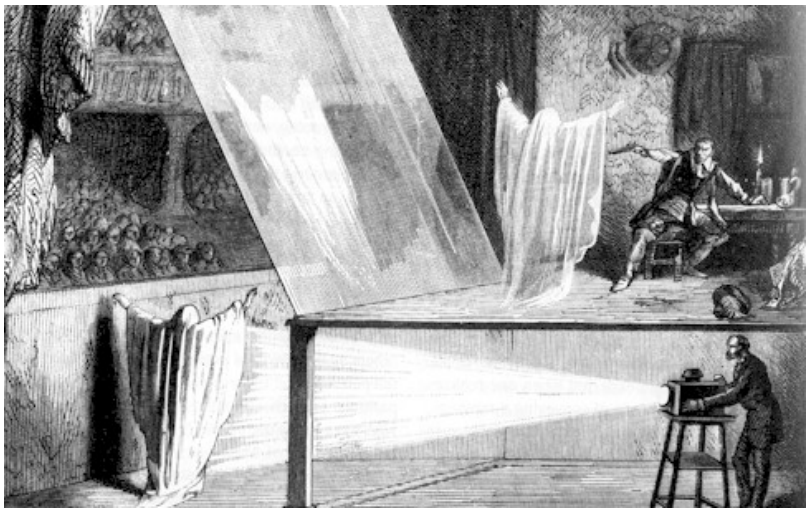
Compelling the viewer to move at various distances from the image as it coagulates into a more or less visible depiction of a scene, *Parade de Cirque* opposes the Renaissance predicament/construction of the painting that remains consistently the same as one moves towards and away from the image. Instead, the image is formed in the eyes (or brain) of the viewer by way of an enactive immersion in and negotiation with spatial and lighting conditions. As such, the piece further subverted the Wagnerian reinforcement of inside/outside delineations that maintained Renaissance principles. Thus, it disavows attentive and cognitive observation by triggering intuitive navigation within a rather theatrical scene which remains visually and semiotically enigmatic all the same. As the piece conspicuously deals with the scopic action of looking (central figure looking at its audience and the actual viewer paired with its audience looking back at it) while seeking precisely to complicate such action and even frustrate it, it formulates a potent example of a visual field seeking to extract itself from cognitive clarity. Such 'illuminations of disenchantment' (Crary 2001: 149) indeed aimed at

> undermining traditional representational codes [through] the calculated construction of new semantic and cognitive models […] intertwined with the accelerating reorganization of perceptual experience in the late nineteenth century and with an emerging social environment structured around the attentive capacities of both individual and collective subjects (Crary 2001: 150).

This constitutes a disavowal of aesthetic ideology inasmuch as the representational framework is used in order to be unravelled and critically questioned. That is,

> both a reflection of the forms of social experience in developed capitalist societies and a specific artistic strategy to express such experience (alienation) through its distance from and dissonance with established aesthetic norms (Adorno in Mercer 2006: 17).

Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, a renewed interest in magic shows and puppetry occurs partly due to the emergence of technological devices that offer new possibilities for optical illusions, but also partly due to the increasing presence of non-Western cultures in which cultural and artistic practices refer and indeed mesmerize the Western audience back to its more primitive activities. Potently combining both influences within the domain of performance, Marie-Louise Fuller (aka Loïe Fuller) created cabaret works which are somehow transpositions of the Pointillist endeavour especially in terms of 'counter[ing] the Western tendency to interpret the environment in exclusively perspectival terms' (Frampton 1998: 32). Amongst Fuller's first performative appearances was the role of Aladdin in *The Arabian Nights* (1887). Within this non-Western and primitive myth, Fuller's male character was draped in silk, sometimes flying on a magic carpet and often overlayered with projections of atmospheric and abstract depictions, all of which helped produce its magical qualities. Subsequently, Fuller went on to create her own solo performances based on the prosthetic inclusion of her body within the disparate variability of drapery supplemented by mirrored sceneries and slide projectors derived from Pepper's Ghost and Magic Lanterns.



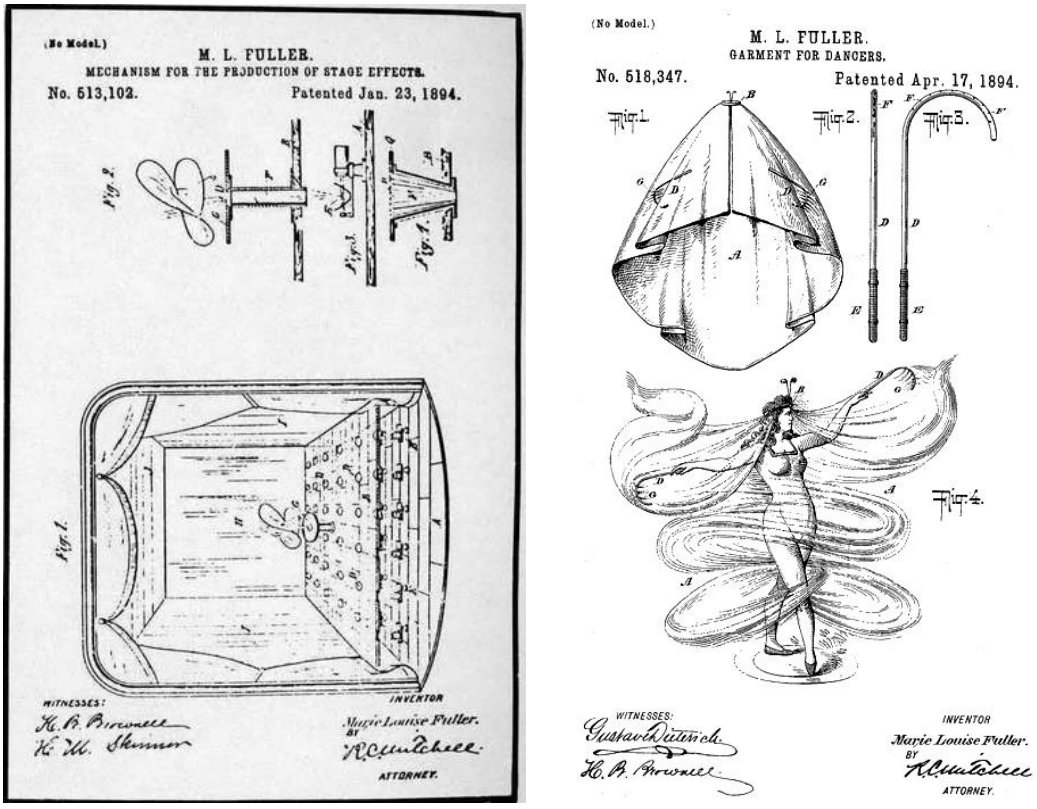
3 Henry Dircks, *Dircksian Phantasmagoria*, 1862

In contrast to Wagner's technical re-engineering of the theatre house to make use of darkness to delineate the stage window and divide the scenic space from the auditorium, inventions such as Henry Dircks' *Dircksian Phantasmagoria* (1862), later renamed Pepper's Ghost, used Magic Lanterns or slide projectors to confront audiences with ghostly and dark visual phenomena through 'effects of gloom […] inkier than a slide projector can achieve, and certainly richer in depths than computer imaging' (Warner 2006: 154). Differently, Louis Daguerre's *Diorama* (1822) also explored the animation of imagery by way of overlapping 'slides'. However, these slides were large and translucent paintings that were illuminated by natural light. Unlike phantasmagorias, dioramas were actually moving images by way of a revolving stage. While anticipating aspects of cinema, the diorama sought to produce accurate depictions of environments by putting painted scenery into motion according to the nodal traditional rule of linear perspective's vantage point. Although functioning through a monoscopic and projective apparatus inherited from the *camera obscura* and the early seventeenth century, Magic Lanterns can also be traced back to the Middle Ages and thus remain entirely different from any monoscopic apparatus striving to reproduce stereoscopic vision (Warner 2006: 137). Rather, they 'play[ed] out the conflict between *mimesis* and *fantasia*, in which *fantasia* gains the greater value to the constitution of the self' (Warner 2006: 116).



4 Louis Daguerre, *Diorama*, 1822

Fuller can be seen further to develop the Magic Lantern as she fused projection screens, painted scenery and costumes into a most unusual prosthetic structure which she patented in 1894. Sometimes white (*Fire Dance*, 1895; *Ballet of Light*, 1908), sometimes black (*Firmament* and *Night*, 1896) Fuller's draped outfit functioned as both a screen and a set to her Magic Lantern's projections. In this way she animated her own visual obliteration thereby bringing upon her self an 'epistemological uncertainty' (Crary 2001: 12): a 'sensual approach [that] questions the powers of the rational mind and circumvents rather than demonstrates its powers', that is an 'art of total illusion that also contained its own critique' (Gunning 2009: 30). Fuller thus embodied new considerations of human 'perception and the constitution of meaning, objects and their appearances, subjectivity and otherness, presence and absence, body and world' (Garner 1994: 3).



5 Loïe Fuller, *Patents of the Mechanism for the Projection of Stage Effects and Garment for Dancers*, 1894

In addition, Fuller designed discrete scenic panels made of reflective and transparent materials, located on horizontal and vertical planes of the stage, to augment the unfathomable presence of the moving drapery. The confusing overlap of body and space by way of intersecting light and drapery produced visual phenomena in which

corporeal and spatial materialities affected one another at every movement. The body's kinesis modulated the visual perception of both its costume and its surrounding volume of space. At the same time, the material nature of the costume and space affected how the body moved as they produced a high level of disturbance to the body's proprioceptive skills, which informed Fuller's language of movement.



6 Loïe Fuller, 1901



7 Loïe Fuller, *La Mer*, 1925

As such Fuller proposed the conception of a scenographic space which not only responded to the body's presence but also in which the body could only move in a tense negotiation with spatial materials:

> [a] bodied spatiality [or] phenomenal space governed by the body and its spatial concerns, a non-Cartesian field of habitation which undermines the stance of objectivity and in which the categories of subject and object give way to a relationship of mutual implication (Garner 1994: 4).

In other words, a physical and controlled investment in instability and vertigo enabled the dialogic potentials of interaction between body and space:

> The dancer who appears lost in the dense jungle of her gestures, in reality is secretly taken by the hand of her own aporia and gently led out of her own labyrinth (Agamben 2000: 113).

While Wagner also sought to advance labyrinthine scenographies, the 'infinity-of-space effect' (Baugh 2005: 107) in Fuller's work was engineered in a way very different from Wagner to weave audiences and stage together. Indeed, not only was Fuller amongst the first practitioners to plunge audiences and stage into darkness at the onset of the performance, but also the movements of air and the visual phenomena she created could not be contained onstage and would regularly affect the audience. In producing this, Fuller initiated the dismantling of the ideological containment of the scenic window and its related delineation of surfaces onstage. As a body that is at once both conspicuously concealing and exposing itself, she embodies a breach of the devices that organize the exposure of the stage and the concealment of the off-stage. Fuller's work not only disclosed but also immersed her audience into an on/off-stage dimension which further punctured all surfaces and boundaries.

Since the bridge between performing and witnessing areas is visually and tangibly uncertain, we should talk of a blur rather than a link. Indeed, the blur disenfranchises the audience from any privileged point of view or perception in general. Though this had not yet been intentionally implemented in theatres, it is possible to find an instance of such a radical blur before the nineteenth century in the small indoor Elizabethan theatres. Having reconstructed one such environment in order to understand the perception of performing bodies and costumes in particular, Elizabethan theatre specialist Jennifer Tiramani found that the replica of the fat-based candles used then would produce so much smoke that audiences, however near to the performers, could no longer see much of the drama performed in front of them. As such, she argues that 'sharing the same light' (Tiramani 2008: 35) was also about sharing the 'shadowy quality to the light onstage' (Tiramani 2008: 35) since both informed an accentuated auditive, tactile, olfactive and gustative experience of the performance. Just as importantly, this multisensory complication would cause the audience to direct their gaze towards other audience members, becoming distracted among themselves within the greasy and sensual haze that would permeate the entire theatre house. Though the blur in Elizabethan indoor theatre was the result of its

necessary reliance on candle lighting, it did not restrict experiences but impelled a set of bodily responses, from the emphasis on actors' vocality to the distracted behaviours of audiences. By similarly 'mak[ing] and break[ing] the performance space' (Dervaux in Howard 2002: xiv), Fuller offered a relational structure of experience to her audience that was borderless where 'instead of a lighted space' she created 'a light-producing space' (Saltzmann in Baugh 2005: 109). But whereas Elizabethan theatre was not established on the basis of the framing device that is the proscenium arch, at the end of the nineteenth century this divisive frame and its associated fourth wall had become a convention. Critically, then, Fuller explored

> potential means for distilling play between material, craftwork and gravity, so as to yield a component which is in fact a condensation of the entire structure […] the presentation of a structural poetic rather than the re-presentation of a façade (Frampton 1998: 31)

As such, Fuller's work challenges not only the structural agency of theatrical experience but also its architectural ramification and thus wider relevance to a society which had, by then, developed an ideological obsession with vision as the privileged sense for communicating information. Very differently, she suggested a 'reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space [to] avoid a variety of brutal techniques and extreme emphasis on visualisation' (Lefebvre in McAuley 2000: 281–2). Thus, Fuller's work could never be too clearly defined in terms of the representation of a narrative, characterization or any specific type of discursive information:

> [E]verything is visible, barely disguised, but we fail to recognize it', no longer 'held back by the clamor of "meaning", by what is fixed and stationary […] the object of our quest twists and turns, passes in and out of the shadows, but remains throughout on the exterior, beneath our confused gaze (Dagognet in Crary and Kwinter 1992: 540).

Fuller offers a potent example of how visual imperceptibility induced by a particular kind of bodily movement can elude the normative interpellation of bodies as discursive surfaces: 'the image is a thorn in the eye and bodies write a text that defies publication, the prison of meaning' (Müller in Cody 1998: 291). The epistemological problems resulting from Fuller's exploration of the scenographic space as such 'a spelling mistake' (Zizske in Howard 2002: xiv) are intrinsically linked to ontological issues vis-à-vis the 'ambiguity and variability of the body's modes of givenness' (Garner 1994: 5) which were, at that time, increasingly pathologized and stigmatized.

Contemporaneous with Fuller's practice, Gilles de la Tourette's 'study on a nervous condition characterized by lack of motor coordination accompanied by echolalia and coprolalia' – later called Gilles de la Tourette syndrome – highlighted a body whose 'whole musculature is engaged in a dance (*chorea*) that is completely independent of any ambulatory end' (Agamben 2000: 106).

By proposing the self as a subjective stance separate from intentionality, Fuller challenged 'the grounding of theatrical representation in the performing body which asserts itself as visual element and spatializing center' (Garner 1994: 2). The scenographic construction of a bodied space, then, whilst profoundly anchored in corporeality, does not offer a stable position to the body which, in turn, resists the stability and thus axiomatic structure of its architectural container. As such, the bodied space no longer simply reflects everyday spaces but also defracts them at its threshold. In this way, Fuller initiated the potential to subvert the traditional and ideological 'mirror-structure of the stage' (Althusser in Van Den Berg 2006) where 'the portraits in the mirror [were] an excuse for a display of the mirror's remarkable powers' (States 1987: 206). Instead, she created spatial phenomena that made portrayal impossible. Yet this does not seek to achieve some form of pure anonymity. Quite to the contrary, it exports a critical and relational sense of self onto her audience.

Through Fuller's work can be conceived the possibility of a body whose movement is not predicated upon its subjectivity nor its architectural surrounding. The bodied space does not pre-order movement. Its discrete elaboration by Fuller lends itself to the wider interrogation of everyday spatial constructions. Indeed, 'architecture and the cities to which it gives rise are frozen habits [wherein] our possible movements are now laid down once and for all in concrete' (Noë 2009: 122–3). To reconsider architectural structures away from their 'fourth dimension [–] 'which *coerce*[s] *behavior in accordance with their own dynamic patterns*' (Hall & Hall 1975: 8–9) – initiates the path to the black box. And although such a proposal was barely conceivable at the time of Fuller, some of its seeds can be found in some architectural phenomena.

These phenomena will be discussed later in order to establish the interdisciplinary landscape of practices that shed light on upcoming scenographic innovations up to the emergence of the black box. However first, I shall pause this historical analysis to introduce the practice I undertook alongside it. Indeed, this practice tested the suggestion that Fuller's work anticipates radical changes in scenographic practices that led to the black box by bringing key elements of her work

into the frame of the black box. Projections in scenography, whether located in traditional theatres or black boxes, have hitherto remained largely contained within flat screen surfaces. Fuller's rejection of the flat screen and exploration of a bodied screen that is volumetric and kinetic are gestures rarely seen in contemporary performance. If the black box partly draws from such innovative ideas, then it should not only smoothly accommodate them but also offer potential for further development.

1.3 Heterotopian speculations

Through historical analysis, the thesis has so far demonstrated how, alongside dominant and traditional scenographic strategies, such as Wagner's, another strand of practices or tactics emerged as subversions that drew from this tradition in order to disrupt it. These tactics of disavowal (such as Fuller's) produced a displacement of normative understandings of the human subject: they rubbed off the cognitive borders of the body thereby opening the human figure to possibilities of embodiment spanning beyond the mere societal categorization of bodies (gender, age, class, etc…). Further, by weaving body and space together they virtually opened the scene for rethinking spatial constructions, firstly as subversions of everyday spaces. Conceptually this tactic can be better understood through Michel Foucault's notion of 'heterotopias', a spatiality which is only reflective of other spaces by way of disavowing, that is where mirroring

> exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy […] I discover my absence from the place where I am […] it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (Foucault in Betsky 1997: 194).

Heterotopias operate a fragmentary reversal that skews and diffracts: 'outside of all places and yet […] actually localizable' (Foucault in Betsky 1997: 193); they are 'places that do exist […] formed in the very founding of society', and 'in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted' (Foucault in Betsky 1997: 193). If 'heterotopia [seeks] to destroy the continuity of syntax and to shatter the predictable modes of the homogeneous grid' (Porphyrios in Velibeyoglu 1999: 13) then Fuller's work qualifies as a heterotopian inversion of the diagrammatic order of the environment she occupied: divisions between off-stage, stage and audience area are effaced by her performances

since the concealing function of the off-stage is brought on stage while the revealing function of the stage spills over the audience. This can be said to be exacerbated by the black box and, indeed, later stages of my practice endeavoured to develop this disordering potential further. However, initially I sought to translate the key empirical and conceptual constructs found in Fuller's performances into the black box environment and to respect the contemporary state of tools and technologies. Indeed, Fuller's work operated through challenging the use of technologies that were undergoing significant progress, namely the new media of photography, film and projection. While these were being developed in relation to flat and framed screens to achieve the clearest images in visual and cognitive terms, Fuller turned them on their head to produce imprecise images in spatial and discursive terms. Being positioned now in twenty-first-century Europe, however, the technological conditions and developments of media are digital, and so I sought to involve and challenge the digital media of projection within the black box.

Dramaturgically, Fuller's performances' titles referred to natural phenomena, clearly affirming a desire to translate exterior and non-human events into interior and man-made instantiations. This explains in part why her work punctures the architectural structure in which it takes place. More importantly, this further reflects her desire to erase divisions between stage and audience, between an inside and an outside, a focal point and its periphery, and to achieve instead an all-encompassing peripherality. To test the validity of such a critical periphery I chose to follow Foucault's model of heterotopia as a space that reverses other man-made spaces in terms of their axiomatic containment and ordering of bodies in space. In other words, following Fuller's blurred structure of relation to her audience, I questioned, through practice, whether the mere positioning of bodies in everyday spaces can be diffracted into a multipositional peripherality and animated as such in the black box. Furthermore, if the speculation that the black box has roots in practices such as Fuller's is correct, then it should allow for interrogating ways of making space alterable by means of bodily alterations and vice versa, and in doing so develop even more radical spatio-corporeal diffraction than Fuller achieved. By undertaking this practical journey I could therefore position myself as a practitioner developing Fuller's innovations further like other past practitioners, whom I researched in parallel to my own practice to advance and include myself in Fuller's legacy.

Heterotopian Speculations are a series of sketches that bring everyday architectural spaces and elements into the black box to challenge their axiomatic perspectival order by diffracting it through the intersection of moving bodies, materials and digital media of projection. I undertook to draw situations in which the bodies of performer and audience are distinctively positioned yet digital projection phenomena confound their positions. In doing so, as I am about to analyze, the *Heterotopian Speculations* rapidly overlapped these positions up to the point of fusing them and rendering the terms performer and audience redundant. Here I will present and discuss the drawings that most significantly bear on the process of advance towards the heterotopian mirroring discussed above.

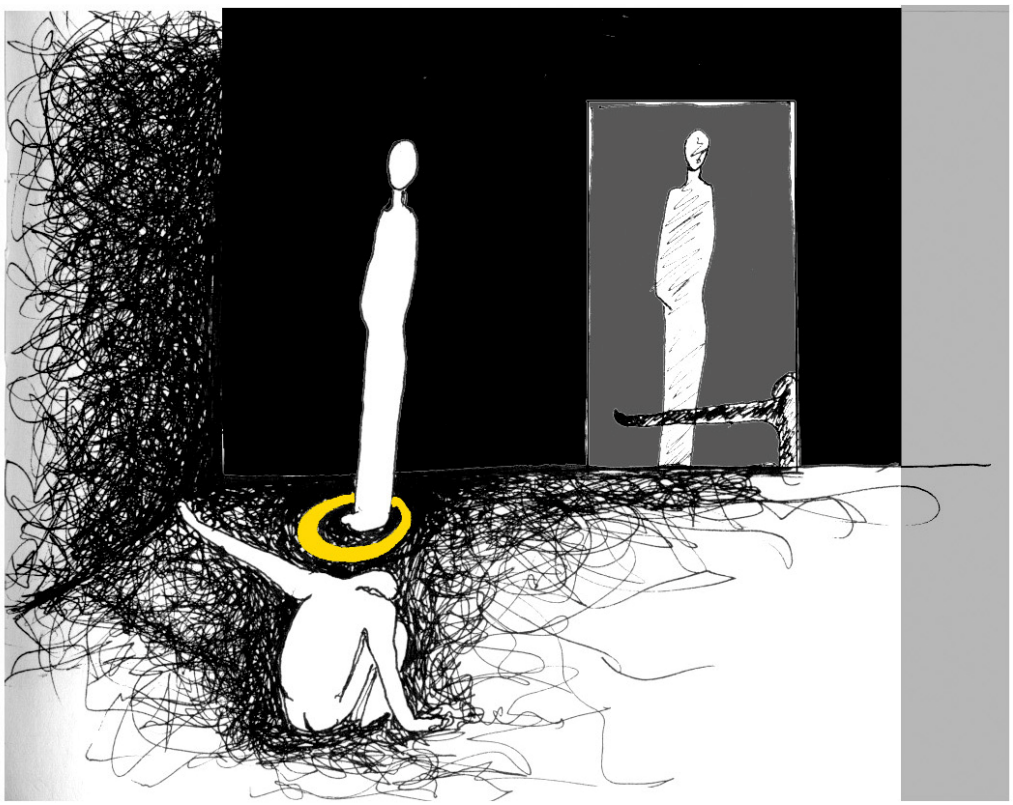


Fig. 1 *Heterotopia #2 The Dressing Room*, 2007

Heterotopias #2 The Dressing Room and *#6 The Glass Door* demarcate clear positions for the physical presence of one performer and one audience member. Respectively using the black box's own walls and a gauze as projection screens, these situations use video projection to mirror and superimpose the performer's and audience's bodies live in order to enable their movements to unfold dialogically – as in a duet – though making it impossible for either agent clearly to perceive the other.

Importantly here, the projection surface is not the focal point for the audience's perception as they can also perceive or sense some aspect of the performer's actual presence in space (behind the audience member in *#2* and behind the gauze in *#6*). In this way, both sketches speculate on the kinetic relation and interaction of performer and audience. These relational interrogations are engineered spatially by way of positioning the performer as a double of the audience: the performer's location in space formulates a kind of shadow of the audience.

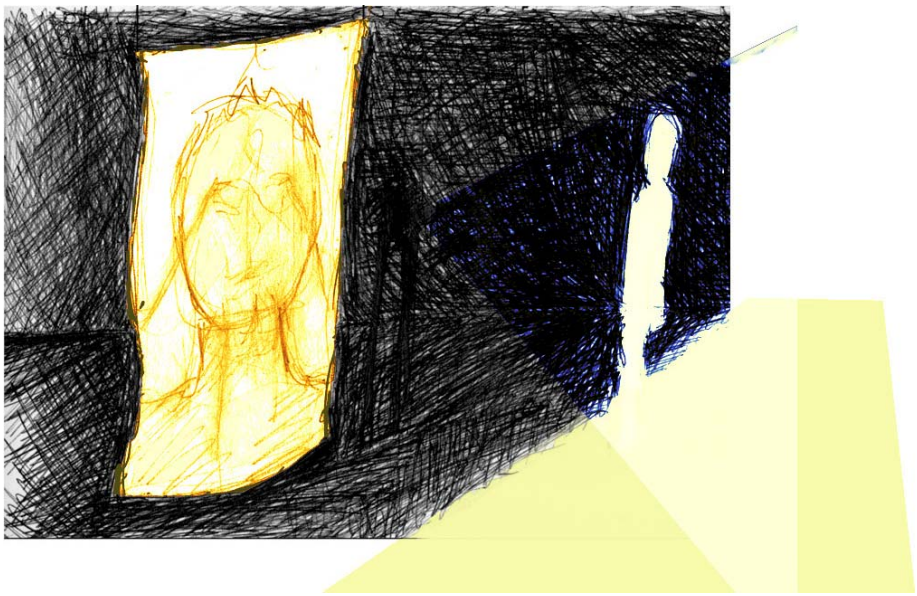


Fig. 2 *Heterotopia #6 The Glass Door*, 2007

Heterotopias #11 The Bedroom and *#12 The Wall* do not include a performer because the audience's double is now animated directly, and thus digitally, within the projection. Further, the spatial positions and material conditions given to the one audience member are kinetically invigorating and visually responsive in different ways. In *The Bedroom*, the audience is required to lie down in order to confront a distorted image of themselves on a suspended ceiling-screen. This clear positionality is, however, disrupted by another perception of their distorted body found within the reflective and circular edges of the bed. In *The Wall*, the audience member is required to engage with an unevenly curved climbing wall-screen within which their distorted double is projected. Here no particular focal point is implemented since the proximity between the audience and their projected double, as well as the distorting curves of the wall, force the body to shift its visual attention constantly across the surface of the wall.

Thus, in both cases positionality is again disturbed by projection and accommodated, if not enhanced, as such, by the space.

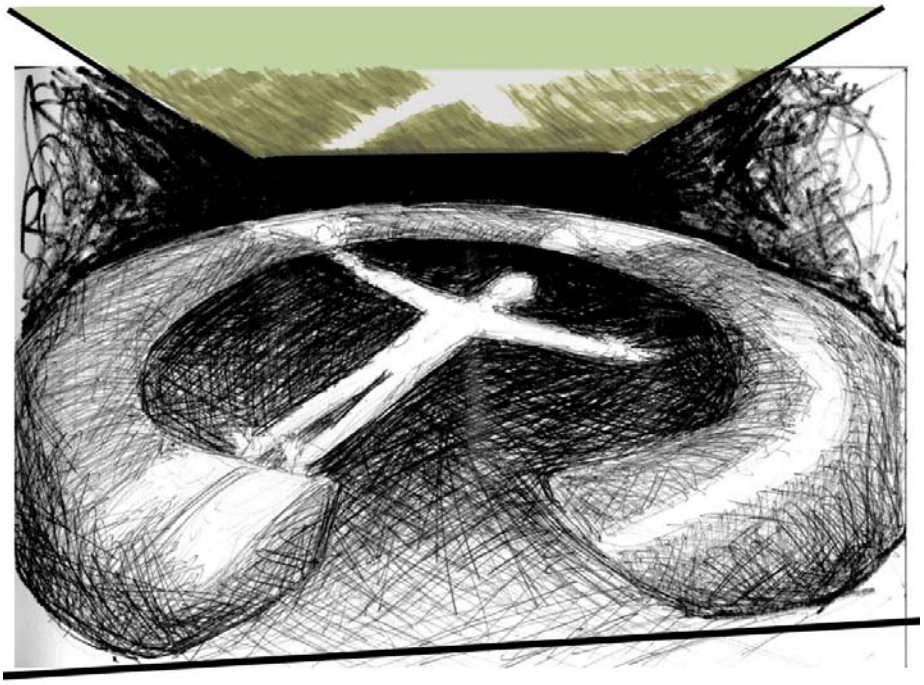


Fig. 3 *Heterotopia #11 The Bedroom*, 2007

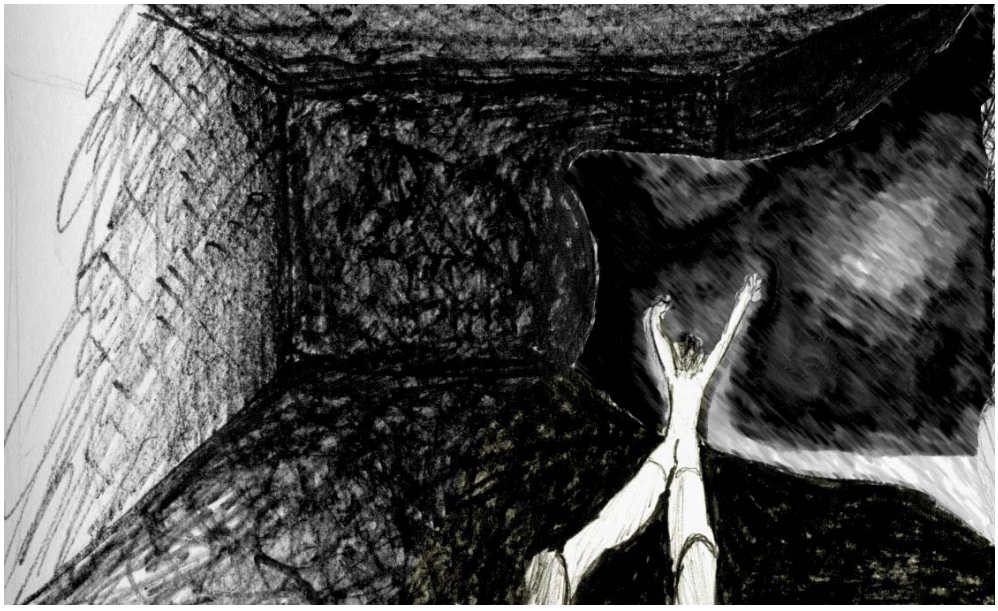


Fig. 4 *Heterotopia #12 The Wall*, 2007

Subsequently, I endeavoured to test further the multipositionality of such mirroring by eliminating any pre-ordered positionality. To do so, I chose to transpose

everyday spaces that edge towards visual imperceptibility and are thus ones in which bodies tend to develop idiosyncratic physicality and movements. *Heterotopia #15 The Shower Room* is the best example of this last phase of the series in that it sparked the next phase. Importantly this sketch does not include a body, for the physical and interactive questioning of the body, had become highly uncertain.

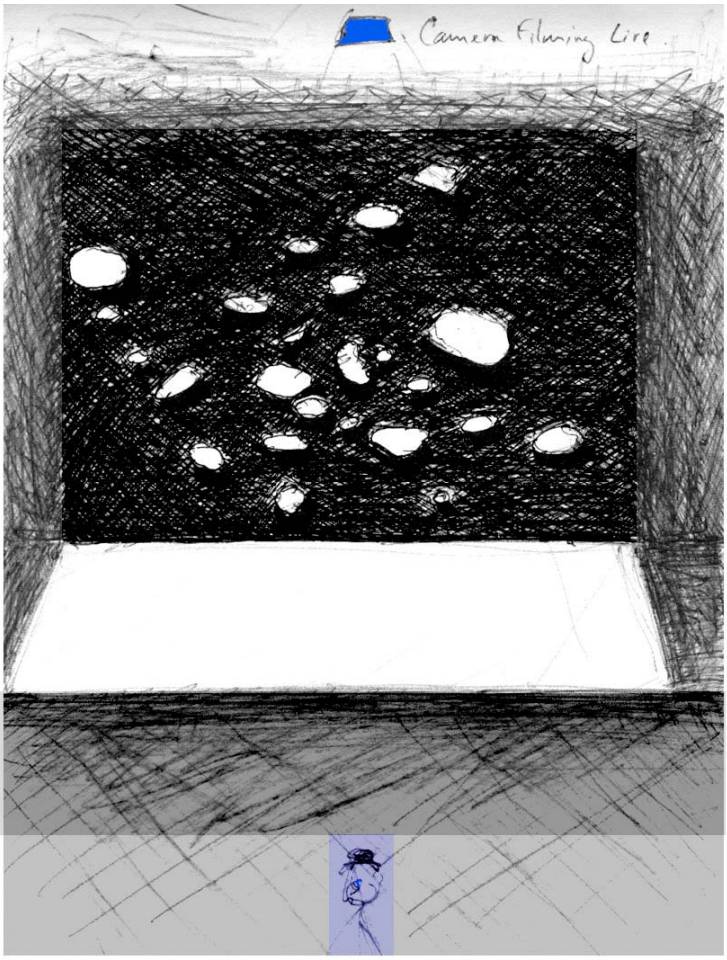


Fig. 5 *Heterotopia #15 The Shower Room*, 2007

In showers and shower rooms, water and steam occupy all surfaces as well as the spatial volume. Bodies react and respond to these conditions in very different ways. Most importantly, the attenuation of visual clarity in these environments enables physical instability and confused orientation to occur. I thus conceived of a constellation of suspended fragments of screens dispersed throughout the volume of a black box. Again live-stream digital media would capture and project the presence of the audience onto the micro-screens, parts of the walls and floor and the audience's body. The experiential emphasis on volumetric space and the inspiration coming from steam and water falling down make this sketch most conspicuously similar to a Fuller-like scenographic

scenario. However, here there is no requirement of a particular position in space for the work to unfold. Thus, the body can not only explore new movement potentials at any particular point in space but also in terms of travelling across the space. The sketch allows for speculation on an expanded field of bodily kinesis. And therefore it requires the responsive distortions of the content of digital projection (already animated in space by the nature of the fragments of screen) to be further diversified so as to respond differently to the possible range of physical actions.

Importantly, in *The Shower Room* the material additions made to the black box have decreased to a minimum, thereby allowing much more space for the body kinetically to unfold and its 'sensations and stimuli [to] have no reference to a spatial location' (Demos in Haralambidou 2006: 11). The incremental reduction of tangible materials in space led to questioning how the multipositionality of the heterotopian mirror could be induced at the source of light itself as if emanating from the very architecture of the theatre-house. In relation to *The Shower Room*, this meant removing the fragments of screens and incorporating this fragmentation within projection. Evidently this provoked a complication to the media content required to realize such a situation experimentally as it meant that the content would not merely be distorted live during the audience interaction but would also have a pre-existing structure of fragmentation. Conceptually, the progressive move from projecting digital media onto flat surfaces to dispersing it more and more into the volume of space can be formulated as a way of returning projection to what it really is: light, as a phenomenon that permeates volumetric space before ending at a surface. In return, the consideration of the body under such light must be one of an elusive volume before being a solid surface. This conception is certainly recognizable in Fuller's work. Further historical research into early twentieth-century Avant-Gardes would specifically uncover such an interest in bodily and spatial volumes revealed by light at the core of their further development of the bodied space of scenography. At this point, however, I shall return to the historical inquiry in order to describe further concepts and contexts that would be appropriated in the next stage of my practice.

1.4 Discrepant abstractions

The following section is taken up with an analysis of how facets of the bodied space were also to be found in the wider artistic and socio-cultural context of the end of the

nineteenth century and specifically in the early twentieth-century Avant-Gardes as noted above. This widening of the frame of reference beyond theatre will offer a further understanding of the perceptual and cognitive assets of both bodily and spatial constructions in such innovative practices. I shall argue that key aspects of the bodied space of scenography were reflected in visual arts and architecture with respect to their advancement of a haptic abstraction, which informs, in turn, the context of early twentieth-century stage designers Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig.

It may be speculated that Fuller's experimental use of screens for projection was prompted by a more general lack of pre-existing structures and locations for positioning them. In 1907, Freud was in Rome where, in the Piazza Colonna, he witnessed 'a screen on which [were] project[ed] lantern slides' of publicity, 'flashing on and off' and 'interspersed with pictures of landscapes' (Freud in Crary 2001: 363). Firstly 'spellbound', Freud quickly abandoned the crowd's 'commotion' to return to his hotel room and write a letter to his family about the scene of perceptual confusion he had just attended. Though resistant to admitting his profound disorientation, taking care not to pathologize himself under his own concept of the *unheimlich*, 'uncanny', experience – of 'not knowing one's way' (Freud in Royle 2003: 29) – Freud attested to and rejected the perceptual conflicts between the screen and the classical architecture wherein 'the screen not only dissolves a classical notion of a façade but is also part of a multidirectional field of stimuli' (Crary 2001: 367):

> the dematerialization of architectural surfaces into projection screens signals the reversibility of what had been established figure/ground relations within an urban fabric [towards] the oblivion of a cognitive periphery (Crary 2001: 366)

The emergence of projection screens in the 1900s thus brought about new challenges to the relation between bodies and the built environment and to the 'numbing standardization' (Crary 2001: 359) of cognition in architecture. Its disruption in strictly architectural terms can, however, be found in the same period in the work of Antonio Gaudí. Gaudí's *Park Güell* (1894–1914), in Barcelona, withholds any rectangular or perspectival dissection of space as a tactic to blur the distinction between the built and the natural environment. It does not present itself as a way of framing nature, and thereby shaping the landscape, but rather as a way of penetrating and being penetrated by its living organisms. Thus, Gaudí's architecture takes on the textures of stone, cork and other natural elements while using random mosaics to fragment built surfaces into

an unsettled array of depths. Though not actually integrating any lighting or projection, Gaudí's mosaic-based pixellation of architectural surfaces does echo, as Seurat's Pointillism did, technological developments 'from three-color printing processes in the 1880s to the mosaic of photoelectric cells in color television' (Crary 2001: 226).



8 Antonio Gaudí, *Chapel of Colonia Güell*, 1894-1914

Like Loïe Fuller, Gaudí drew his inspiration from nature yet the result is not simply replicating the natural world. Critically, the visual reduction of recognizable forms and the self-obliterating appearance of *Park Güell* have no cognitive impact upon its visitors. By rejecting flat and right-angular surfaces, Fuller and Gaudí's works initiated the volumetric conditions for a type of visual reduction, or abstraction, of which the cognitive dimension was exactly that which was despised by the then dominant strategies of abstraction. These dominant strategies were based on the clarity of geometry. In 1901 and 1902, Ernst Mach published essays in which he defined abstraction according to the mathematics of geometry. Mach argued that geometry originated out of discriminating the multisensoriness of empirical perception: 'certain definite forms, that is, certain specific combinations of space-sensations, which man learns to know through intercourse with his environment, are unequivocally characterized even by purely physiological features' (Mach 2004: 40). To Mach, abstraction then is the ability to extract these clear forms, to clarify, so to speak, the

fuzziness of the world starting with an emphatic trust in vision and mistrust of the other senses.

> Although our sensations of sight and touch are primarily produced only by the surfaces of bodies, nevertheless powerful associations impel especially primitive man to imagine more, or as he thinks, to perceive more, than he actually observes. He imagines to be filled with *matter* the places enclosed by the surface which alone he perceives [...] It requires considerable power of abstraction to bring to consciousness the fact that we perceive the surfaces only of bodies – a power which cannot be ascribed to primitive man (Mach 2004: 40).

Mach identifies the civilized body through geometry by means of a conceptual distinction between surface and depth/matter, wherein touch is recoded away from matter's textures so that one only *touches* with one's eyes. Mach's concern with the civilized body sought to reinforce how 'Western civilization habitually identifies itself with civilization as such on the pontifical assumption that what is not like it is a deviation, less advanced, primitive, or at best, exotically interesting at a safe distance' (Van Eyck in Frampton 1998: 24). But the 'primitive', or non-Western, cultures potentially offered a different way of perceiving.

Increasingly present in the European continent, the primitive exoticism of non-Western artworks reminded European culture of its own ancient arts and cultures. At the end of the 1890s, primitive Western and non-Western arts and crafts were investigated by art historian Alois Riegl. Focusing on ancient arts, Riegl argued that visual perception was intrinsically permeated by a tactile mode of perception that he named *haptic*. Riegl's perspective both related the haptic to and contrasted it with the visual. Though perceptual experience can be primarily 'optical or haptic, farsighted or nearsighted, isolating or bonding, sub-idealistic or naturalistic, crystalline or organic' (Kemp in Gubser 2006: 4–5), 'haptic and optic are not autonomous terms but together constitute an indivisible mode of knowledge' (Crary in Gubser 2006: 198). Two centuries before Riegl, George Berkeley had initiated an understanding of 'the spatial content of vision [as] consist[ing] of the association between visible properties and tangible properties' (Noë 2004: 101).

In the twentieth century, the senses' connections were to be further elaborated under the term 'synaesthesia', which 'by its psychological nature […] is association, specifically intersensory association [starting with the ability] to connect in consciousness the visual and audible phenomena inherent to everyone' (Galeyev in

Harrison 2001: 244). The synaesthetic turn suggests that vision is not inherently predominant above the other senses, and the intersection of visual and tactile senses in haptic perception is not hierarchized in itself.

> We will [thus] speak of the *haptic* whenever there is no longer a strict subordination in either direction, either a relaxed subordination or a virtual connection, but when sight discovers in itself a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function (Deleuze 2003: 124).

Haptic perception discredits the primacy of vision and sensory simplicity. For Mach and his form of abstraction it had to be admitted that 'the fundamental assumption of geometry thus reposes on an experience … of an idealized kind' (Mach 2004: 42). But Mach conceived of this idealism as a practically uniting principle: 'in the place of an individual and non-transmittable intuition of space are substituted the universal concepts of geometry, which hold good for all men' (Mach 2004: 96). Indeed, behind Mach's rejection of tactility and the volumetric dimension of matter in abstraction was a social concern with streamlining human perception and identity to produce a consensual mass similar to Wagner's vision. Such a concern was further reflected in the emergence of Gestalt psychology, which was similarly based on a visual 'simplicity hypothesis […] in favour of geometrical simplicity and cohesion' (Gombrich 1993: 222) between the body and the environment conceived as figure and background: the background is an object that demands cohesion with the figure so that the figure can assimilate it and emerge autonomous while 'the environment, in turn, becomes background again' (Robine 1998: 28; present author's translation). Such an approach to perceptual experience is congruent with the monoscopic simplification of vision in cinema: 'the total ambiguity of one-eyed static vision is logically compatible with the claims of geometrical perspective but incompatible with the idea that we "really" see the world flat' (Gombrich 2003: 330). Although some Gestalt theorists such as Ehrenfels 'made clear that Gestalt qualities were not necessarily a privileged order of sense data[,] later Gestalt theory would insist on the essential primacy and even ethical value of the whole […] to establish an image of the observer as an autonomous subject […] an observer marked by innate form-giving and form-apprehending capacities' (Crary 2001: 157–58).

Since 'only in our conscious experience has [perception] the firm and stable structure which the Gestalt psychologists postulated' (Ehrenzweig in Morris 1969: 882),

the haptic abstraction that we have noted in Fuller and Gaudí's works may be said not only to move away from the idealized and 'monological quest for absolute "truth"' (Mercer 2006: 8) but also to object to and disturb the autonomization of the observer's experience and consciousness. The abstraction of haptic perception thus grafts the body onto what Rosalind Krauss calls a 'pulse [that] involves the constant threat of interruption [of any] law of repetition [or] recurrence': 'not a good form, not a good gestalt [but] on/off, on/off, on/off [,] the oscillating presence and absence of contact' (Krauss in Foster 1988: 66–7).

I shall return to the presence of such a 'discrepant abstraction' (Mercer 2006: 7–8) in the mid-twentieth century, where further developments in abstract artforms would contend more polemically that 'there has been no "abstract movement" as such, but many manifestations of a powerful trend in modern art away from the *representation* of recognizable objects in pictorial space' (Gooding in Mercer 2006: 19-20). But for now, the emergence of this discrepant abstraction enables us to pinpoint some of the key initial problems in the perceptual and cognitive experience it offers. Indeed, the bodied space itself is an abstraction which is not based on representational and hermeneutic certainties, for it dis-locates and dis-positions bodies both materially and cognitively.

> I get the sense, sometimes reassuring, sometimes uncomfortable (because forever dependent on the unfinished […] that points to the unsayable towards which the desire to write despairingly tends), that [I am] following a path […] marking out a space […] tracing a tentative itinerary […] describing point by point the stages of a search the 'why' of which I can't tell, only the 'how' (Perec 2008: 143).

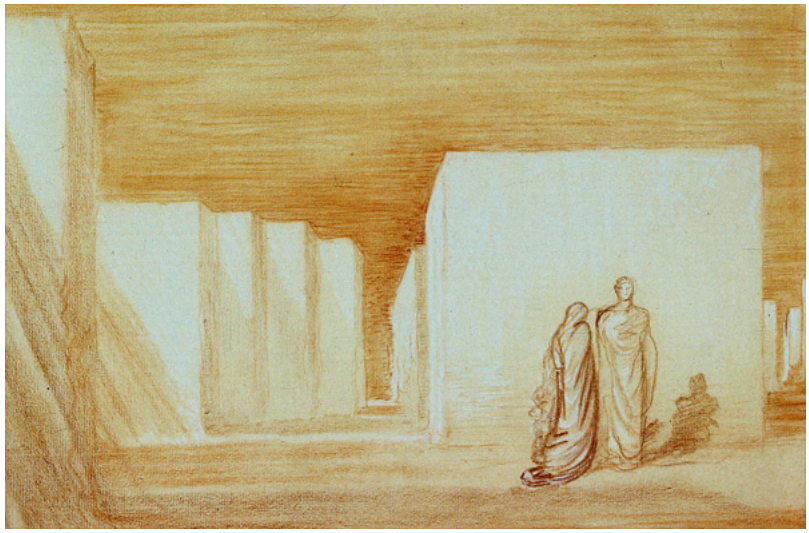
The bodied space may therefore be conceived as modelling a counter-claim to, although resulting from, the cognitive clarity that is 'symptomatic of the priority given to sight'. It thereby establishes 'the tactile' as 'an important dimension in the perception of built form', covering 'a whole range of complementary sensory perceptions which are registered by the labile body: the intensity of light, darkness, heat and cold' (Frampton 1998: 31). By resisting the predominant ideology of a human perception hierarchically hinging on vision, the haptic dimension of the bodied space suggests the possibility 'to inter-relate with the world in ways that are not "framed"' (Baugh 2005: 219). It is a 'space [that is] no longer perceived as an initial datum, an a priori starting point [but constitutes] instead an architectonic proposition resulting from […] movement, vision and touch act[ing] together' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 94).

By focusing on the ‘redemption of [the very] matter’ (Toulmin and Goodfield in Crary 2001: 226) that Mach rejected from his definition of abstraction as a civilized perception, architectonic propositions elaborate new considerations of the civilized that are ‘alien to *any* quest for certainty and stability’ (Baugh 2005: 218). Thus, the emerging bodied space of an ‘architectonic approach to scene design [–] where the physical boundaries between performer space and audience space, and between actor and spectator have shifted and blurred’ (Baugh 2005: 213) – cannot be defined by a ‘pluralistic (post-modern) […] quintessential relativism and ephemerality’ (Baugh 2005: 216–8) that would constitute another ‘more universally accepted art [that is] defining essential qualities of human perception’ (Baugh 2005: 216). Rather, an architectonic approach intertwines the body and the built, thereby upsetting any subjective stance based on aesthetic autonomy and resetting the possibility for a consciousness that is interactively elaborated through the outside, that is to say ‘subjectified and intersubjectified’ (Garner 1994: 3).

Such epistemological and ontological crisis was to be core to early twentieth-century scenographers who would, like Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig, seek to evolve a ‘New Presence’ (Appia in Beacham 1993: 109) by ‘remov[ing] the Pictorial Scene [in order] to leave in its place the Architectonic Scene’ (Craig in Baugh 2005: 145). As the next chapter will demonstrate, their forceful interrogations of the material and perceptual conditions of the ‘performance space’, pushing it to become ‘fundamentally incomplete […] not […] pictures […] nor […] sculptures’ (Baugh 2005: 61) furthered the ‘*tectonic*’ approach as far as conceiving spaces ‘in which the syntactical form of the structure explicitly resists the action of gravity’ (Frampton 1998: 30). Consequently, they were to articulate more clearly the cognitive, or dramaturgical, challenges of their architectonic abstractions in theatre and performance where ‘suggestion, not representation, is relied on and nevertheless variety is obtainable’ (Craig in Baugh et al. 1999: 1). Not only do they foreshadow the next visual arts’ developments of ‘architectonic installations in which space is physically and perceptually destabilized [– thereby] confound[ing] the body’s ability to locate itself in space according to tangible coordinates’ (Iles 2001: 37) – but also they conceived of all the various elements that would influence further scenographic developments and the creation of the black box half a century later.

1.5 Carnivalesque cognition

Having generated an initial understanding of a discrepant abstraction that reduces visual clarity in the performances of Fuller, the paintings of Seurat and the architecture of Gaudí, the thesis has exposed the emergence of an aesthetic tactic – provisionally called architectonic – the dissidence of which lies in the deregulation of body–space delineations and orders, and of the perceptual experience holistically conjured by vision. Within the architectonic rise of a haptic and bodily space in theatre, the substitution of painted scenery with kinetic draperies and curtains offered a significant shift from representational and perceptual clarity to cognitive and sensory uncertainty. This section will therefore consider a set of advanced experiments which interfered further with visual clarity by, in particular, blurring the distinctions between body and space. We begin with Craig's concept of the 'Architectonic'.

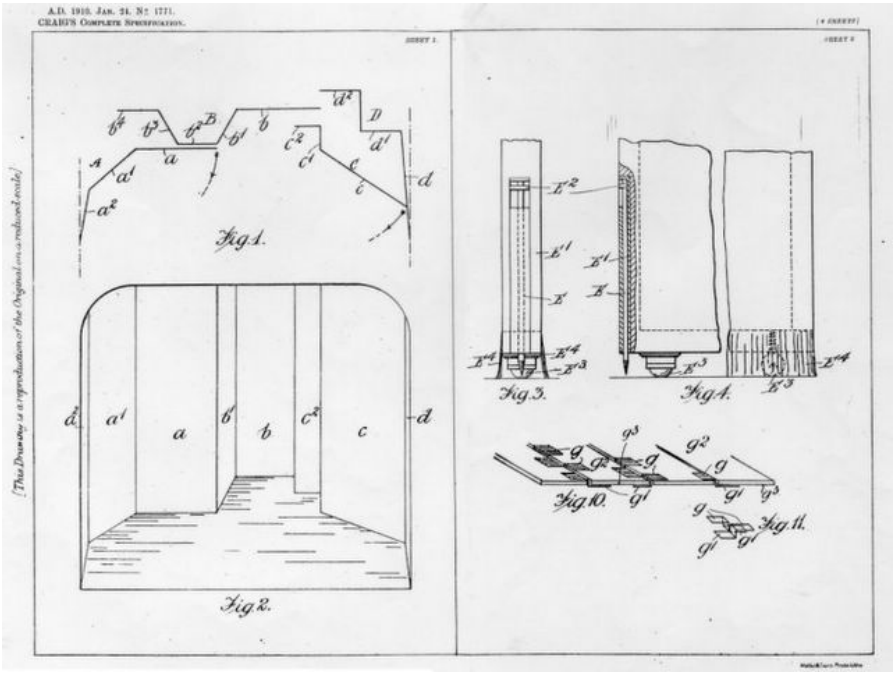


9 Edward Gordon Craig, *Sketch for Hamlet*, 1909

Edward Gordon Craig's use of the terms 'Pictorial' and 'Architectonic' was, in the contemporary context, attributed to specific trends and styles related to disciplinary domains such as painting and architecture (Packman 1931). But, if it can be taken that, as is suggested, aesthetic ideology pervaded all artistic disciplines, then the architectonic need not be simply comprehended in dialectical opposition to the pictorial as it was in the early twentieth century. Instead, and by way of producing a historical and interdisciplinary legacy that underpins its contemporary significance, the architectonic is here considered within the terms of a bodied spatiality (found across a variety of artistic practices) where space affects and is affected by the moving presence

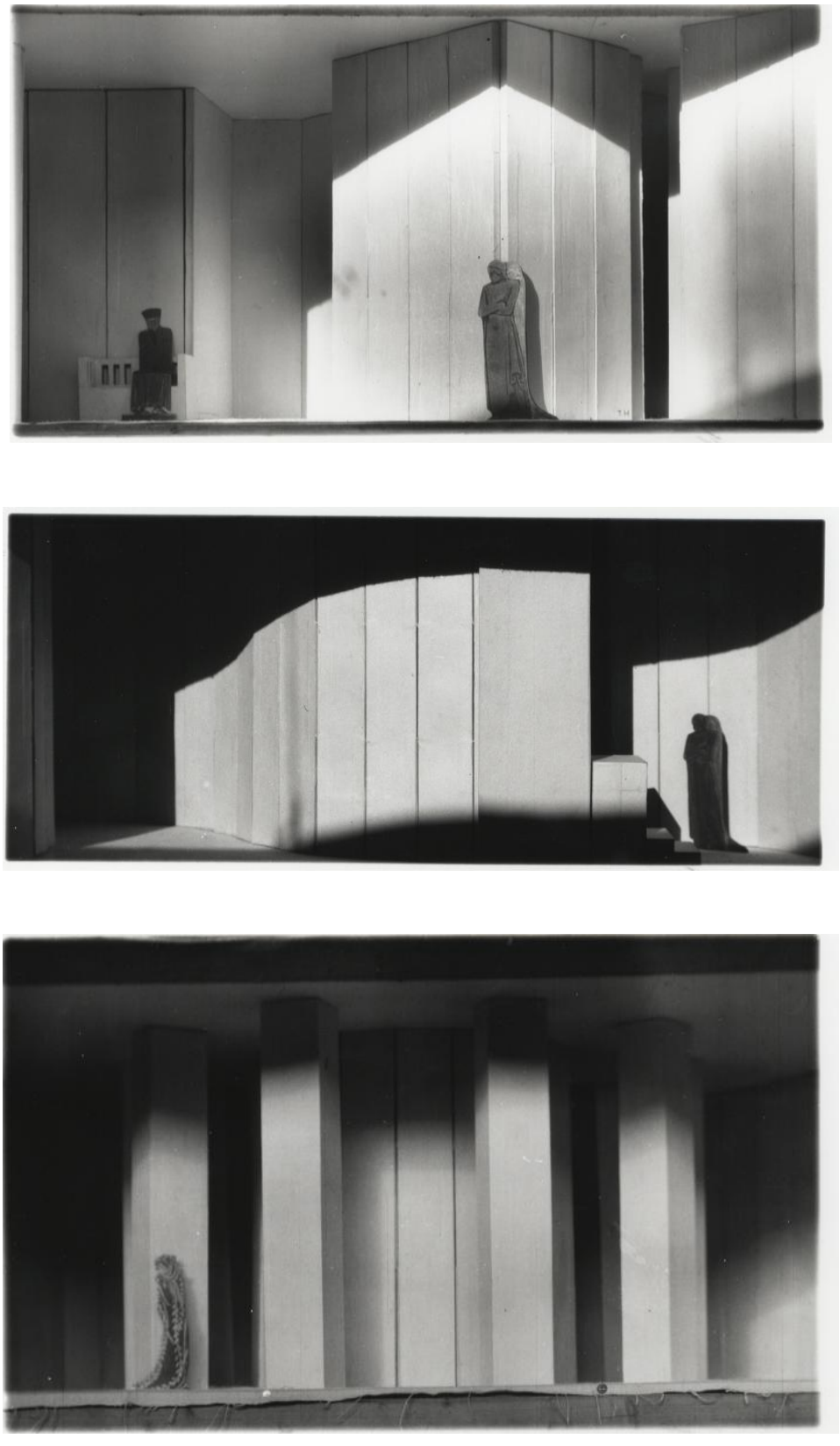
of bodies thereby causing the distortion – 'compress[ion]' and 'expan[sion]' – of 'time and space', as if struck by 'non-human forces such as the rush of waters' (Packman 1931: 4). While this opened up a wider sensory field of experience, the practitioners engaged in this critical shift were more concerned, as Craig noted, with the *suggestiveness* of visual reduction, or abstraction, because of its stimulation of the audience's creative imagination away from discursive interpretation. To this end and like Fuller, Craig patented a scenic device, the Screens (Patent 1771, 1910), reliant upon projection and lighting:

> The object of my invention is to provide a device which shall present the aesthetic advantages of the plain curtain but shall further be capable of a multitude of effects which although not intended to produce an illusion shall nevertheless assist the imagination of the spectator by suggestion (Craig in Baugh et al. 1999: 1).



10 Edward Gordon Craig, *Patent 1771, Improvements in Stage Scenery*, 1910

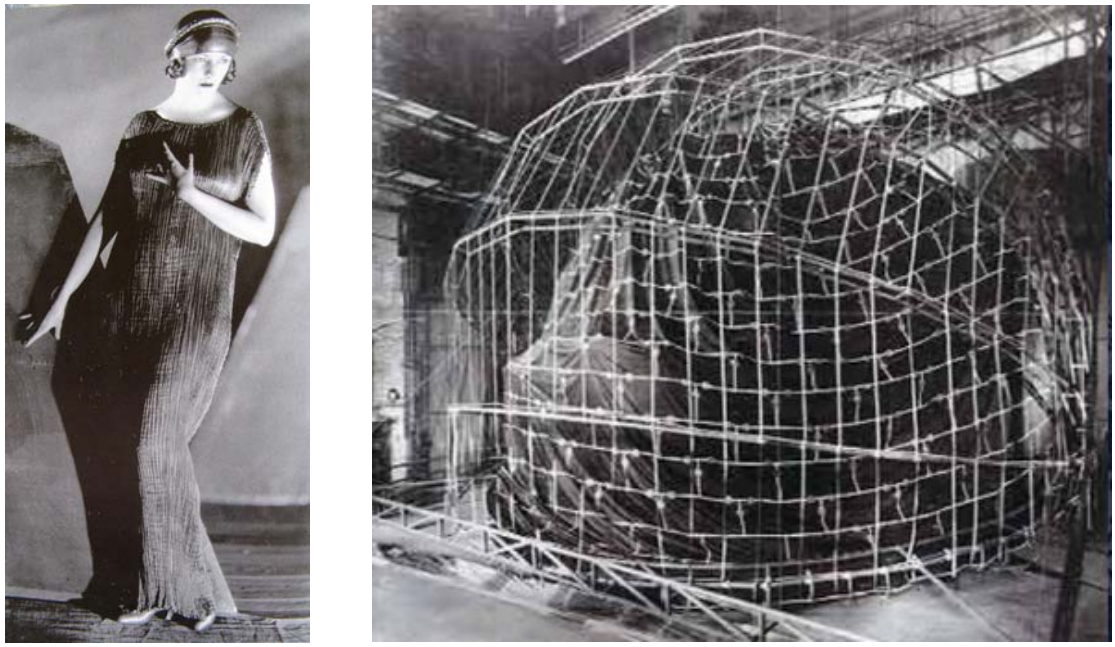
Actualized through Stanislavski's production of *Hamlet* in 1911, the Screens were 'further intended to combine the artistic variety and mechanical advantages of painted scenery with the portable nature of the curtain' (Craig in Baugh et al. 1999: 1) to enable '1000 shapes' (Craig in Innes 1998: 142). The mobility of the Screens enabled the multiplicity of their positioning on stage but also constituted Craig's attempt to embed the performer's body within the spatial structure since the Screens were designed to be pushed on stage by the hands of performers.



11 Edward Gordon Craig, *Hamlet Model-Box*, c1912

In producing various multiperspectival landscapes seemingly stretching well beyond the stage, Craig's Screens can be seen as a complex development from an

innovation that had taken place in theatres a few years before. In 1907, fashion and lighting designer Mariano Fortuny patented the cyclorama under the name ‘cupola’. This large, curved and rigid screen, positioned as a backdrop, enabled the accommodation of new lighting technologies that allowed more control and more variety of lighting effects, leading to the possibility of lighting phenomena that were a spectacle in themselves. This new and rapidly popular device could seemingly expand the volume of space on stage as it erased the upstage borders. Fortuny translated this borderlessness into another creation he patented in the same year: his ‘delphos’ dress sought to rub off bodily borders via the use of endless pleats and trailing inspired by Ancient Greek clothing.



12 Mariano Fortuny, *Delphos Dress* and *Cupola*, 1907

Craig’s Screens constitute a fragmented and mobile version of the cyclorama. They alone can be seen as a development of Fortuny’s inventions since Craig’s approach to the body was also shaped by a particularly radical conception derived from the return of Carnivalesque cultures in the nineteenth century and, in particular, the *Commedia Dell’Arte* and Heinrich von Kleist’s theory of puppetry. Following Kleist, Craig conceived of the performer as an *Übermarionette*: a ‘new form of Acting and a new form of Drama’ (Craig in Rudlin 1994: 163) that innovated the performer’s physical presence by bringing it to the level of the inanimate made animate as ‘only

mimes and not actors' (Craig 1972: 150) could do: 'up sprang portraits with flushed faces, eyes which bulged, mouths which leered, fingers itching to come out of their frames, wrists which exposed the pulse' (Craig 1911: 260). Craig's interest in framing and unframing that which is visually presented on stage was not simply applied to both body and space but also hinged their interactions, hybridizations and thus incompletions. This is most relevant to the early twentieth-century's renewed interest in Ancient or primitive arts, when a set of 'Carnivalesque' practices were developed, based on Ancient Greek aesthetics, puppetry and Commedia Dell'Arte. But the Carnivalesque had previously emerged as a mode of hybridizing and mobilizing corporeal, spatial and temporal contexts. Carnivalesque cognition thus offers semiotic and hermeneutic problems that are relevant to discuss here within a broader historical perspective as their precedents inform the endeavours of Craig and the Avant-Gardes of his time to revive and develop it further.

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, Commedia artists had 'borrowed their narrative frameworks from classical Roman comedy' and 'turned to contemporary carnivalesque practices in order to create specific masks, costumes and movements' (Wiles 2004: 141). The multi-referentiality of the Carnivalesque participates in establishing how 'commedia dell'arte […] was a phase of the dramatic art almost without parallel [as] it appealed not only to the people but to the aristocracy […] for three centuries' (Craig in Rudlin 1994: 163), yet 'the marionette theatre [–] as the last vestige of the commedia' (Green and Swan 1993: 20) – was used by Craig's *Ubermarionette* as a critical revision of the performer's characterization: 'fingers itching to come out of their frames […] all the colours higgledy-piggledy; all the lines in hubbub […] form breaks into panic (Craig 1911: 260).

The Carnivalesque destabilization of characterization is also based on hybridity as it was brought about by the performer's body splitting into part-character and part-real human being without seamless cohesion. This dissonant characterization – found in Commedia's 'half-mask [which] establish[es] the sense that a particular actor has a unique physical presence' (Wiles 2004: 141) while dethroning its singularity through an emerging character – operated a 'return to the particular and a constant overriding of identity' (Eagleton 1990: 337), 'as being-for-itself and being for others' (Hyman and Malbert 2000: 80): 'a boundary phenomenon of hybridization or inmixing in which self and other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogenous, dangerously unstable zone' (Stallybrass & White 1986: 193-4).

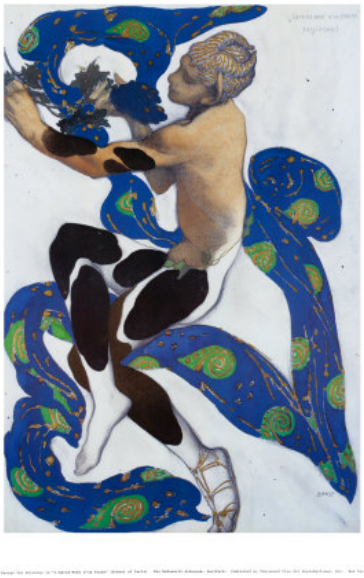
Craig's interest in Commedia included the nomadic mobility of its scenic structures. His Screens can therefore be seen as an extension of the destabilization of Carnivalesque characterization into environmental matter. And this too is in line with the earliest manifestations of the Carnivalesque. The merging of environment and bodily excess can be seen in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the large character of Ursula, 'mother o' the Pigs', epitomizes the 'Body o' the Fayre' (Jonson in Homem 2008: 114) whereby

> the city finds its enabling and redemptive other, with which it can enter a dynamics that proves productive of a more balanced and reconciled relationship to experience and to the spaces against which it is lived (Homem 2008: 115).

That Carnivalesque blur between body and space can be seen to be revived by early twentieth-century Avant-Gardes within a perceptual domain which may be qualified as 'fusional haptics [–] the perception of the physical body in the environment up to fusing' (Laval-Jeantet 2008: 91). In 1912, the Ballets Russes dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky presented *The Afternoon of a Fawn* in collaboration with the stage designer Leon Bakst, who designed scenery and costumes in a way that accentuated visual effects of two-dimensionality across, and between, bodies and environment. The opening scene of the *Fawn* is a key moment, at which the large flat painted backdrop appears at first devoid of anyone, but suddenly reveals the presence of the Fawn as he starts moving.



13 Vaslav Nijinsky, *The Afternoon of a Fawn* (opening scene), 1912

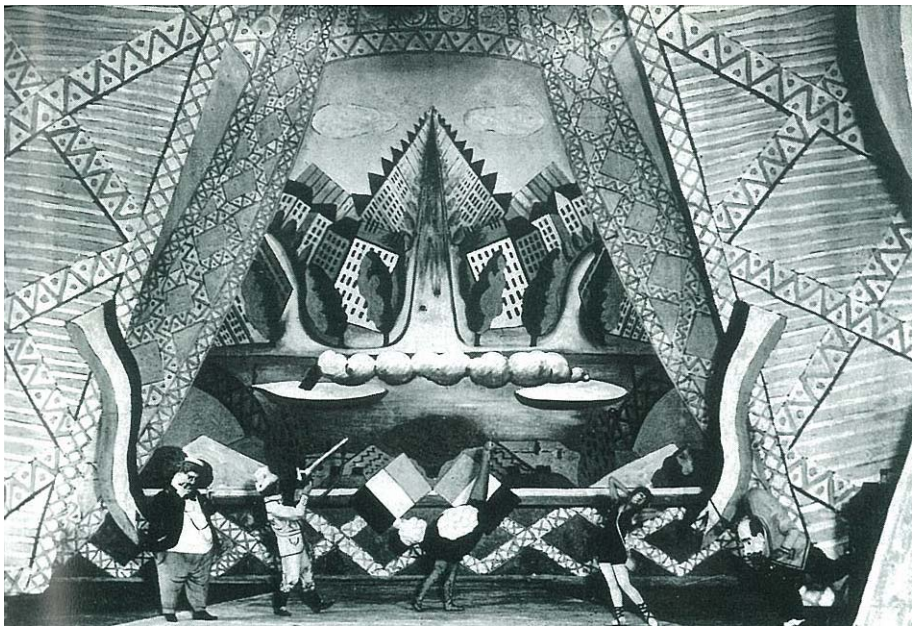


14 Leon Bakst, *Design for the Fawn*, 1912



15 Nijinsky, *The Afternoon of a Fawn*, 1912

Ballets Russes' grand master Sergei Diaghilev went on to develop such spatio-corporeal overlap with more explicit relation to architecture and urbanism in his collaborations with Jean Cocteau and his Carnivalesque 'travelling theatre' works (Cocteau in Goldberg 2001: 77) such as *Parade* (1917), *The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party* (1921) and *The Blue Train* (1924).



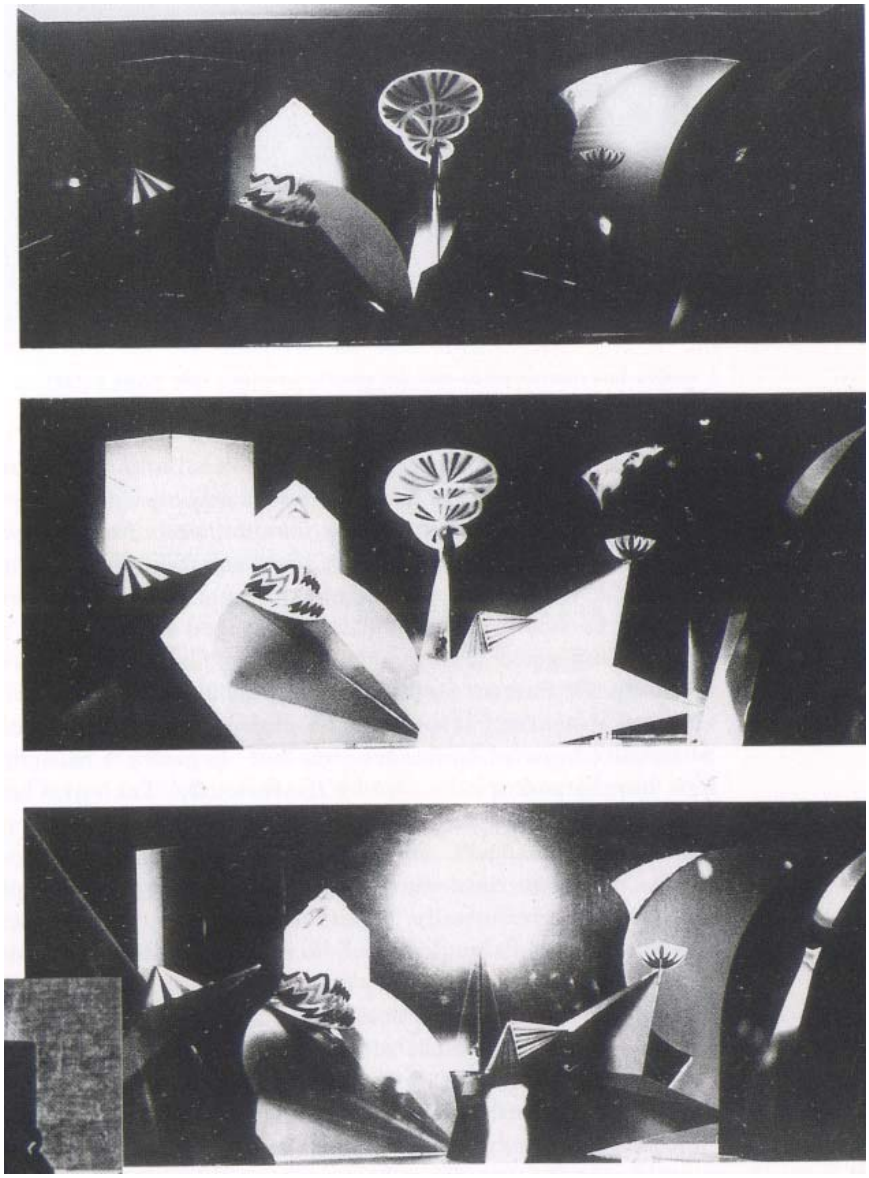
16 Jean Cocteau, *The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party*, 1921



17 Jean Cocteau, *Parade*, 1917

Pushing the body to become a fragment of space, and space a fragment of the body, led to even more radical configurations of spatiality, recovering bodily qualities and kinesis. In Futurist artist Giacomo Balla's collaboration with Igor Stravinsky on the five-minute opera *Fireworks* (1917), no performer inhabited the space, and light's interaction with the scenery informed all the action onstage. Designed through drawing, painting and a model-box, *Fireworks* presented a large composition of projection screens of various shapes, hung throughout the volume of the stage with dark gaps between them. The presence of the screens was modulated via various lighting colours and intensities, all participating in the production of phenomenal oscillations between two- and three-dimensionality. In return, the dark empty spaces between the screens would be more or less accentuated, modulating their fragmentary impact upon the overall image. Although *Fireworks* did not include actual bodies on stage it posited itself as a prosthetic extension of bodies as it implied the importance of the concealed presence of 'stage hands', of bodies working to operate and animate the work. Indeed, the conception of space as itself a body followed Futurism's interest in puppetry where 'motion, light and air' (Prampolini in Salter 2010: 86) become core to the perceptual stimulus. Conceptually, this can be better understood through Enrico Prampolini's manifesto for a *Futurist Scenography* (1915), in which an 'electromechanical architecture, powerfully vitalized by chromatic emanations from a luminous source

[would execute the] mutual permeation [and] intersection of lights and shadows [producing] vacant abandonments, exultant, luminous corporalities [,] assemblages [,] unreal shocks [and the] exuberance of sensations' (Prampolini in Drain 1995: 23).



18 Giacomo Balla, *Model-box for Fireworks*, 1917

Clearly hybridizing industrial and technological advancements with Carnivalesque precepts, Futurism's radical approach to space underlined a reconsideration of the body as one which cognition is overwhelmed by sensation. Haptic perception provides not only the disturbance of vision but also of tangibility by raising tactile interrogations at the core of the perceptual experience. As a result, materialities are highly equivocal, and can no longer be entirely distinguished from one

another. By ‘transgressing the body’s frontiers in a play of erotic solidarity with others’ (Eagleton 1990: 337), the ‘material bodily principle’ of the Carnivalesque – where ‘all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated and immeasurable’ – advances the ‘pitting [of] sensation against concept’ (Bakhtin 1984: 19) within corporeal terms that extend beyond the body into the environment: ‘an evidence in the realm of flesh which has nothing to do with the evidence of reason’ (Artaud in Nechvatal 1999: 373).

Sensation in Carnivalesque cognition resists any singular ‘idea or meaning’; rather it issues a polysemiosis from an irreducible ‘collection of images [with] many meanings’ (Green and Swan 1993: xi) where the audience then ‘*ought* to turn, baffled, to the images, to let them speak for themselves’ (Green and Swan 1993: xi). Indeed, as the ‘mobile, pluralized, disarticulated body of Bakhtinian carnival disowns all instrumentality in the name of sensuous repleteness [,] the body’s libidinal practice explodes the languages of reason, unity and identity into so many superfluous bits and pieces’ (Eagleton 1990: 337) that both body and space are ‘conceptualized as corpulent excess[es] always in [a] process [of] *becoming*’ (Stallybrass and White 1986: 8–9). Carnivalesque’s ‘poetics of mobility’ where ‘notions of movement, kinesis, energy, exploration’ (Boehrer in Homem 2008: 115) ‘call on the flesh to disprove a monolithic construction of authorship’ (Homem 2008: 115) ‘render things non-identical with themselves in order to adumbrate a golden age of friendship and reconciliation’ (Eagleton 1990: 337).

We have noted that Carnivalesque modes and practices move between the seventeenth century and twentieth-century Avant-Gardes. Practices such as Commedia and puppetry, like the ‘magical effects […] of medieval theatre [,] disappeared after the 17th century [– due to theatre’s professionalization, institutionalization and *sedentarization.* – But they were] ‘resurrected in the second half of the 19th century’ (Dawes in Butterworth 2005: xvi). This resurrection has to be specifically noted in that it constitutes, within the history of scenographic practice, a precursor to what may have been assumed to be of Modernist origin. In the same way the dissonant cognition resulting from their kinetic energy in weaving body and space may be seen in the work of early Renaissance artists, who were challenging the classical codes of Pictorialism that were then being implemented. An example of such can be found in Leonardo Da Vinci who, dissatisfied with the restricted singularity of linear perspective, developed (sometimes mathematically flawed) perspectival systems, one of which led him to the technique he invented and coined as *sfumato* (‘hazy’). A painterly technique responsible

for his depiction of clouds, blurred landscapes and the fuzzying of bodily borders, *Sfumato*'s production of incomplete and uncertain surfaces and borders would create a pulse 'hovering between the seen and the unseen' (Vasari in Gombrich 1993: 185), and thereby disturbing the legibility of spatial and corporeal identities.



19 Leonardo Da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503



20 Michelangelo, *Awakening Captive*, *c*1516

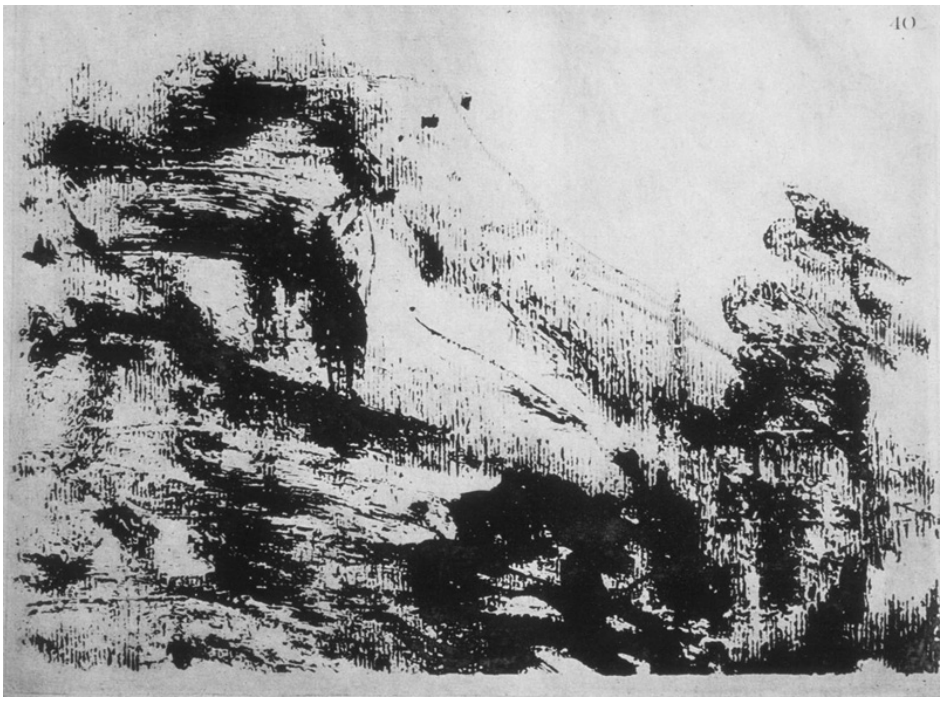
In Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1503–6), as in Seurat's Pointillism, *sfumato* 'cut[s] down the information on the canvas and thereby stimulates[…] the mechanism of projection' (Gombrich 1993: 185). Contemporaneous with Da Vinci, Michelangelo produced a series of unfinished sculptures that have been referred to as *non-finito*. Michelangelo's *non-finito*, like Da Vinci's *sfumato*, dissolves the borders between body and environment and proposes a sculptural presence that is quasi-immersed in the spectator's own spatiality. Space and body gnaw on one another, inviting the viewer into their dialogic imprecision: '*sfumato* [contained] the seeds of an immersive counter-tradition in opposition to the geometricised optics of point perspective' (Nechvatal 1999: 222). This relation is propelled by how *sfumato*, like *non-finito*, evokes kinesis, movement and the 'rapid actions of figures' (Da Vinci in Warner 2006: 110).

However, this evocation is not hermeneutically closed, for the movement elaborated by the image may be understood in different ways. Thus the viewer, as E. H. Gombrich (1993) argues, is required to undertake a mechanism of projection: a process

of ‘making and matching [, of] errors and trials’ (Gombrich 1993: 24), ‘making guesses and modifying them’ (Gombrich 1993: 231), that constitutes a relational cognition Gombrich calls the ‘beholder’s share’ (Gombrich 1993: 154). *Sfumato*’s emulation of hazy phenomena recovers sensory stimuli’s ‘infinite ambiguity’ (Gombrich in Noë 2004: 163) and, as such, requires that we develop an ‘understand[ing of] what one does not see’ (Barbaro in Gombrich 1993: 186): ‘look at walls splashed with a number of stains or stones of various mixed colours. If you have to invent some scene, you can see there resemblances to a number of landscapes […] and an infinite number of things’ (Da Vinci in Warner 2006: 110).

Thus the viewer’s experience of *sfumato*’s cognitive imprecision and polysemiosis is in itself prefaced by the artist’s speculative process of creation: ‘Leonardo recommended staring at stains and clouds to stimulate the mind’ (Warner 2006: 125) in a similar way to how Michelangelo peered through the raw chunk of stone and perceived a figure out of the mineral’s own material structure. And although Carnivalesque practices were seemingly to disappear for two centuries, their heritage of cognitive imprecision would last in processual strategies just as the phenomena of clouds and rocks would continue to be regarded as structures of visual imprecision within what Marjorie Hope Nicolson calls ‘the development of the aesthetics of the infinite’ (1997). Focusing on how English poetry denoted various understandings of cognition and subjectivity by means of depicting the human approach to, relation with and conception of the natural landscape, Nicolson’s study traces between the seventeenth and nineteenth century the emergence of a dissonant subjectivity in the face of, and projected onto, the particular image of the mountain. Whereas the seventeenth century attributed to the mountain the non-divine and non-human allegories – what Nicolson names ‘Mountain Gloom’ – of threatening monstrosity, ‘shapelessness and confusion’ (Nicolson 1997: 279), the eighteenth century developed an observational engagement with mountains in which human bodies confidently approached mountains through a direct, scientific and optical possessiveness: ‘Mountain Glory’. This confidence in visually capturing natural ‘polymorphousness’ (Warner 2006: 111) became more conspicuously advanced as a speculative process of creation by Alexander Cozens’ ‘New Method’ of picturing landscapes ‘by blotting and crumpling the paper beforehand’ (Warner 2006: 104). Cozens ‘encouraged his students to follow chance’ within the ‘adventitious camouflage mottling of light and shade’ (Warner 2006: 113). This too, then, is an anticipation of the return of anti-perspectival

structures of spatiality in the nineteenth century when, alongside the revival of carnivalesque cultures, Nicolson suggests that gloom and glory merge and the landscape is apprehended as the shapeless and confused corners of the human mind. As 'the caves that were Ruins of Nature to the eighteenth-century poets have […] become symbols of secret places in the soul of man' (Nicolson 1997: 379), 'ruins [and] asymmetry' became understood as part of a human subjectivity that follows the 'irregularities of mountains and clouds' (Nicolson 1997: 336).



21 Alexander Cozens, 1759

Though such cognitive dissonance in the human subject was embraced and celebrated by some, it was predominantly depreciated and even pathologized. Thus, for instance, Justinus Koerner's drawings of smudges and blots in the 1850s offered a 'practice [of] stains and marks […] fold[ed] to produce a symmetrical image [and] took a psychological turn in Romantic literary circles in Germany' (Warner 2006: 309) as Romantics sought to comprehend 'clouds [as] extensions of the mind's vagaries' (Warner 2006: 110) in parallel with 'numerous techniques of unravelling nature's riddles and reconstituting its secret patterns to become intelligible' (Warner 2006: 310). Though 'Koerner suffered from very poor eyesight, so this was his way of transforming incapacitating blurs into aesthetic "creatures of chance"' (Warner 2006: 309), his drawings were subsequently recycled by psychologist Hermann Rorschach in 1921 by

way of producing a psychological test out of random inkblots, the readings of which were deemed to provide ‘a form of psychological illumination’ (Warner 2006: 310): ‘the Rorschach test entails precisely finding meanings where there is nothing represented, only abstract and random symmetries [to] result [in] the diagnosis of character’ (Warner 2006: 310). While the streamlining of visual imprecision’s plurality of suggestive readings towards one singular defining interpretation has proven inconsistent in psychological terms, and its ‘adherents are losing ground and have recently come under scrutiny and serious criticism’ (Warner 2006: 311), such dismissal had already been articulated by practitioners who valued the suggestiveness of imprecise imagery such as Fuller, Seurat, Gaudí, Craig and the Avant-Gardes.

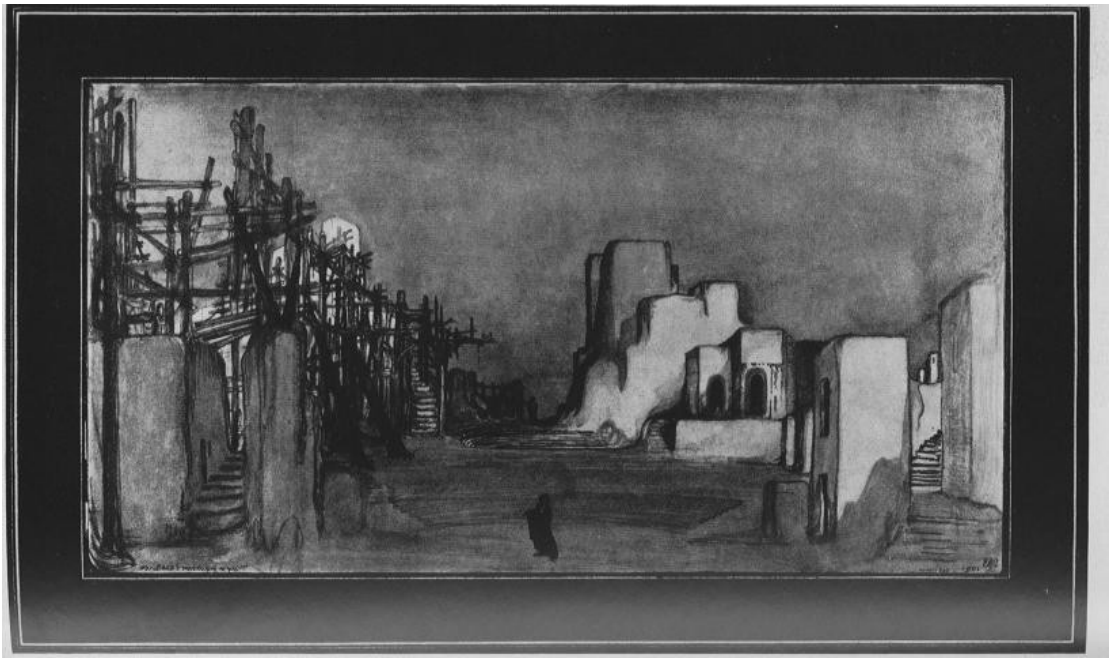


22 Hermann Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostik* 1921

Returning to Edward Gordon Craig’s scenographic practice we may now observe the Screens as Carnivalesque structures with fragmentary yet cohesive combinations and arrangements of infinite landscape-like structures. Their invention results from various speculative processes of creation of which the most significant may be a series of speculative designs for Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*. Begun in 1900 and developed throughout his life, Craig’s *Passion* shifted from ruins, asymmetry and ‘a structure of dark scaffold poles’ (Craig 1972: 148) to a cathedral environment taken from the twelfth-century Italian church of St Nicolao. Though the monolithic frontal

part of the set would suggest that it is a faithful replica of the church, it also includes underground spaces leading the eyes through to find the upstage areas stripped of much of the architectural features that should continue the frontal environment. This seemingly 'ruined' and less visible bare back section of the model enabled Craig to increase the number of positions and directions of light that circulated in the cavities of the box and, therefore, to break the physical and frontal wholeness of the overall architecture into maze-like aggregates of spaces melding into other spaces. Indeed Craig was looking to exacerbate the phenomenal rather than the tangible qualities of the church:

> a structure that is essentially a denial of gravity and of determinate form, undermin[ing] normative categories of space and time by creating a spatial and temporal dimension, that, through the complex interplay of ritual, light and structure, is immeasurable. At the same time, the uncertainty, a denial of clear boundaries, engenders a condition where the discrete differences between subjects and objects are questioned; without clearly defined objects, there can be no separate, identifiable subjects. In cathedrals, space and time are wedded to structure, construction, light, and material, while the program is structured according to the traces and orchestrations of movement that occur within an indeterminate realm (Burns Gamard 2000: 123–4).



23 Edward Gordon Craig, *Sketch for St Matthew Passion*, 1901-2



24 Edward Gordon Craig, *St Matthew Passion* (Model by E. Craig 1972)

To this end, Craig was also inspired by the 'little boxes, or luogi deputati' found within 'the sacred plays of the Middle Ages' (Craig 1972: 149) from which he developed a scenic structure where multiple platforms, semi-contained boxes and 'more and more steps' constituted much of the stage further surrounded by a 'huge orchestra […] hidden behind the "houses" and distributed around the theatre' (Craig 1972: 149–50). In this speculative project, Craig conceived of the performer's presence as an intrinsic part of the space: his *Passion* 'was to be without action, just the movement of lights and background – form and colour – the music and voices coming from invisible sources' (Craig 1972: 148). Performers would stand still in various places and thus would be more or less fully visible. Audiences' bodies were also invited to immerse and disperse: 'people could have wandered in and out' (Craig 1972: 150). Such fragmentary inclusion of bodies was further supported by lighting: not only its ebb and flow pulsating in different areas at different moments – 'a light [...] would come up in one place [...] die down and come up […] elsewhere' – but also evolving gradients of darkness as various areas would 'grow darker and darker' (Craig 1972: 150).

Similarly to Balla's *Fireworks*, Craig's syntactic use of darkness to punctuate and puncture the overall spatial structure constitutes another way of bringing the dark periphery of the off-stage onstage and, in return, of stretching the stage to a never-ending landscape: a Carnivalesque revision of the stage as a cyclorama, suggestive of a spatiality spreading beyond the stage. Similar to how the Screens were 'mounted on castors and provided with struts [to evoke] the corner of a street-or the interior of a building' (Craig in Baugh et al. 1999: 3), Craig's *Passion* oscillates between inside and

outside without settling for one or the other. This two-fold semiosis is a dichotomy, a paradox that calls for reconsideration of the conceptual dualism of interiority and exteriority which is assumed in regard to both spaces and bodies. In this respect, Craig further speculated on the possible structures and phenomena of such a Carnivalesque modulability of the stage in his *Theatre of the Future* (1907) by expanding on the 'Asphaleia System [which] at the turn of the century, made it possible to raise sections of the stage floor to form platforms of various heights [that] could even be tilted or rotated' (Innes 1998: 181). Perhaps one of the most potent anticipatory designs of the black box theatre, the work sought to augment and complicate 'deep wells, open spaces, steps, platforms or partitions' (Innes 1998: 177) by forecasting the Asphaleia System beyond the floor:

> each section of the floor can rise and fall at will by mechanical means; each section of the roof can descend or ascend, echoing as it were the movement of the floor; each side can as it were fold and unfold at all parts and can be moved at will (Craig in Innes 1998: 178).

Thus, 'the floor seems to be an absence – the roof a void […] slow shapes […] continue to arise in endless numbers […] until there stand before us vast columns of shapes, all single yet all united – none resting' (Craig in Innes 1998: 181). Craig's conception of the scenographic space as a 'void' seeks to articulate the semiotic multiplicity and unrest of Carnivalesque cognition. The Carnivalesque and *sfumato* can be seen as part of an abiding counter-tradition, or lineage of multiplicity, which finds twentieth-century expression in Craig's scenography. The void points to a critical metanarrative of multiplicity which blurs divisions between interiority and exteriority as well as presence and absence. Instead absence is now to be construed as a minimal degree of presence similarly to how darkness is no longer opposed to light but is seen as a minimal degree of light. Exteriority then is to be apprehended as a minimum level of interiority, one where cognition is at its most feeble and yet where meaning is not lost but is at a fragile point of emergence:

> The place is without form – one vast square of empty space is before us – all is still – no sound is heard – no movement is seen […] nothing is before us – And from that nothing shall come life – even as we watch, in the very centre of that void a single atom seems to stir – to rise – it ascends like the awakening of a thought in a dream (Craig in Hannah 2003: 25).

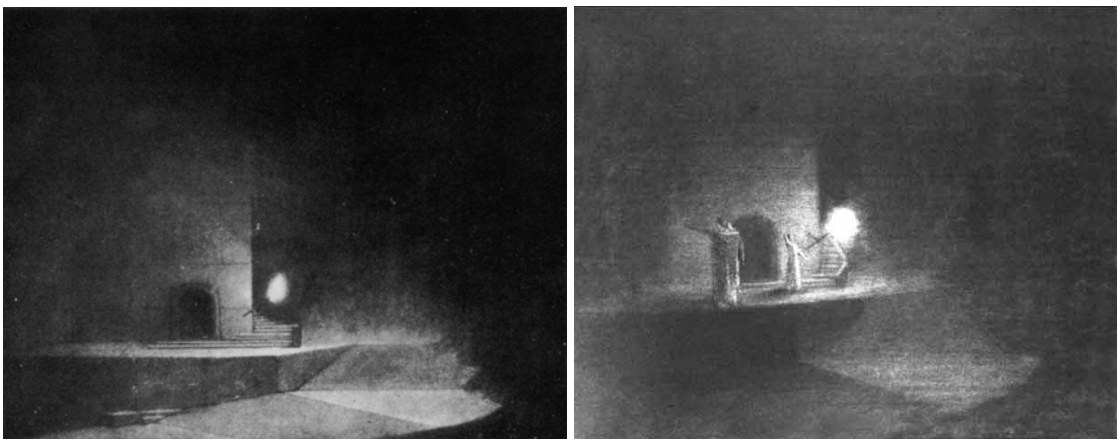


25 Edward Gordon Craig, *Scene 58* (reconstructed) *c*1970

Carnivalesque cognition provides a reduced and fragile polysemiosis whose ‘suggestiveness’ led Craig to investigate the abstract depths of a void where forms and thoughts are not pre-given but speculatively and infinitely possible. Not quite empty, this void must then be understood as a speculative threshold where all imaginable and unimaginable spatial and bodily forms may emerge. Although Craig wrote about new considerations of the theatre-house based on such a speculative threshold, it is his friend Adolphe Appia who would propose a potent precursor to the black box: a ‘changeable space […] in which the traditional architecture […] would […] be radically transformed’ (Beacham 1993: 110) – a ‘cathedral of the future’ (Appia in Beacham 1993: 109) – as a theatre-house where the speculative threshold was even conceptually applied to the audience’s presence since it could be ‘with or without spectators’ (Appia in Beacham 1993: 110): a ‘living space’ in which ‘a moment of living art with no one viewing it except the performers themselves exists fully, and with more dignity than when reflected in the eyes of passive onlookers’ (Appia in Beacham 1993: 162).

Where Wagnerian scenography strove to isolate the visual phenomena on stage from and for the viewers, Craigian designs looked for the precise inversion of Wagner's precepts. As a result, perception was no longer to be tied to representation and cognitive clarity. Rather, it could be conceived in terms of an intensity of experience that cannot be fully grasped in discourse. Thus through such cognitive challenges Craig's Carnivalesque approach suggests an ontological reversal that is exemplified by his void: whereas prior built spaces and bodily understandings were based upon mathematical and geometric rules that referred symbolically to religious or philosophical ideologies and orders, space and body could now be elaborated from a speculative threshold. On the one hand, this led practitioners to conceive of and realize spaces that anticipate the mid-twentieth-century emergence of the black box. On the other hand, the speculative threshold offered ways to reconsider how bodies move, are seen and understood. And since the formation of such a speculative threshold is based on a bodily space, the further spatial developments that led to the black box should simultaneously provide the further developments of such bodily innovations.

The next section thus discusses various instantiations of black box-like spaces after Craig, including Appia and artists from the Bauhaus. As it traces further the spatial implications of the speculative threshold, the section will highlight bodily consequences which can again be related to Craig in terms of his *Ubermarionnette* theory. Through continuing this historical analysis I hope to delineate more precisely the ontological and epistemological issues and revisions that are embedded in the cultivation of the speculative threshold.



26 Adolphe Appia, *Tristan and Isolde*, 1896

1.6 Speculative Threshold

Like Craig, Appia began his career with multiple speculative designs that sought to undo scenography's Pictorial tradition. Appia used Wagnerian music dramas to develop dark, fragmented and borderless scenic spaces. In his sketches for the staging of *Tristan and Isolde* (1896), Appia's scenery shows an unbalanced and gaseous interplay of darkness and light. Subsequently, his series of drawings called *Rhythmic Spaces* (1909), no longer related to any specific textual scripts, showed endless arrangements of stairs, columns, platforms, curtains, scrims and screens that were sometimes mobile, and always conceived as canvases altered by and altering light phenomena.



27 Adolphe Appia, *Rhythmic Spaces*, 1909

Craig's speculative drawings of the *Steps* (1905) equally emphasized the visually shifting presence of stairs and curtains. In one of those drawings, Craig traced a labyrinth on the floor of a stage made of stairs as well as plain and draped walls. Comparing this drawn space to Appia's actual 'study site' reveals much resemblance as to the core structural elements that populate the stage. In both cases, the drapes do not function as devices to conceal off-stage areas but rather operate on a vertical plane as much as the floor's design (stairs and labyrinth) does on a horizontal plane. Stairs interface phenomenal dialogues between floor and walls as they literally intersect their own vertical and horizontal planes, therein offering multiple levels and new micro platforms/stages. At the same time, stairs present protruding and receding corners and thus create a complex three-dimensional assemblage of angles, cascades of minute walls and floors that all interact with light in ways that are comparable to the folds of curtains and draperies.



28 E. Gordon Craig, *The Steps*, 1905



29 Adolphe Appia, *Study Site*, 1912

Thus stairs and drapes can enable a high degree of visual modulation of the environment just as they affect the body. This section will begin by exploring the kind of spatiality suggested and constructed by drapes of various sorts, from curtains as screens to the draped body. From drapes it will move to the spatiality of caves, which, as in the case of Plato's cave, explicitly raise issues in relation to the dualisms which have historically shaped our thinking about space. Caves will in turn lead us to touch on scaffolds, those structures which are neither walls nor not walls.

Similar to how ‘the kinetic impetus of the body in climbing the stair is […] checked by the friction of the steps’ (Frampton 1998: 31), curtains and draperies can facilitate the corporeal exploration of multiple levels and axis in motion thereby freeing the body from its fixed centring in the torso and the correlated ‘upward training of the body’ (Vigarello 1989). Collaborating with composer and choreographer Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Appia conceived and realized in 1911 a theatre-house in Hellerau, Germany, he called his ‘study site’ (Appia in Baugh 2005: 61). A large and modulable white box, the study site mostly comprises mobile stairs and curtains. These are relatable to the bodies because all performers are dressed in white Ancient Greek-like draperies. Bodies and space are further brought together by way of broad washes of light permeating both stage and auditorium. As Appia’s collaborator, Jaques-Dalcroze, developed a movement language (‘eurhythmics’) which sought to augment the body’s three-dimensional mobility, spatial design was equally acquiring a broader visual and kinetic language.

However these languages are to be understood within the terms of an abstraction that is less concerned with referring to fictional narrative and more interested in revisiting everyday metanarratives. Though the eurhythmic body (like the puppet) could elaborate a bodily torsion and torque that evoked ‘a process of character transformation’ (Schwartz 1992: 77), Mary Wigman, one of Dalcroze’s students, left his *Eurhythmics* to look for even further ‘dissonance […] to express […] character’ (Perrottet in Schwartz 1992: 73). In Wigman’s *Hexentanz* (1913), the draped costume participates in producing extreme physical contortion, asymmetry and the near loss of the human shape. By nurturing ‘the lack of the proper deportment prescribed mainly by socialized ethics’ (Vigarello 1989: 149), Wigman attacked the tradition of ‘granting privilege to rigidity and rectitude’ (Vigarello 1989: 155) that had permeated dance and everyday behaviours for centuries. ‘What began with adherence to lines of the body result[ed] eventually in the opposite: the imposition of a conventional shape’ (Vigarello 1989: 155) correlatively producing ‘the stigma of deformity’ (Vigarello 1989: 149). Wigman vigorously performed deformity, rejecting the prescription that ‘a lady [should] “walk without looking or turning her gaze toward any man or woman who might be to the right or to the left”’ (Vigarello 1989: 150). Since proper deportment was underlined by the civility of how ‘one’s posture as a whole must also show […] self-possession’ (Vigarello 1989: 150), Wigman’s oblique gestures subverted ideologies of civility and civilization by applying precision and control to the most unstable confines of human motion and new propioceptive relations between body and space. As such, the

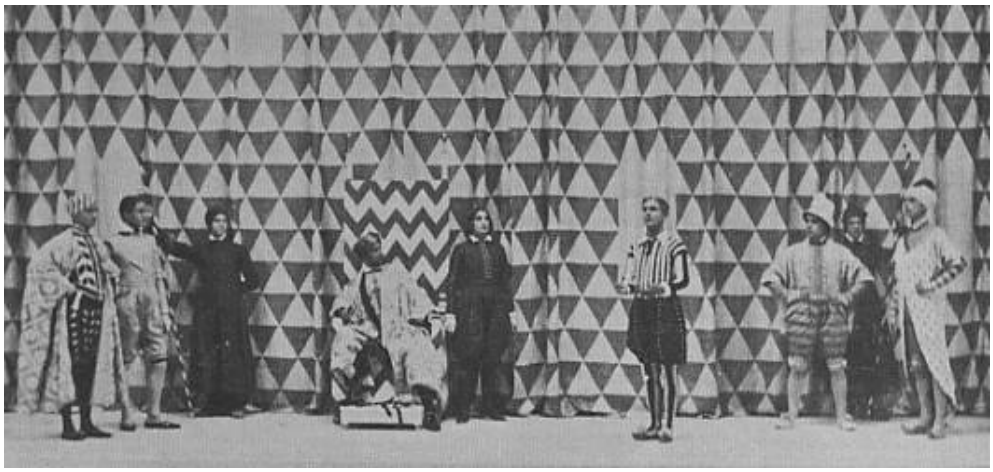
speculative threshold of spatio-corporeality can be said not only to erode the stability of characterization but also to seek a reconsideration of the self separated from authorship as ownership.



30 Mary Wigman, *Hexentanz I*, 1914

Traditionally ‘drapery is the aestheticisation of cloth’ and ‘aestheticization is associated with civilisation’ (Doy 2002: 230) and ‘high culture’ (Doy 2002: 213). Thus the use of drapery to participate kinetically in the ‘soft, imprecise “picture”’ (Doy 2002: 54) of a destabilized subject may be seen as a critique of any civilized body that would be defined by cultural dominance and supremacy. Fuller, Craig, Appia, Wigman and others’ attempt at making ‘the draped cloth […] devoid of any cultural and political associations’ (Doy 2002: 181) circumvent a critical ‘co-existence of civilisation and barbarism’ (Doy 2002: 215) wherein drapery subverts both and, with it, the very ontological and epistemological foundations of Western culture. Indeed, conceived in the architectural terms of walls, drapery’s shifting porosity produces a destabilized spatiality by way of collapsing the spatial divisions that previously ordered the built (as an inside) against the outside. Thus, when director Harley Granville-Barker, having visited Appia’s theatre in Hellerau, affirmed: ‘what is really needed is a great white box’ (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 77), the ‘box’ must be understood differently from a closed container. To be sure, from 1912 to 1914, in London, Granville Barker directed a series of Shakespearean plays at the Savoy Theatre in which he extended the stage into the auditorium, creating the proximity Appia was

striving for while developing it further by employing large amounts of curtains whose ‘patterns suggest walls’ through a ‘new hieroglyphic language of scenery’ (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 78). The stage’s extension, like the suggestion of walls through curtains, enabled the ‘set[ting of] our scenes in a shell […] something that will not tie us too rigidly indoors or out’ (Granville-Barker in Dymkowski 1986: 7–8). Granville-Barker’s proposal for a ‘shell’ denotes a particular attention paid to the membrane that actually separates the outside from the inside. His call for a constructed environment that no longer connives at dialectic conceptions of outside and inside is underlined by an insistence upon a border that must be seen as an interface in which outside and inside penetrate one another. This conceptual border philosophically dates back to Ancient Greek thinkers and to Plato in particular. It thus contributes to a more general Western ontology where dualisms order being and experience: inside and outside, self and other, mind and body, etc. In Appia’s study site, the porosity of boundaries suggests, as did Granville-Barker, the demise of dualistic thinking which could not be more different to how ‘Wagner carried the logic of Plato’s cave to its conclusion’ (Wiles 2003: 229).



31 Harley Granville-Barker, *Twelfth Night*, 1912

Granville-Barker’s shell may thus be seen as a kind of spatiality that predates Plato. Let’s first remind ourselves of Plato’s Allegory, or Simile, of the Cave, in which he articulated his dialectic division ‘between soul and body, between intelligible and sensory realms of experience’ (Wiles 2003: 211). Plato formulated an oppositional distinction between cognition and sensorimotor experiences precisely through the opposition of light and dark conceptualized as form and formlessness. Plato theorized

the notion of form by arguing that sensory experiences are attached to the dark formlessness of shadows, thereby preventing us from grasping forms originating from the sun's light and constituting (cognitive) truth. He thus regarded the cave as the paradigmatic space of the formless, criticizing it because of the ways in which bodies are immersed in phenomena weaving light and shadows, and creating, allegedly, unintelligible images. As a result, Plato demanded that one comes out of the cave: extracting one's body from sensory experiences (formlessness) and dividing one's self from one's body to focus on the clarity of forms drawn from sunlight. Plato posited a homogenizing hierarchical and socio-political model in which light and form are privileged against darkness and formlessness, where the latter are located to the background of humanity and the former to the foreground.

This influential Platonic view, in which darkness is strongly depreciated by the civilized mind, was already instated within the ontologically hierarchizing structure of the Ancient Greek Dionysian *chora*. Indeed, *chora* produced rituals with the political (and rather Wagnerian) agenda of educating the mass, giving a specific form and limit to Greek society: the 'gathering of the *polis* around the dancing circle' (Wiles 2003: 211). The divisive and socializing ontology of the *polis* established through *chora* went on to develop in Hellenistic theatre 'where the actors stood as if in a relief on a narrow stage, and the empty space of the orchestral circle created aesthetic distance, with choral songs helping to separate the imitators of life from those imitated' (Wiles 2003: 212).

The very interval created by the orchestra has a precise depth for which 'Greek scene painters developed the art of perspective […] not the single-point perspective beloved of renaissance princes but a looser form that satisfied spectators in all parts of the auditorium' (Wiles 2003: 212). Through this non-linear perspective, 'the art of trompe l'oeil scene-painting was developed to enhance the proposition that the stage was a two-dimensional mirror' (Wiles 2003: 212). The scenography of *chora* leads to a distortion of three-dimensionality into two-dimensionality, yet separates, and privileges as such, the mimetic reproduction from its real instantiation as it makes use of spatial intervals to organize and order form, representation, meaning and subjectivity: thereby advancing 'the materialist proposition […] that reality exists out there to be observed and imitated on a stage; and the collectivist proposition […] that we are social beings before we are individuals' (Wiles 2003: 238). As an allegory, Plato's cave offered a fictitious situation, yet the cave, its darkness and shadows all referred to actual

prehistoric caves in which drawings can be found. If these drawings' complex forms were then seen as disordered primitivism, they have since revealed a key stage in the advancement of fundamental human technologies such as lighting and architectural devices. At Lascaux, walls display a mix of figures and motifs that were partly drawn from the stone reliefs and their shadows revealed by the fire of tallow lamps. As there is 'no longer any space outside of the figures to define them [–] space is immersed in the overlapping figures' (Nechvatal 1999: 157) – those are 'super-imposed […] entities […] leading to the articulation of new identities [and a] dizzying sense of spacelessness' (Rothenberg in Nechvatal 1999: 397). Form is conceived through, and remains woven in, formlessness, resulting in a 'visual turbulence' or '*flooding-over effect*' that is 'stunning our senses' (Bataille in Nechvatal 1999: 151) while producing a 'cognitive dissonance' (Nechvatal 1999: 159, 161) and

> a corporeal vituperation against the obligations of spatial form, of perspective, of measure, of equilibrium, of dimension, and through this demanding vituperation a condemnation of the psychic world incrusted like a crab-louse on the physique that it incubates or succubates by alleging to have formed it (Artaud in Weiss 1994: 41).

Prehistoric caves, like Granville-Barker's shell, draw attention to their walls as porous membranes since their surfaces are also semi-reliefs oscillating between flatness and depth. Two-dimensional depictions of the outside are conditioned by the physical, three-dimensional and fragmentary conditions of the inside space and the diffused multidirectionality of the tallow lamps' lighting. Drawings proliferate onto all the walls and ceilings and the cave turns into an in/outside space. Without any frame setting limits to the work, Prehistoric artists 'abandoned their oeuvre to the next to come after them in ant-like activity' (Bataille in Nechvatal 1999: 158). Furthermore, to attain those illuminated ceilings and remote corners of the cave's walls they would have 'constructed a scaffold' (Nechvatal 1999: 156). Although the history of scaffolding had been lost at the time of the Renaissance, when papers and books suspiciously disappeared (Robertson 2003: 153), scaffolds are seminal to understanding architecture as an interface that mediates interactions between bodies and the environment. The prosthetic extension of scaffolding to reach for the ceilings of the cave is in itself neither an inside nor an outside space but a transient architectural response to and corporeal inhabitation of the cave's irregular volumes and surfaces, developed further through the drawings on the wall.

‘Scaffolding [–] to storm by mounting a wall by ladders’ (Robertson 2003: 162) – ‘explain[s] what a wall is without being a wall [, thus,] detached from the severity of an origin [,] the scaffold wants to fall away from support’ (Robertson 2003: 79, 163). Prehistoric caves provide a hazy spatiality that serves as an indication as to what a spatial void may be. They implicate body and space by way of a vertiginous and reciprocal decentering. This prehistory nonetheless remains connected to *progress* in terms of adapting and developing tools intensely to engage with the environment. This apparent paradox we already found in Loïe Fuller’s conflation of primitive and natural images with innovative technologies. Craig and Appia similarly sought to apply and innovate the developing technologies of their time to produce similar spatial voids. It is as if the more technical tools were developed to see (lighting and projection), the more some artists appropriated these devices to inquire into imperceptibility. In doing so, they uncovered new spatial forms as well as another configuration of the human subject in which cognition and consciousness are not settled in the interiority of the body but rather, by way of an embodied consciousness, remain entangled in and diffracted by exterior materiality. In this way, they proposed not only the possibility of new kind of subjectivities – ‘metamorphing personalities and destabilized identities’ (Warner 2006: 380) – but also, as a result, a renewed understanding of human relations and interactions.

> Artists, performers, and writers who are grasping the imaginary fabric that swathes and freights our consciousness [by] answering the call to grasp technologies as the prime shaper of human identity […] and recognize their effects, engage with social issues, and revision the seductiveness of illusions as a first step towards dreaming them differently. They can help […] reorientate […] audiences’ perceptions, and shape subjectivity within a mesh of reciprocal and social relations (Warner 2006: 381).

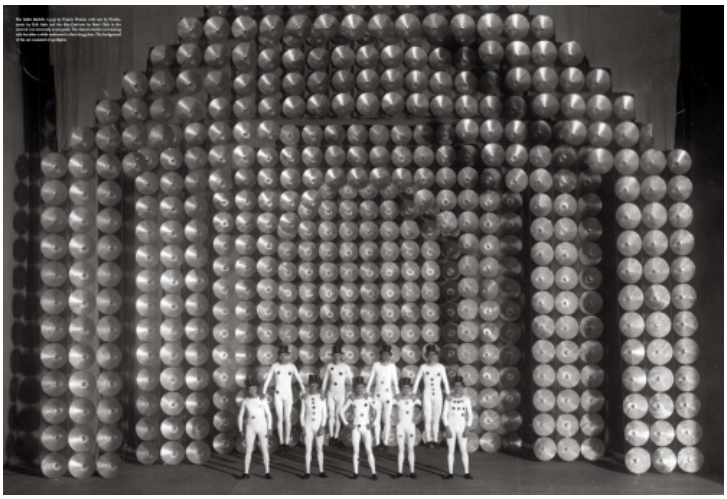
Having deciphered the compound of problems and new opportunities that lie, often since very ancient times, at the core of the speculative threshold, I shall now turn to unpicking how the dismantling of perceptual clarity and the correlated subjective stance it implies were furthered by way of conceiving of and realizing new phenomenal, architectural, bodily and social projects. In line with Craig’s innovations based on lighting and projection technologies, the following section will focus on these as catalysts for problematizing the perceptual act of seeing and the experience of being.

1.7 To see and not to see

Craigian and Appian endeavours to integrate new technologies on stage were paired with conceptions of entirely black or white environments. Blackness and whiteness indeed provided surfaces with high sensitivity to lighting phenomena: by absorbing much of light's photons blackness enables the activity of isolating and sharpening, while photons bounce off and slide on white surfaces. Black and white presented artists with much potential to explore lighting phenomena that ranged from the near absence of light to its blinding presence. While blackness and whiteness became rigidly organized in cinemas, the Avant-Gardes' ethos of interdisciplinarity sought to bring projection technologies into hybrid artforms of a performative and/or sculptural kind. In doing so, they challenged the passive and precise positioning of the live body vis-à-vis (or rather outside of) the filmic image and looked for the exact opposite: the multi-positioning of screens, projections in relation to, and as well as, live bodies. As darkness was more effective visually to control the filmic medium onstage, as opposed to bright whiteness, which is rather detrimental to the perception of projected imagery, it is alongside the increasing ubiquity of film and cinemas that scenography can be seen to shift its developing interest in the attenuation of visual clarity from blinding intensities of light to the quasi-absence of light. This section explores various Avant-Gardes, to which Craig and Appia paid much attention, and how their radical playfulness with technological innovations offers important instances of the foundations upon which the black box space would be realized while, at the same time, denoting more critical social projects and revisions of the human.

In the Surrealist ballet *Relâche* (1924) Francis Picabia's scenic design was comprised of a unique cyclorama: an 'enormous backdrop of metal discs, each reflecting a powerful light bulb' (Goldberg 2001: 90), which would occasionally flash and blind the audience from perceiving the performing bodies on stage. During the piece's intermission, the auditorium was plunged into darkness and the closed curtain would become a screen for the projection of Picabia and René Clair's film *Entr'acte*, which was comprised of unusual camera perspectives showing Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray playing chess, as well as views of ballet dancers from underneath. Immersive relations between stage and auditorium were orchestrated in three ways: the backdrop of light bulbs onstage illuminating (spilling over) the auditorium, the curtain that delineates the boundary between stage and auditorium turning into a screen that brings another kind of spatiality (from below) to the audience, and, at the beginning of the

performance, the performers walking from the auditorium seats to the stage. As part of its interdisciplinary rejection of defined artistic fields, *Relâche* itself is a term traditionally used to refer to a closed theatre: *no performance tonight*. Yet *Entr'acte* refers to an intervallic moment between acts which therefore implies the experience of performance on its peripheral, off-stage, borders.



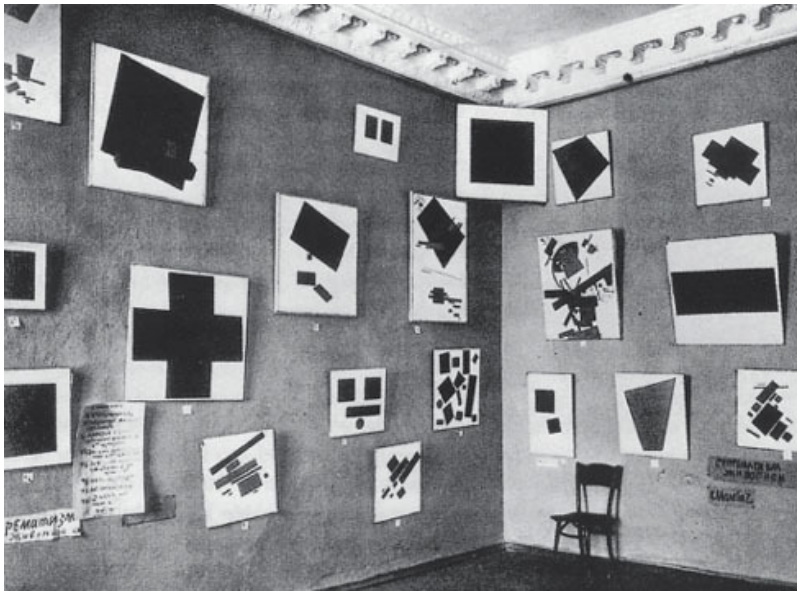
32 Francis Picabia & Erik Satie, *Relâche*, 1924



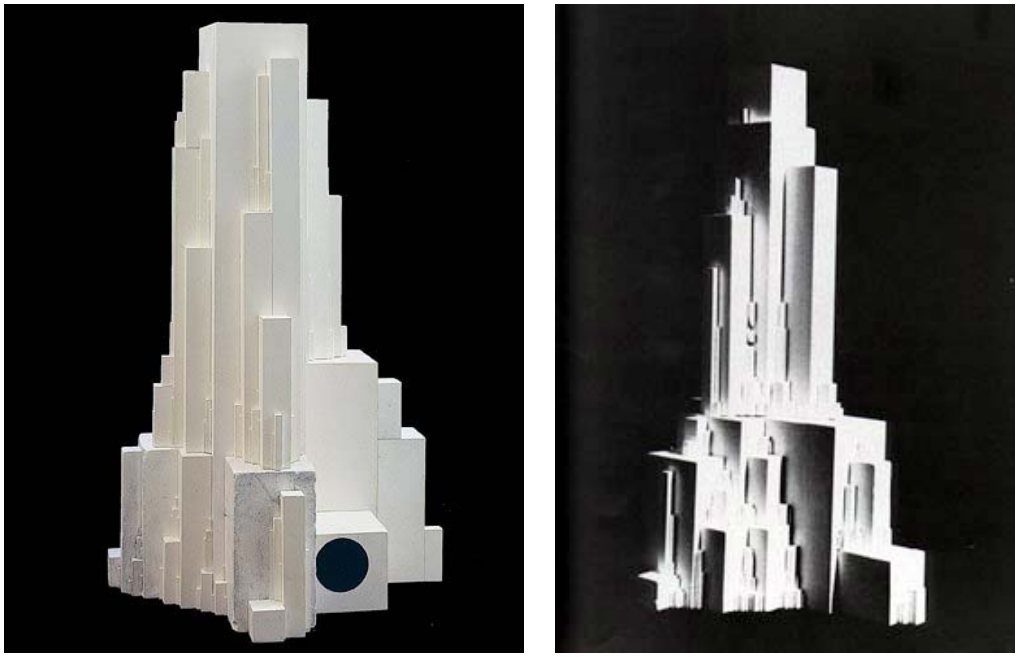
33 Francis Picabia & René Clair, *Entr'acte*, 1924

Since Picabia called *Relâche* an 'Instantaneist' ballet, the work can be said to resist altogether the immediacy of performance in order to formulate an understanding of instantaneity as an in-between experience in perceptual terms: privileging short delayed moments between perceptual stimulation and visual processing, those intermittent seconds in which visual content has not yet taken shape as such but still occurs as

flickering abstract particles that are remnants of past perception. Such an attempt to produce ‘the loss of direct vision’ (Crary 2001: 226) suggests the ‘disintegration of a faith in [visual] perception’ (Virilio in Crary 2001: 226). As with Kasimir Malevich’s *Black Square* (1915), we confront ‘a visual image that tells of the impossibility of seeing, embodied in an object whose very reason for existing is to be seen’ (Morrison 2006: 140). Though this may seem negatively paradoxical, the contradiction here does not prevent the work from offering productive developments. Indeed, in his *0.10 Exhibition* (1915), Malevich presented *Black Square* in the corner of the exhibition space, thereby disrupting that architectural element which signals the integrity of the container as a closed inside. This subtle attack on the architectural space then takes on a much larger scale in Malevich’s speculative architectural projects titled *Architekton* (1923–6). Although those projects present models of speculative buildings of a rather monolithic kind, Malevich also developed them in photographic records and collages, revealing their highly fragmentary appearance under their own lighting and within the urban landscape. In the photo-montage *Architekton in front of a Skyscraper* (1924), the work is shown as a parasitic and composite structure of surfaces and volumes that derives traces from the neighbouring skyscrapers, and whose disparity not only disunifies itself but also the buildings upon which it is grafted.



34 Kasimir Malevich, *Black Squares* in *0.10 Exhibition*, 1915



35 Kasimir Malevich, *Architekton Gota,* 1923



36 Kasimir Malevich, *Architekton in front of a Skyscraper*, 1924

Architekton in front of a Skyscraper echoes and complicates further the introduction of screens into the urban landscape. However, as a screen it does not offer its own content but rather reflects and diffracts, like a broken mirror, the adjacent surfaces and forms of the skyscrapers. It bridges two buildings in a way that makes them seem to overlap in a mishmash of forms. Equally concerned with confounding vision, Marcel Duchamp's work sought to engage viewers further by immersing them within overlapping materialities by 'plac[ing] mirrored pieces of glass on the floor so that the room and the viewer are mirrored simultaneously' (Duchamp in Iles 2001: 38)

as if ‘hang[ing] a geometry book from the balcony […] so that the wind would tear through its pages’ (Duchamp in Dunhill 2008: 11–12).

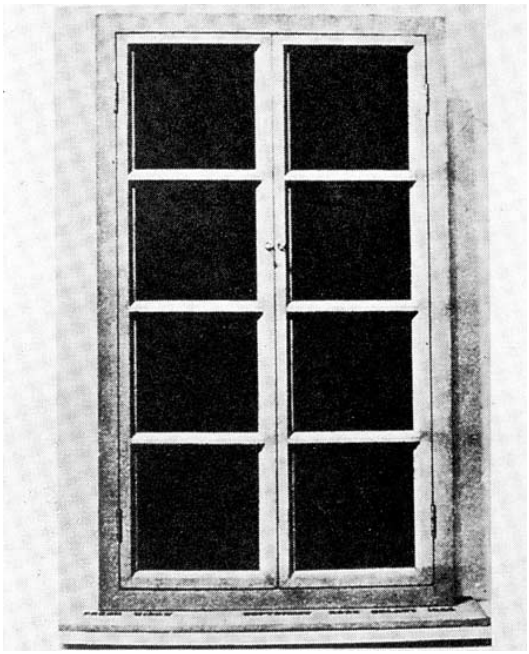
Blurring borders between bodies and space informs ‘Duchamp’s theory of the “infra-thin” with which he associated “division, transparency and ‘cottage’”’ (Iles 2001: 36): ‘reflection from a mirror – or glass – / flat / convex – infra-thin separation – better / than screen, because it indicates/interval (taken in one sense) and/screen (taken in another sense)’ (Duchamp in Iles 2001: 66). The infra-thin demarcates an intentional problem in locating and positioning that which is empirically separate. This problem raises cognitive difficulties for the audience as Duchamp’s ‘art [is] still in a raw state, which must be “refined” as pure sugar from molasses by the spectator’ (Duchamp in Lebel 1959: 78).

> the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act (Duchamp in Lebel 1959: 78).

Considering such visual experience with respect to the filmic medium, Duchamp created artworks such as *The Small Glass* (1918) or *Anemic Cinema* (1926) where he orchestrated ‘the dismantling of the two-dimensional picture plane’ through ‘multiple perspectives’ that countered ‘the hypnosis induced by the pitch-blackness of the cinema, within which the single bright screen seizes our minds’ (Iles 2001: 34). *The Small Glass* has another title: *To be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*. The work is ‘to be looked *at* like a screen, but it also instructs the viewer to look through it from behind, like an aperture’ (Joselit in Iles 2001: 36). It is a ‘slippery surface’ producing ‘a movement away from the opposition of surface and depth in favour of an awareness of the oscillating and constantly changing movement from one into another’ (Imperiale 2000: 5):

> [m]y eye riveted to the magnifying glass, I see – or rather I don’t see – the work vanish from my visual field only for there to appear an inverted and reduced image of the gallery […] where the object is exhibited [and when] by chance another visitor passes [and] appears […] upside down and in my former place, since I was initially on that side of the glass where the title/instruction sheet was to be read […] a missed encounter has just taken place [: because] between the two of us was nothing but the instrument of this encounter [and] since he occupies the place where I was, it is also with myself that I had this missed rendezvous to which I arrived late, and it is with himself that he will have, or that he already has a rendezvous, *with all kinds of delays* (De Duve in Iles 2001: 35).

Duchamp employed the Avant-Gardes' immersive subversion of artistic tradition where 'painting was no longer an exterior scene, the setting of a theatrical spectacle' (Boccioni in Goldberg 2001: 14) and 'the spectator [must] live at the centre of the painted action' (Soffici in Goldberg 2001: 14). As such, the position of the viewer's body dislodges and is dislodged by the body of the artwork. But Duchamp confounded and *dis-positioned* the viewer in both physical and discursive ways by underlying the works with textual structures (titles) that conflict with the objects attached to them in such a way that materiality and discourse interactively coalesce to prevent the settling of meaning. The window-like quality of looking through the *Small Glass* turns against the very tradition of the pictorial window that precisely framed and secured meaning onto the world behind, and continued to permeate new technologies and media such as cinema. This is most conspicuous in *Fresh Widow* (1920) where Duchamp presents us with an actual 'French window' with the title an obvious pun: on one hand, the title seems to offer meaning inasmuch as the window has been somehow veiled in darkness like a widow; yet, on the other hand, the object is not entirely veiled, only its glass panels are and thus what is here mourned, or contested, is the window's content as it now frames and focuses on darkness.



37 Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920

Thus, the piece is not physically positioned at eye-level but much lower, touching on the floor as if it had just been dismantled off the wall or is about to be inserted into the

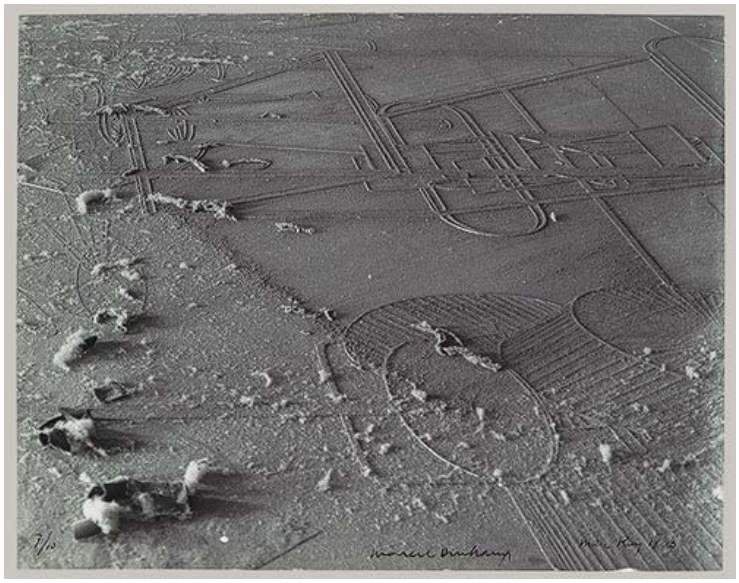
wall. *Fresh Widow* is a paradigmatic Duchampian attempt at suggesting positions in order the better to reject them, thereby making the artwork relationally unstable. By placing this window on the floor, the object becomes less divided from the viewer and more part of his or her own space, but this window has no function anymore, and consequently inviting the viewer similarly to accept and immerse into its *disposition* and *dysfunction*. This was already in place in the *Small Glass*, for looking at a close surface and looking at another one at a distance cannot be simultaneously achieved by the human eye and requires different locations and positions for each action.



38 Marcel Duchamp, *The Large Glass*, 1915-65

Duchamp pursued the *Small Glass* on a larger scale with *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23). *The Large Glass* can be associated with a window as much as with a door due to its material, size and shape. Like the *Small Glass*, it has physical limits but seeks to unframe perception by requiring us to attend both to its fragmented surface and the fragmenting view through it towards the environment. Duchamp requested that the work should not be presented against a wall but perpendicular to one so as to allow viewers to observe it from all around and to see other viewers through it. As such, the piece also constitutes (a fragment of) wall in itself, but this wall-door-window does not regulate the audience's perceptual and physical mobility. Quite to the contrary, it operates as a parasitic architectural

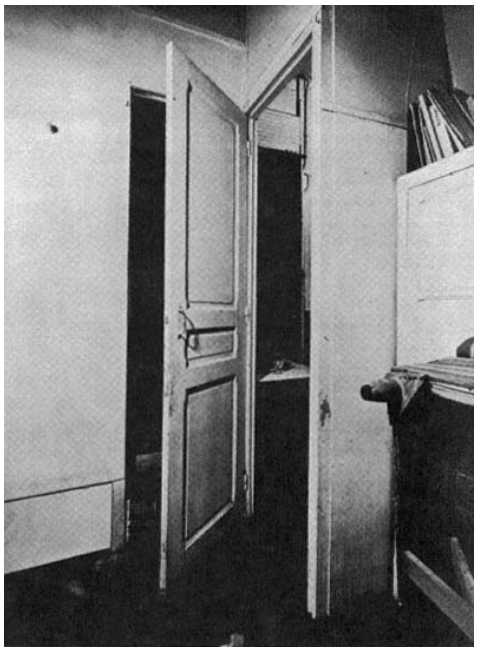
component within the museological space, in which the textures of the artwork, the environment and the viewers all collide without settling down into the one and only image. In this way, Duchamp initiates an exploration of an architectural domain that is equivocally embedding and embedded within live moving bodies, resulting in an embodied object. And the object of *The Large Glass* had indeed been conceived like an architectural body. In Man Ray's photograph of *The Large Glass* called *Dust Breeding* (1920) the artwork is shown to lay on (and as) a floor covered in dust. From this short sleep of the object, Duchamp would retain some of the dust, glued in some etched areas of the glass, before it was brought back to a vertical, upright, position. The process of realization, like the presentation of the finished object makes it comparable to a body.



39 Man Ray, *Dust Breeding*, 1920

Duchamp's intervention in the architectural domain was taken further within his own home. In his Paris flat, he realized *Door: 11 rue Larrey* (1927) and became both creator and audience to an architectural element that impacted on his life and the lives of others on a daily basis – inasmuch as the normally unequivocal function of the door as an open or closed framing device was subverted in that it would simultaneously open and close, connect and disconnect different rooms at the same time, therein offering to multiple bodies simultaneous possibilities of relation and interaction with a singular door. But it is in his very last work, *Given: 1. the waterfall 2. the illuminating gas* (1946–66), that Duchamp radicalized his subversive approach to positionality in architectural and bodily terms, and, as such, provided a clearer delineation of the multi-

positional subversion of both the filmic medium's relation to architectural and corporeal matters in particular and assumed norms of visuality in general.



40 Marcel Duchamp, *Door: 11 rue Larrey*, 1927



41 Marcel Duchamp, *Given*, 1946-66

Given first presents a large wooden door integrated seamlessly within the white walls of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This door cannot be opened and functions instead as an accidental window since there are broken apertures in its wood that allow it to be peered through to see what is on the other side. As such, the work can only be seen by one viewer at a time, who must bend her body and adjust her eyes to the holes – a position that cannot be sustained for very long. In addition, the wood between the holes imposes a dark gap in the field of the viewer looking through them: an effect of cropping happens to the viewer, which can be partly modulated by the viewer's eyes' movement. The content behind the door is a landscape presenting a naked female body whose legs are wide open and whose distorted genitals are projected at the forefront of the image. Her head cannot be seen as it is obscured by grass. The illuminating gas lamp appears three-dimensional and working but its light doesn't seem to be the only source of lighting in the space. The waterfall on the other hand appears two-dimensional like most of the landscape, which nonetheless seems to extend to the apparently three-dimensional grass bursting around and upon the figure. The cold artificial and static plasticity of the body and the landscape is juxtaposed with the warm and vibrating light of the gas lamp. Though the flickering of the gas lamp is like the incessant flickers of early cinema, the filmic image's smooth flattening of the three-dimensional world is here disclosed as an irresolvable intersection of two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality thereby impelling the 'blossoming of perspective' (Haralambidou 2006) out of 'the centralism of perspectival vision [and] the linear viewpoint, after the fashion of the cinematographic sequence' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 68).

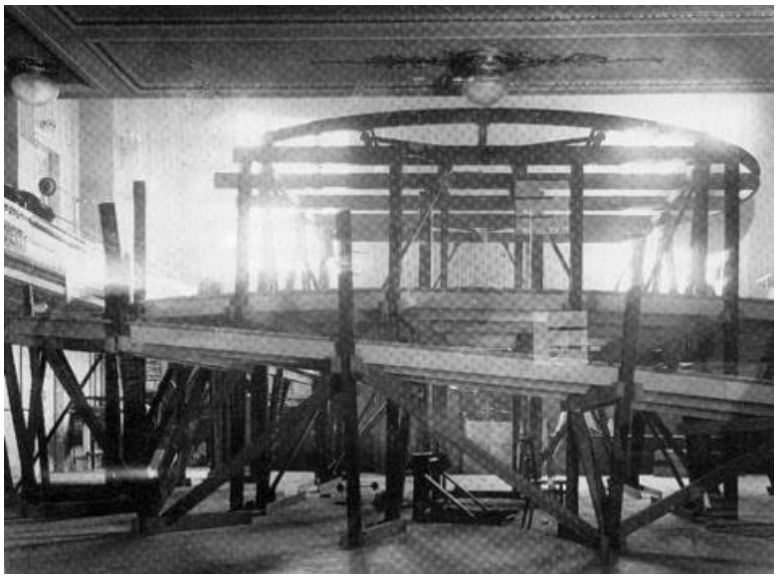
Further enhanced by the surface of the door visually obliterating some of the three-dimensional content, *Given* offers 'a new understanding of vision as active process, proposing a cognitive operation that is subjective, contingent and constructive' (Demos in Haralambidou 2006: 10). Indeed, the physical and visual struggle required from the viewer is paired with hermeneutic problems linked to the rather unhelpful title and the presence of a headless body. '[I]ndeterminate, flexible and transposable' (Demos in Haralambidou 2006: 11), *Given* 'signal[s] a space where the reified "identities" of classic genders lie defeated' (Demos in Haralambidou 2006: 11). Duchamp appears to take on Da Vinci's *sfumato* within three-dimensional terms in such a way that *Given* could be 'the result of Mona Lisa's fall from her balcony into the landscape. During the fall she undergoes a transformation: she loses her clothes and blossoms into three dimensions' (Haralambidou 2006: 6–7). *Given* orchestrates a three-

dimensional tension between the vertical format of the portrait and the horizontal format of the landscape. As a result, Duchamp created an unruly, destabilized and destabilizing, three-dimensionality that attempts to immerse the viewer in turn. This is evident in the way that the female body's obscured head parallels how the viewer's head is similarly placed in the concealed situation of a voyeur: a 'voyeur [who] is not, therefore, in a position of pure manipulation of an object, albeit distant, but is always threatened by the potential exteriorisation of his own function' (Rose 1986: 194).

Thus in *Given* the three-dimensionality of viewer and space is part of 'a multimedia space of inquiry […] the space of perspective's other, which breaches the picture plane': 'a space of "becoming", where materiality always holds within itself the virtual possibilities of its visual transformation that extends beyond any notion of a static material reality allowing sightlines to multiply endlessly and identities to metamorphose in the act of viewing' (Demos in Haralambidou 2006: 11). In this way, Duchamp suggests the potential for bodies and spaces to be reconsidered according to the uncertainty of an ever-shifting three-dimensionality. Such concern with a volumetric perception freed from perspectival orders was also, at the time of Duchamp, a potent strategy for creation within the Bauhaus movement. Indeed, in the Bauhaus, the rejection of visual clarity and the correlated blossoming of new potentials of three-dimensionality fell under the theoretical concept of *Raumempfindung* or 'felt volume': 'a space filled with a soft pliable substance' (Schlemmer in Goldberg 2001: 104).

By investigating the kinetic animation of volumetric spatiality and weaving the body into it, Bauhaus produced works in which the experience of seeing involved acquainting oneself with degrees of difficulty in seeing, or progressively peering through the various depths and layers of the visual stimuli. In Frederick Kiesler's 'endless stage' or *Space Stage* (1924), a scaffolded and revolving set upstages any attention paid to two-dimensional surfaces. Like Craig's Screens, Kiesler's set was put in motion by means of the performers pushing its various parts. The scenic structure itself becomes comprehensible, as a spiral, only by means of its interaction with bodies. Yet during this interaction bodies and scenery are entangled and obscure one another. Thus, both performing and viewing bodies are engaged in a constantly changing perceptual experience without a visual centre and where the entire volume of space becomes a multiplicity of perceptual points. No longer frontal but spiralling, the three-dimensional space designed as repudiation of surfaces makes it possible to recover an unruly 360° 'thousand-eyed' (Moholy-Nagy in Goldberg 2001: 117) perception. Such

perception always exceeds what the individual human can grasp, yet, as Kiesler demonstrated with his further works, this perceptual excess and the difficulty of settling the body in and in relation to space can be productively imagined in everyday life: see the *Mobile Library* (1939), the *Endless House* (1950) and the *City in Space* (1925).



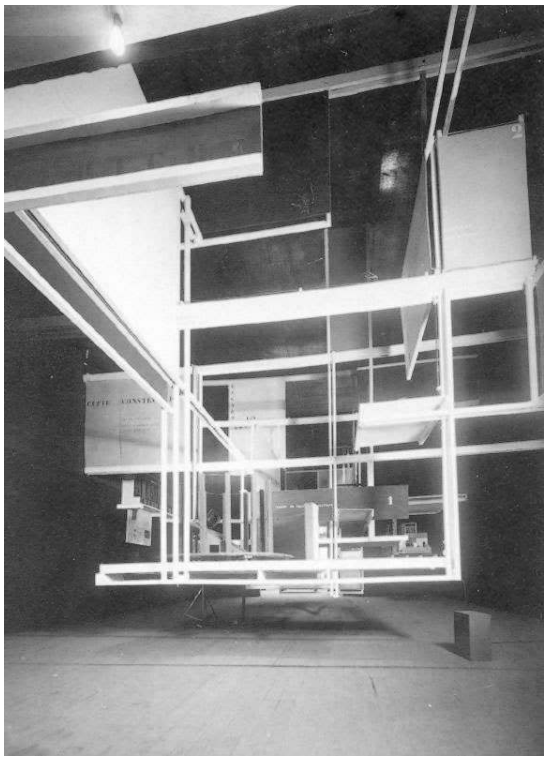
42 Frederick Kiesler, *Space Stage*, 1924



43 Frederick Kiesler, *Inside Bucephalus*, 1964



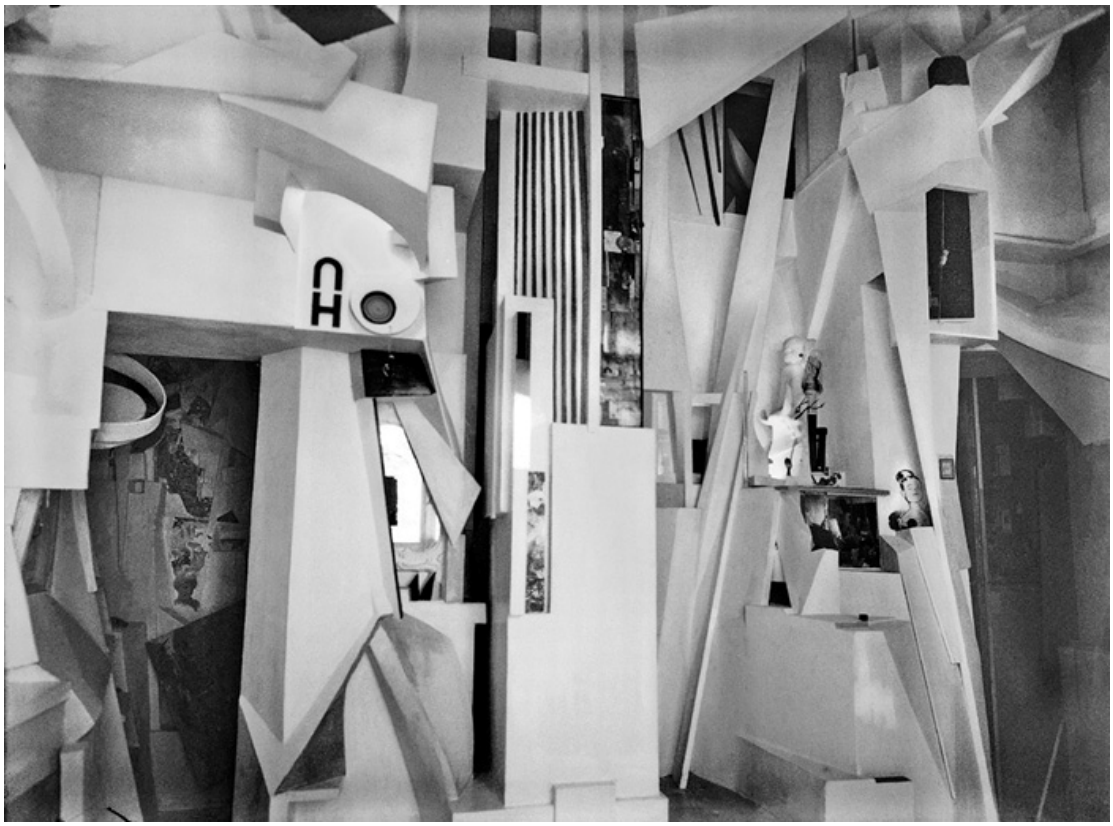
44 Frederick Kiesler, *Endless House Model,* 1950



45 Frederick Kiesler, *City in Space*, 1925

Further still, Bauhaus artist Kurt Schwitters implemented felt volume in the everyday architecture of his home. In 1923, Schwitters started his *Merzbau* (1923–30): a growing composition of found objects brought in by Schwitters and others visiting his flat that covered the walls and ceilings and even devoured some of the floor of his flat. This accumulative three-dimensional collage coagulated under the white paint Schwitters applied to it, forming a grotto-like environment in which the pre-existing corners and surfaces of the architecture have disappeared, giving way to an ungraspable array of volumes modulated by changes of natural and artificial lights. Schwitters first

titled the work *KdeE*, standing for *Die Kathedral des erotischen Elends*, 'The Cathedral of Erotic Misery' (Burns-Gamard 2000: 87), thereby referencing, as Craig's *Passion* did, a cathedral-like environment; yet *Merzbau*'s volumetric complexity emphasized a maze-like and cave-like pre-Renaissance spatiality 'like the labyrinths under Chartres' (Burns-Gamard 2000: 124).

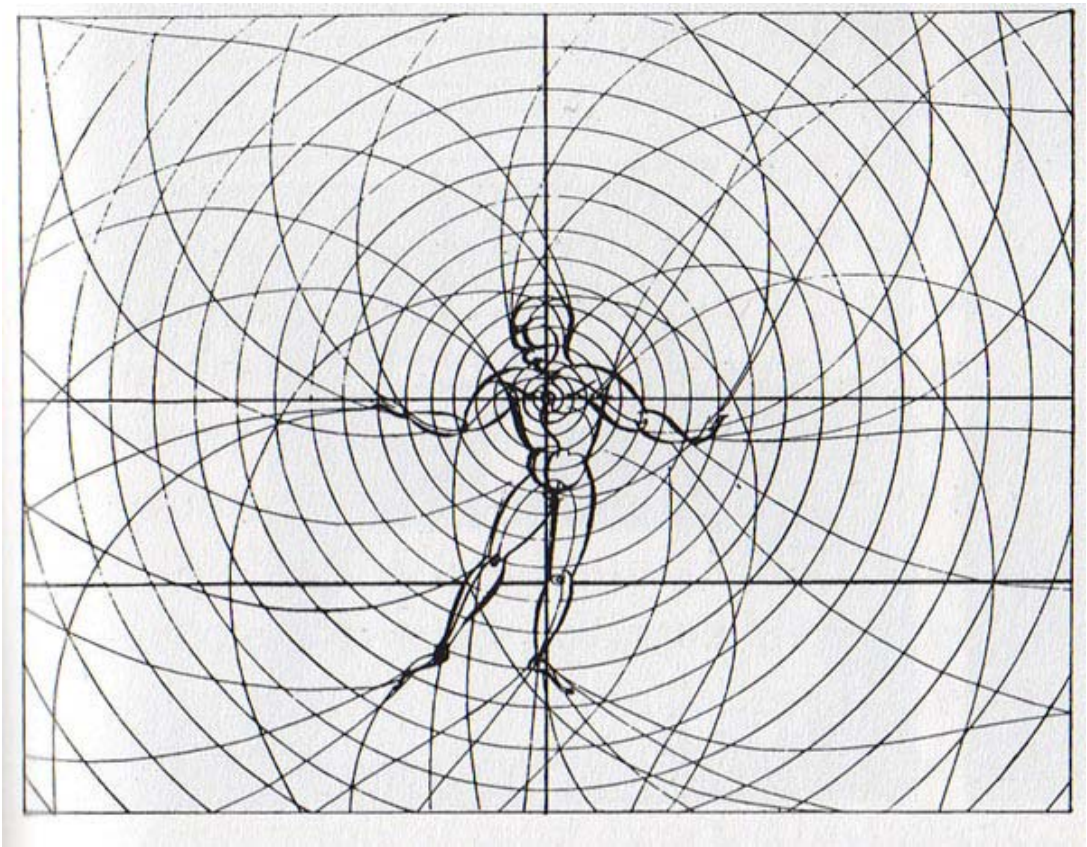


46 Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, *c*1930

Disorientation in *Merzbau* is also dramaturgical and philosophical as the work is composed of the remnants of the artist and others. As such, it carries out Schwitters' artistic philosophy, which he called *Merz*: a conceptual intersection of art and life in terms of a 'shock' and a 'change of state' (Burns Gamard 2000: 117) that challenges individual identity. 'Anyone could do or "be" Merz' (Burns Gamard 2000: 117). Thus, Schwitters sought to advocate his *Merz* philosophy to friends, family and strangers by applying it to both private and public environments: alongside his *Merzbau*, he developed a 'Merz-Theatre [of] solid, liquid and gaseous bodies' (Schwitters in Drain 1995: 24), for which he created the tonal performance *Die Ursonate* (1922–32) in which 'he mesmerized his audience with his staccato voice' (Goldberg 2001: 71). Transposing this bodied and aural fragmentation into the architecture of his flat required an

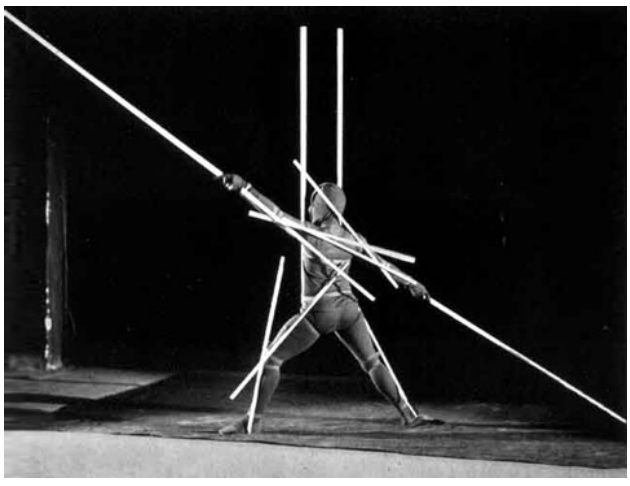
unravelling of the geometric axis of the built space, which also entailed the dismantling of the possessive proprietary demarcation of the home as an identity marker.

Considered a degenerate artist by the Nazi regime, Schwitters had to relocate his *Merzbau* to other flats where he moved to avoid repression, until he had to flee Germany and landed in the UK where his last Merzbau was revived one last time. The political obstacles Schwitters encountered made it difficult for him to apply his *Merz* approach to the body as well as to space. To understand the impact of felt volume on corporeality more fully therefore we might turn to the head of the Bauhaus stage, Oskar Schlemmer. Drawing from Craig's *Übermarionette*, Schlemmer named the performer a figure of art, or '*Kunstfigur*' (Carlson 1993: 353). In his drawing *Mensch & Kunstfigur* (1925), Schlemmer shows a performer who is connected to the entire volume of space around him. In the performance *Slat Dance* (1927), prosthetics extend the body's relation to its surrounding volume and thereby challenge and reconfigure bodily motion. The performer's sculptural decomposition and puppet-like motion sought to articulate the 'dismembered, crazy, meaningless, foolish, banal and mysterious' presence of the body as in Schlemmer's *Dance of the Stage Wings* (Goldberg 2001: 119).



47 Oskar Schlemmer, *Mensch & Kunstfigur*, 1925

The ambiguities at play in animating spatial volume were thus imported onto and supported by scenic materials and performing bodies alike: scenery could be engineered to disperse throughout the volume of the stage, and so too could the performing body. Following Craig's Screens, Schlemmer also found lighting to be an effective medium to link body and scenery in a felt volume: 'we have constructed simple flats of wood and white canvas which can be slid back and forth on a series of parallel tracks and can be used as screens for light projection' (Schlemmer in Baugh 2005: 124). Schlemmer's geometric approach was drawn from mathematical innovations such as Georgy Voronoi's mathematical decomposition of the metric space to understand natural phenomena like rainfall or the growth of forests. So-called Voronoi diagrams model, in the artificial conditions of geometry, an approximation to the visual complexities at play in the spatial and volumetric distribution of such phenomena. Felt volume pursued this decomposition through solid materials, performing bodies and lighting: in *Metal Dance* (1929), Schlemmer made extensive use of reflective materials such as scenery and costume to diffract light waves and, in return, disturb the overall volumetric content onstage (body included).



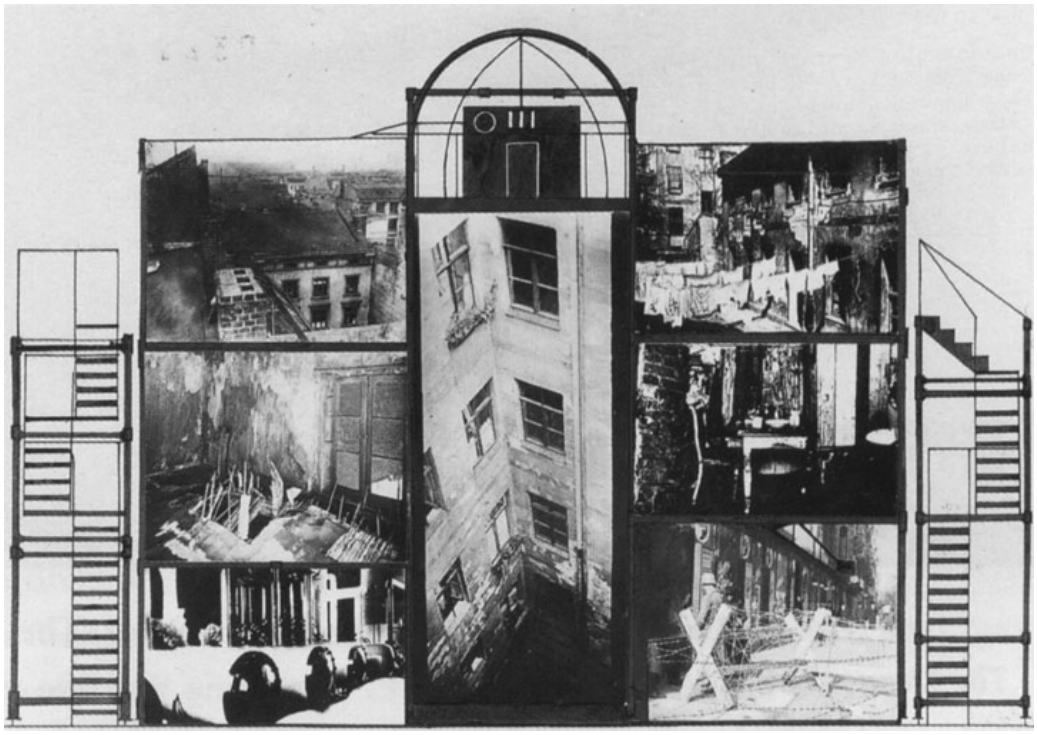
48 Oskar Schlemmer, *Slat Dance*, 1927



49 Oskar Schlemmer *Metal Dance*, 1929

While lighting enables the enhancing and complicating of spatial volumes, projection on the other hand is prone to flattening the environment. Following on from the practices of Loïe Fuller and Craig in using complex scenic structures to make use of

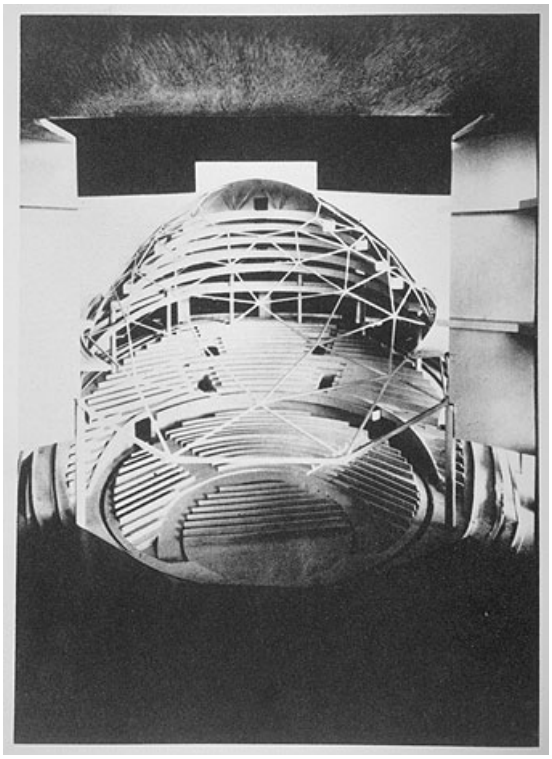
projections in three-dimensional and volumetric ways, Bauhaus artist Erwin Piscator developed more advanced kinetic spatial structures to host, and to challenge, the two-dimensionality of filmic projection. In *Hoppla Such Is Life* (1927) Piscator's revolving set formed a tower of adjacent screens that juxtaposed multiple filmic projections on a vertical axis yet in each projection presents different perspectival camera – one-eyed – viewpoints, thus confounding the vertical singularity of the tower. Piscator's screens taken together point to various perspectives diverging from the overall perspective produced by the tower. As a large moving body the tower can then be inhabited by performing bodies who can then be related to the projections in different yet simultaneous ways.



50 Erwin Piscator, *Hoppla Such Is Life*, 1927

Such an attempt to embed filmic projections into the three-dimensionality of space and bodies was further developed into a never realized theatre-house by Bauhaus' grand master architect Walter Gropius. The plans of his *Total Theatre Project* (1926) show a conflation of various past forms of theatre-houses, resulting in an arena-like spherical environment in which 'projection screens surrounded the interior like wallpaper suspended some distance from the walls – behind the stage and throughout the auditorium' (Baugh 2005: 126). Rejecting the positionality of the 'deep stage, which

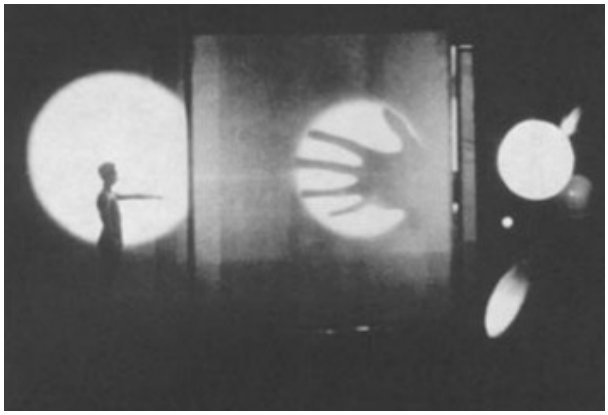
lets the spectator look at the other world of the stage as through a window, or which separates [itself from him] by a curtain' (Gropius in Goldberg 2001: 114), Gropius sought to create a 'flexible building, capable of transforming and refreshing the mind by its spatial impact alone': a 'Playhouse […] made to dissolve into the shifting, illusionary space of the imagination [to] become the scene of action itself' (Gropius in Baugh 2005: 160). By diffracting the stage image all around the audience, *Total Theatre Project* opposed any 'optic', 'stolid and dormant […] geometry of vision' (Evans in Gooding 2006) to produce a multidirectional perception and multipositional situation similar to how 'the world is around me, not in front of me' (Merleau-Ponty in Iles 2001: 72). By positing a perception where 'our attempt at focusing must give way to the vacant all-embracing stare' (Ehrenzweig in Morris 1969: 881), Gropius enacted a counter-position to the Wagnerian 'Total Work of Art': 'what we need is not the *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* alongside and separated from which life flows by, but a synthesis of all the vital impulses spontaneously forming itself into the all-embracing *Gesamtwerk* (life) which abolishes all isolation' (Moholy-Nagy 1969: 17).



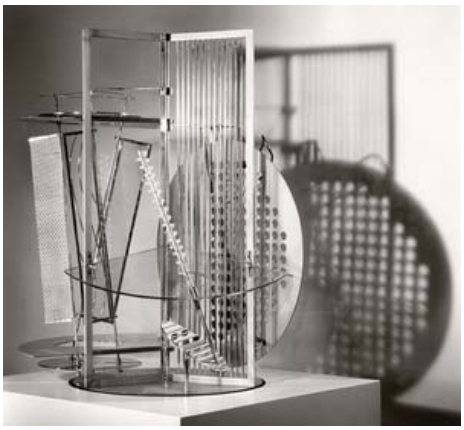
51 Walter Gropius, *Total Theatre Project*, 1926

In the Bauhaus, the relation between body and space is conducted by prosthetic extensions and technologies that affect both in terms of motion and perception. That is

to say, whilst the body is placed ‘on an equal footing with the other formative media’ (Moholy-Nagy in Carlson 1993: 353), these media are equally redirected towards corporeality in three-dimensional, movable and even wearable terms. It is not a matter of redefining the body in technological terms but, quite the contrary, of reconfiguring technology within embodied terms so as to draw out a ‘recognition of that which [in the body] can *not* be mechanized’ (Schlemmer 1961: 264). This constitutes a critical approach to technology since, at the time, corporeality was undergoing an increasing mechanization found in societal domains such as industrial production and warfare which were underlined by broader and extreme political ideologies. The body of the social subject was required to be more obedient and controllable. Against such a politically normative and socializing conception of technology, Bauhaus projects such as László Moholy-Nagy’s ‘Theatre of Totality’ conceived of a radically opposite understanding of technology as a ‘mechanized eccentricity’ that formed an ‘ORGANISM’ (Moholy-Nagy in Packer and Jordan 2001: 16) with the body, and thus sought to expand rather than limit bodily life. Pursuing Craig’s interest in ‘the relation of light to [the] scene […] akin to that of the bow of the violin, or of the pen to the paper’ (Craig in Baugh 2005: 124), Moholy-Nagy’s theatre was to be achieved through lighting by asking the ‘ACTION OF LIGHT [to be] equal to that of all other theatre media’ (Moholy-Nagy in Baugh 2005: 124).



52 László Moholy-Nagy, *Light Play*, n.d.

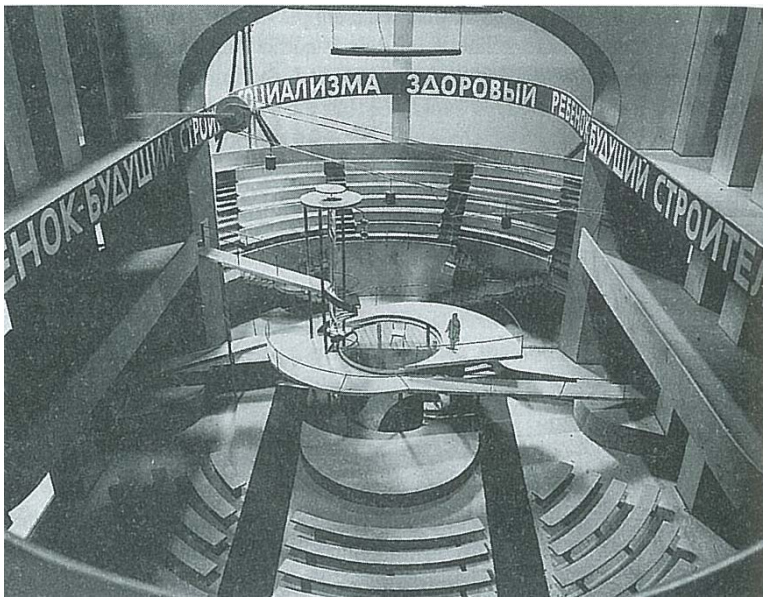


53 Moholy-Nagy, *Light Prop*, 1922-30

Accordingly, he developed his famous kinetic lighting source *Light Prop* (1922–30): opposed to a follow-spot that would highlight the body in space, *Light Prop* was meant to stand visibly on stage and deploy lighting states and shadows that would visually fracture the stage’s volume. Between a light source and a projector, the physical

presence of *Light Prop* on stage would have emphasized the levelling up of the scenographic apparatus' presence to that of the performers, and the levelling down of the performers' presence to that of the scenography.

Light Prop was never implemented in this way and instead became an autonomous sculptural object full of unrealized potentials. Nonetheless, parallel to its development, Constructivist artists can be found similarly exploring ways of embedding bodies within fragmentary lighting phenomena such as El Lissitzky's approach to scenography which strove to create an 'electromechanical peep show' (Lissitzky in Salter 2010: 20) where 'beams of light, refracted through prisms and mirrors follow[ed] the movement of bodies' (Lissitzky in Salter 2010: 22). Again these innovative conceptions of embodied lighting states are correlated with the revision of the theatre space. In 1926, Constructivist artists Vsevolod Meyerhold, El Lissitzky and Sergei Tretyakov began to collaborate on a new production called *I Want a Baby* (1926–8) which would lead them to conceive of a multidirectional and scaffolded theatre-house. Inspired by the Carnivalesque Commedia Dell'Arte's Russian equivalent Balagan, such bodily space as a theatre would have better supported Meyerhold's approach to performing as a mode of scenographic embodiment.

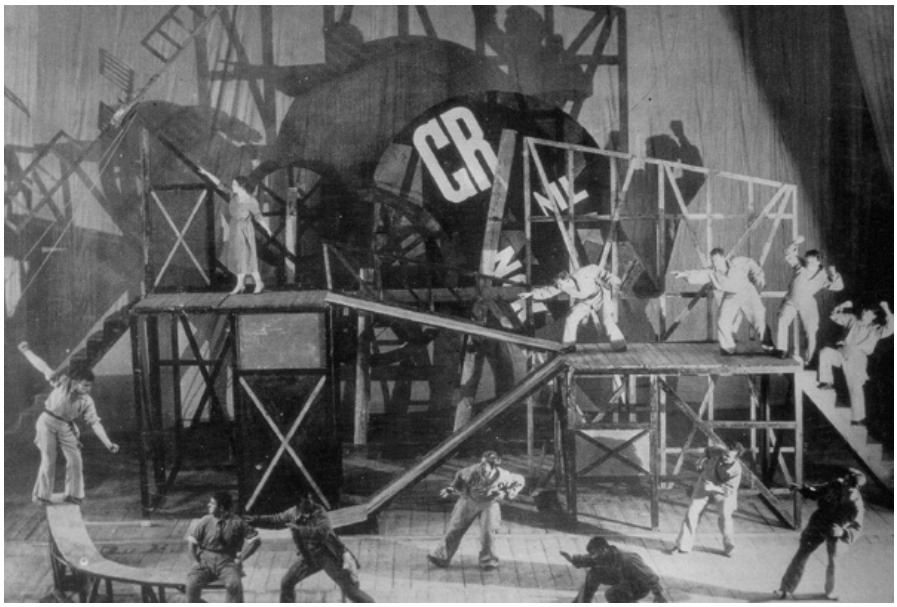


54 Vsevolod Meyerhold, *I Want a Baby* (reconstructed model-box), 1928

Indeed, what Meyerhold called biomechanics asked of performers to weave together animate and inanimate kinetic qualities by adjusting their physicality to the materiality of spatial elements in another puppet-like kinesis:

> the art of the actor is the art of plastic forms in space, he must study the mechanics of his body […] organising his material [so that] the creation by the actor of plastic forms in the space of the stage is a manifestation of the force of the human organism (Meyerhold in Baugh 2005: 63–4).

Similarly, the scenography's 'raw material[ity]' would also comprise the 'juxtaposition of surfaces and shapes of *tangible materials* [which allowed] artists […] to throw away their brushes and take up axes, picks and hammers to hack stage sets out of the materials of raw nature' (Meyerhold in Baugh 2005: 71). Thus, to support the innovation of new forms in the actor's body, responsive and kinetic sceneries made of scaffolds became landmarks in Meyerhold's performances. Their radicalism required the modification of architectural aspects of the theatre-house.



55 Vsevolod Meyerhold, *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, 1922

In *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922) stage designer 'Lyubov Popova took the brutally stripped, and "liberated", stage of Meyerhold's theatre and made a construction of timber, metal components and minimal paint' to consolidate 'actors and [scenic] construction [as] an orchestrated device' where 'actors ran, walked and manipulated the "machine" in their performance' (Baugh 2005: 89). But for *I Want a Baby*, 'Lissitzky created a scenography of multiple stages that took over the complete interior of the theatre, entirely obliterating the division between stage and audience' (Baugh 2005: 73) and propelling the need to revise the theatre-house entirely:

> [i]n 1930, inspired by the thinking of the Bauhaus, Meyerhold planned to create an adaptable theatre allowing performance in different conformations [where] the romantic vision of a popular audience, bonded by the unifying spatial principles of Greece and Rome, seemed to be over (Wiles 2003: 203).

Although the stage was to be divided into two parts –

> 1. The proscenium, constructed according to architectural principles, intended exclusively for 'reliefs' and the figures of the actors (who perform only in this area). The proscenium to have a forestage projecting deep into the auditorium. No footlights. No prompt box.
>
> 2. The upstage area, intended exclusively for painted backdrops, is not used by the actors at all, except in the finale … and even then they will appear only *on the dividing line between the two areas* (Meyerhold in Baugh 2005: 68-9; my italics)

– performers were to embody both parts like oscillating *semi-relief* presences. As such, Meyerhold was pursuing the elaboration of conflicting corporeal interplays which, like his forestage penetrating the auditorium, formulated another tactic for weaving space and bodies together. The 'intensification of the play of bright light – both from the stage lighting and from the lights in the auditorium […] left on throughout the performance' (Meyerhold in Baugh 2005: 69), similar to how the 'set was to be on split levels with transparent floors [,] disorienting and asymmetrical [, seeking] to exploit not the […] unity of his audience but its divisions' (Wiles 2003: 203).

Such heterogeneous multipositionality informed Meyerhold's dehierarchizing 'conception of the theatre as an artist's "studio"' (Wiles 2003: 252) as it required the '[theatre] artist to become both artist and engineer' (Meyerhold in Baugh 2005: 63) and thus 'to develop a technical personnel as important as the actors, one whose job would be to bring [the scenographic] apparatus into view, undisguised and as an end in itself' (Loew in Goldberg 2005: 114). Importantly then, dehierarchization is exported to the audience as their included, yet diffracted, experience echoes the performer's embodied and conflicting relation with a fragmentary set of objects, materials, structures and lighting phenomena. These experiments are part of the development of what I have called the gloom. Their consequence can be modelled in the theoretical terms of a critical and innovative aesthetic:

> [B]y revolutionizing the relations between part and whole, the constellation strikes at the very heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to

> the organizing power of the totality. The aesthetic is then turned against the aesthetic (Eagleton 1990: 330).

Taken from Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, the concept of the 'constellation' helps to indicate how the critical aesthetic of the gloom 'sets its face against the Cartesian or Kantian moment of subjectivity, less concerned to 'possess' the phenomenon than to liberate it into its own sensuous being and preserve its disparate elements in all their irreducible heterogeneity' (Eagleton 1990: 329). In this way, the

> constellation safeguards particularity but fissures identity, exploding the object into an array of conflictive elements and so unleashing its materiality at the cost of its self-sameness' (Eagleton 1990: 330)

The gloom's perceptual dissensus sought to topple any dominant and homogenous vision of the human that underlined the aesthetic domain. By 'rejecting an organic notion of the integrated artwork' *I Want a Baby* 'work[s] against any residual belief in the body politic as an organic metaphor of naturally legitimated super- and sub-ordination' (Jay 2003: 172). Unsurprisingly, the work was banned by the Stalinist regime and only revived by Meyerhold's legacy in the 1960s.

Thus through the practices of the Bauhaus and related practitioners of the early twentieth century we find the seeds of an immersive scenographic space that is visually difficult to grasp. This would become the black box. In the practices described perceptual difficulties are engineered by technical and technological structures woven into spatial and bodily components. The bodies of performers and audiences alike are confronted with physical and perceptual challenges that require radical reconsiderations of visual and corporeal experiences. These are particularly drawn from attempts to embody tangible materials and intangible lighting phenomena. In all cases the performer absorbs qualities from, and extends his or her physicality into, space. This twofold paradigm of relational interaction can be said to have drastic consequences on the body's physicality given the unusualness of movement seen in Bauhaus performers and those of Meyerhold.

Such ways of articulating the body in space operated as a means to critique and attempt to resolve issues surrounding the mechanization of the body. Moving away from an understanding of technological progress where the body is increasingly limited and objectivised, these artists sought to invoke a technologization of the body that opens new potentials for embodiment and, in particular, the possibility of embodying the physical and phenomenal environment as a way to create it anew. As such, these artists

attempted to renovate built spatiality according to the injunction of a corporeal lability as well as attempting to renovate the body by means of an architectural flexibility, or modulability: see Frederick Kiesler's plans for a scaffolded theatre-house called *Universal Theatre* (1961) which drew from his earlier *Universal Theatre for Woodstock* (1928).

> The obsolete formula of a monolithic construction, suddenly solidified and permanently and fictitiously thrust upon the scene, is out of the question. The changing demands of stage production and the need for proper correlation between actors and audience made necessary a flexible ephemeral construction and a building technique best achieved through tensional structures, light-weight easily fabricated tubular supports of metal, and web coverings of weatherproofed fabrics (Kiesler 1932).

Hypothetically, then, the environmental radicalization that would emerge in the form of the black box should offer even more new potentials for the development of spatio-corporeal phenomena. At the same time, the technological advances that have since taken place and the advent and consolidation of digital technologies can also be said to offer new tools which have divisive and paralyzing effects that may in turn be critiqued and reverted to become new and productive spatio-corporeal connections. In order to press further the exploration of the ways environment can be radically embodied, and specifically to experiment with digital technology as an agent for this, I commenced on another phase of practice-based research. This phase was undertaken under the influence of and as a specific response to Moholy-Nagy's proposition for a relational structure between body and light as constituting an organism. Derived from his *Light Prop,* my practice used digital projection technologies to produce fragmentary fields of light to be inhabited, interacted with, in the black box. This, as I am about to show, consolidated the understanding of an innovative form of visual perception suggested by the Avant-Gardes' interest in multidirectionality. At the same time, the practice raised a set of new conceptual problems regarding the positionality of the body or, to be more precise, it raised problems about the nature of embodied subjectivity when extricated from constructions of the body-politic.

1.8 Cycloramic Lighting

I concluded the first phase of my practice as research with questions of light pertaining to my sketch *The Shower Room*. This drawing speculated on the possibility of lighting

phenomena behaving as volumetric, quasi-tangible particles by way of fragmenting and diffracting the light beam. This speculative scenario sought to expand light's behaviour in order to make it more prone to interaction with live bodies and, by this means, question bodily kinesis, or to ask how the body would fragment and diffract physically in space to create relations and interactions with lighting. These interrogations, as we have seen, were key to the Bauhaus' innovations. Corporeal fragmentation was indeed part of the performing language on the Bauhaus stage and thus inspired radical devices for scenography further to support and expand such bodily explorations. Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* constitutes such a device, yet since it was never actualized as part of a performance, the embodiment of its lighting phenomena remains uncertain. In this respect, I hypothesized that laboratory-based research investigation, predicated upon the previously discussed speculative threshold of scenography, could offer a particularly relevant platform to revive and update *Light Prop* with a view to exploring its physical implications on the body.

Since Moholy-Nagy's device was not conceived to rely on any scenic support to fragment light but did so at the source of light itself, I undertook to develop *The Shower Room* further by removing its scenic components (the fragments of screen suspended and dispersed in space) and concentrating on the light source. Following the previously established critical position of technology within the Avant-Gardes' corporeal speculations, I turned to the contemporary technologies of lighting and projection that are increasingly pervading everyday life: digital projectors. These can be seen as developments of early projectors inasmuch as the possibilities for creating content to be projected are much broader than they used to be. Yet at the same time digital projectors are predominantly used with respect to flat white screens which, like early filmic projections, organize a limited directionality of perception and positionality of reception by way of their frontal experience. Thus, this next phase of the practice sought to turn conventional uses of digital projectors on their head, as the Avant-Gardes did, by firstly removing the presence of screens and considering the entire space of a black box as a screen, or to be more theatrically precise, as a cyclorama. Secondly, for the source of light to diffract itself, the projected content would need to be fragmentary so as to reveal and complicate the light emitted by the projector.

To do so, I produced a series of drawings (*Cycloramic Lighting*) that I aimed to process digitally in order to project them. Each drawing was thus conceived as a projected field of light with greater or lesser fragmentation to diffract space and the

body that would inhabit it. To this end, I drew visual motifs based on the physical qualities of light (particles, waves and flows) articulated in varying shapes, sizes, colours, textures and directions through a scaffolded operative strategy of drawing: a 'directional lability [, a] lacework [,] branchwork stimulating' (Robertson 2003: 165). I drew one motif at a time, each motif growing out of the previous one, or any other form near or in contact with it. I would repeat the motif in a loose chain-like structure until it would become almost automatic for my hands to draw it, at which point I would morph the motif and change the direction of the branch or create a new branch. In this way, I could prevent the emergence of a central area, a dominating core or a pre-eminent singular direction, as well as balance the distribution of motifs and empty areas in 'a vacillation between […] being opaque, translucent and transparent' (Graham 1999: 197).



Fig. 6 *Cycloramic Lighting #3*, 2008

Indeed, because the drawings were conceived as content to be projected onto, and thus relevant to, the entire volume of a space, throughout their making I sought to disrupt the two-dimensionality of the paper page through creating motifs and areas with varying degrees of two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality: two-dimensional forms that enhanced the flatness of the page (and projection plane) were constantly breached by three-dimensional effects that appeared to create depths piercing through

or lifting off the page. Furthermore, hand-drawing was first employed to produce textures and haptic motifs emphasizing touch and three-dimensionality in the visual field.



Fig. 7 *Cycloramic Lighting #7*, 2008

The first drawings of the series present complex arrays of textures and colours because I started by considering all the possible qualities of the radiant energy that is light and which are replicated by theatrical lighting equipment: direction, angle, intensity, focus, form, colour and texture. In addition, I first made use of the whiteness of the paper page to create gaping fragments that were conceived as empty pockets of spatial volume. However, as I implemented the drawings' projection in a black box, my body's immersion into them found it impossible to interact with the complexity of motifs as I could not discriminate them from the white gaps: both were bright and thus the space was entirely flooded with light. As a result, I reverted the drawings' background, and gaps, to black (even though the projector still emitted light in these black gaps, the intensity of their brightness was much lower than white and much less sensed by the immersed body which could, as a result, pinpoint and engage with the brighter motifs).



Fig. 8 *Cycloramic Lighting #10*, 2008



Fig. 9 *Cycloramic Lighting #14*, 2009

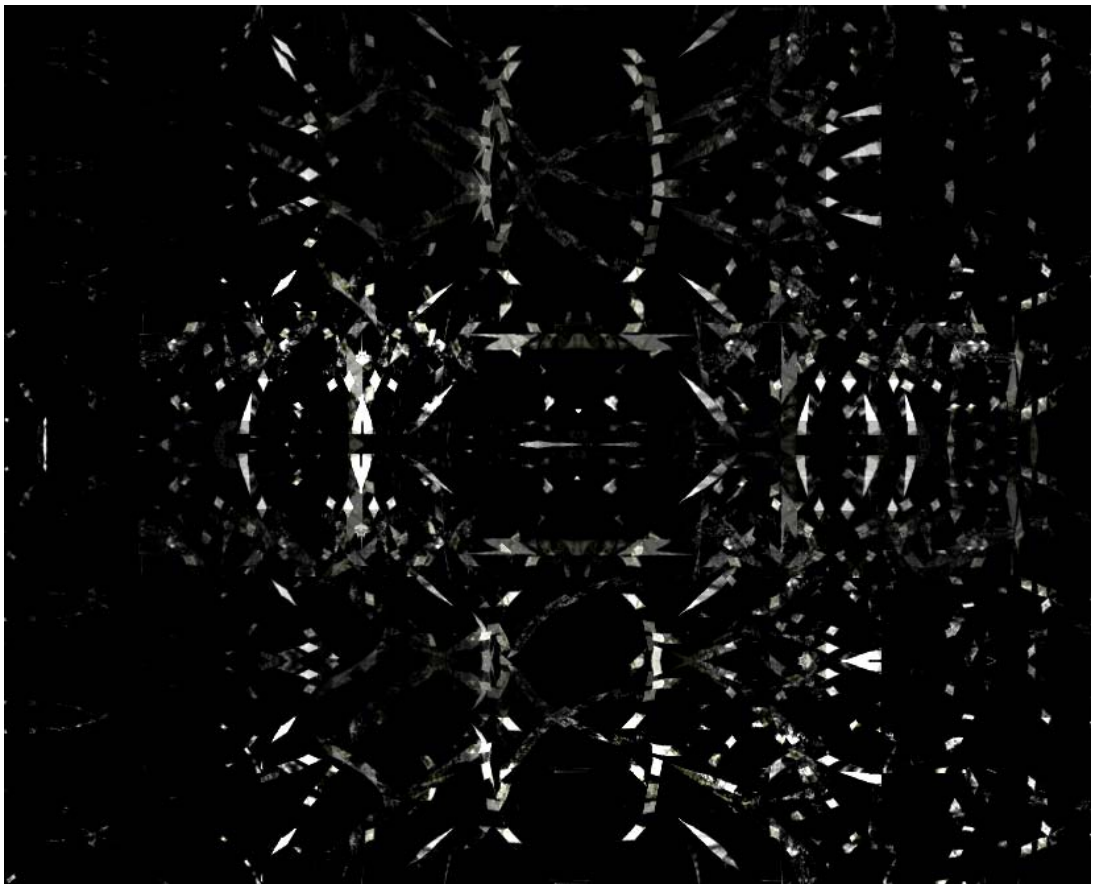


Fig. 10 *Cycloramic Lighting #16*, 2009

Following Meyerhold's proposition that the stage be considered as an artist's studio and that roles be blurred between artists, performers and technicians, I initiated a realization of the practice based on the drawings by following a strict routine: using a laptop, I would operate a slideshow of the drawings, activate the link between computer and digital projector, switch on the record button of the video camera, and walk into the portion of black box space flooded by the projection. After moving through the projection, I would return to the camera to pause the recording, rewind it, play and watch it until reaching where I had paused and stop it (ready for the next recording). I would then walk to the computer's desk to move to the next slide, the next drawing, then walk back to the camera to push 'record' again, and walk back into the new projection, back and forth …

First-hand experiences from within offered two separate, yet correlated, findings:

– Facing the projector, I observe the drawings imprinted upon my body, an inwards gazing that slows my body down to quasi-stillness. Although the drawings are

static, observing them on my body is intrinsically kinetic as the drawings are always distorted by my body's volume. Every tiny movement, or shiver, seemingly *animates* the drawing on my body. As I accelerate my movements the drawings are further distorted, flickering up to becoming fuzzy and unspecified, which makes paying attention dizzy and destabilizing: instead, my gaze searches for a stimulus that allows the pursuit of velocity without losing balance. The projector's singular shining source of light is such another stimulus. Thus, specifically looking at the projector's light, I sense rather than see the drawing: my eyes can only feel degrees of heat relevant to the intensity of the part of the drawing I am passing through. That is to say, I can only distinguish whether I am passing through dark areas of the drawing (low heat over my eyes) or bright areas (high heat, almost painful, over my eyes): an oscillation between being blinded by the lack of light and being blinded by its excess.

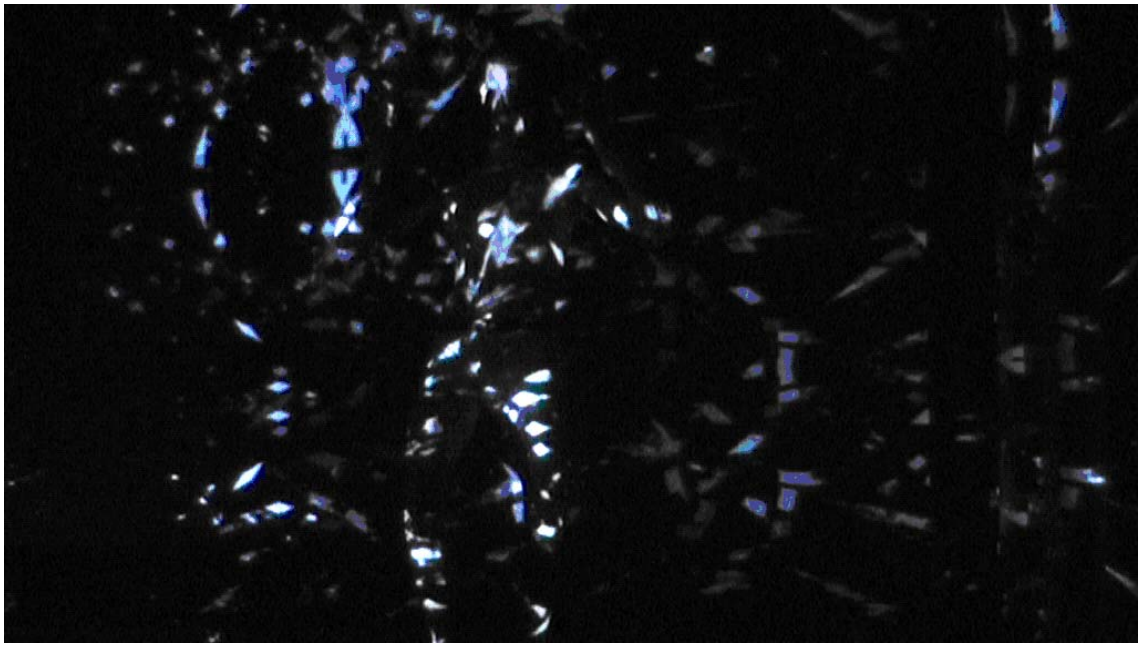


Plate 1 *Static LX*, *2009* (also see DVD excerpt Static LX)

– Turning my back to the projector I can no longer see the drawings imprinted upon my body but lightly or strongly cast around my own shadow against the black wall of the space. While facing the projector I could only see the drawings on myself becoming distorted and three-dimensional; turning my back to it suddenly shifts space into a more two-dimensional surface. Yet, paradoxically, the projections made the wall appear semi-transparent, as if one could go through it, which would often fool my body into creating large movements that were cut painfully short by the wall.

By undertaking these experiments, I was increasingly able to identify visual qualities with which I could physically interact: small, simple and bright motifs were most potent as I could perceive them on my body and *animate* them by way of movement. Thus, I continued to refine the drawings by way of cancelling the variety of forms, colours and textures to retain only a few, organized through a multiplicity of directions and intensities (brightness). Such motifs could also be perceived on the walls and floor in such a way that I could intentionally bring my body into them seemingly to *capture* them and make them move. Perceptually, then, my gaze would always return to my own body. No longer simply looking at something outside of me, interacting with the projected content required me to look outwardly and inwardly. Furthermore, once a motif was overlapping my body, I would kinetically isolate the body part on which the motif was in order to manipulate it and make it slide onto another body part that would then become the new focus of movement. My body was thus starting to move in fragmentary ways – a 'vertiginous tension between forward propulsion and objectival inertness' (Garner 1994: 9) – which felt, at first, very odd as if someone else was manipulating some of my body parts.

Progressively, what first felt like *tip-toeing* from one unusual movement to another became more fluid and less hesitant to the point of feeling the projection on my body as if it were clothed in the projected motifs and particles. By this point, the projections offered a most unexpected visual phenomenon, perceivable both from within and from without: my body's movement determined light's movement. When standing still within the field of light, the white particles imprinted on my body were quite simply static. Any vibration of my body would make them vibrate too. The projections would be animated as I moved so that I could control, to some extent, their alterations according to mine. Further, even when still, any sudden and tiny movement of light would make me aware of the inconsistency of my stillness, thereby requiring greater efforts to remain static. And these were as unusual to my body as much of the movements I was exploring through the light's movements. In both cases, I was compelled to become aware of every part and limb of my body and to input similar precision and control to articulate each and every body part.

As the visual content that surrounded me was imprinted on my body, corporeal reactions to stimuli were never separated from the stimuli themselves but, quite to the contrary, affected the stimuli which, in return, afforded new bodily sensations and reactions. Swimming in the dark pools of the *Cycloramic Lighting*'s glowing particles,

my body seemed no longer a cohesive, singular and autonomous entity but a fragmentary, multiple structure whose every movement was impelled by the outside: the rather extreme proximity of this outside substituted for any internal instigation of kinesis. Between stillness and motion, I unravelled a palette of sometimes painful and often vertiginous slow-moving kinesis which I had not experienced before and thus could not relate to pre-existing intentions or emotions. The scope of light's kinesis and mutability determined the scope of my body's uncertain kinesis. But since light (the projected motifs) was always present and, being inherently static, could only alter to some extent, I could neither, by way of moving, extinguish the light particles nor vice versa, nor shift their location in space nor overlap them. Speculatively then, making the projected content kinetic (in response to bodily movement) could also further develop the uncertainty and unusualness of the body's movement. Described in the second part of the thesis, the next phase of practice thus moves on to develop further the realization of phenomena where corporeality and light are woven as one 'organism' derived from Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* and informed by later practitioners such as Josef Svoboda. This led to the development of an interactive digital programme aimed at animating light and, I hoped, the body and the responsiveness of one to the other.

Although this practice only partially uncovered the reciprocity of interaction that was speculated from its onset, it has underpinned the shifting modes of sensory and physical experience in the black box. In particular, immersed in *Cycloramic Lighting*, I could no longer maintain a 'frontal' perception – where we could 'see clear articulations drawn between the objects that solicit the reactions of our solid body' – but a

> longitudinal [perception, where] we constantly expose ourselves to out-of-body images in order to always redefine the present of our perception or the variable horizon of our contractile body [as] each of these images continually interacts with the others and with us, as in a test of resonance [:] our longitudinal perception constantly folds and rubs the fabric of images against itself, thus allowing the texture of things to emerge (Cache 1995: 147).

This first section of the thesis has surveyed the emergence of an aesthetic domain of visual imperceptibility whose sensory disturbances and innovations demand a renewed understanding of cognition. In particular, it has argued that processes of creation in this domain are based on a speculative threshold, or void, wherein the authorial approach is driven by phenomenal and cognitive uncertainties which, though

developed, constitute the core of the spectator's experience. This attenuation of differences between such positions is founded upon a more general effect of the gloom whereby physical and cognitive positioning can no longer rest in the safety of a precise singularity but rather extend into other positions, multiplying according to the various spatial and corporeal coordinates that surround oneself. To conclude, and before attending to the intercorporeal and intersubjective implications of the gloom in the next section, we need to return to the everyday graphic frameworks and assumptions with which we started. These can now be understood more critically. For if the visual domain does not divide bodies from spaces, but instead enmeshes them, this has major sensory, physical and cognitive implications for some of the 'everyday' discourses which carry assumptions about space and body. For example, geography's positioning of confident spatial borders would need to radically be redefined. 'Geography' would be 'a line that passes through our objects, from the city to the teaspoon, along which there exists an absolute outside. This outside is not relative to a given inside; it exceeds any attempt at interiority' (Cache in Ricco 2003: 90). So too the assumptions about bodies and how they are viewed that are both carried and symptomatized by pornography would need revision. A ('New') 'Pornography' would be

> what in the act of presentation exceeds representation […] not objects that would confirm them in the comfortable neuroses of their subjectivities, but the singular risk of the fetish, withdrawn from the very possibility of intelligibility and meaning [...] transform[ing] the white cube into a labyrinth, architecture into something undecidedly contingent (Haver in Ricco 2003: xii).

My introduction here of a redefined pornography highlights the fact that the development and operation of the gloom have particular implications for our thinking about subjectivity. The second part of the thesis therefore explores ways of understanding the critical subjectivity – an 'ontological mutation in action' (Hardt and Negri in Jay 2003: 175) – at play within the radical reciprocity of embodied experiences in the gloom. This will be undertaken through the analysis of various instances in which the embodied co-existence of the self and the environment delineates the experiential domain of the black box and related scenographic practices of the second half of the century. These developments not only suggest the continuing relevance and increasing importance of the 'possibilities of the void' (Svoboda in Baugh 2005: 87) – the gloom's speculative threshold, some of which I have shown through my own research practice – but also reflect more explicit theoretical and philosophical discourses regarding the

reconception of an embodied subjectivity separated from normative constructions of the socio-political being.

2 Vertigo

> The black box breathes, swells, sweats, bleeds and breaks; a material place in motion (Hannah 2003: 32).

> [P]roducing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representations; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps (Deleuze 2004a: 9).

> Theatre is antibiographic, precisely because it is a place of transformations and never a place of the written ontology (Castellucci 2001: 184; author's translation).

> [T]he vertigo of Plato, discovering 'in the flash of an instant, as he leans over its abyss' that the simulacrum, the 'other' that his philosophy strategically creates, can destroy his philosophy's foundations. It is the vertigo of a *critical* distance, in which 'the privileged point of view has no more existence than does the object held in common by all points of view' (Morris 1998: 151).

The first part of the thesis established historically the seminal instances of the emergence of a scenographic concern with visual attenuation and discrepancy which was particularly foregrounded by Avant-Garde artists of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These seeds of the gloom suggested a rejection of traditional aesthetics that relied on systematic rules of visual constructions such as perspective. The thesis has argued that these creations were instead founded on a speculative threshold, or void, whereby their instantiation was drawn out of concepts and processes that drew the realizable out of the unrealizable. Furthermore, to explore and question impossible physical structures and their physico-perceptual experiences, these artists employed and subverted the developing technologies of their time. Where these technologies in dominant use were infiltrating everyday life in the form of images separated from bodies, these seminal practices sought to redirect them towards and through bodies. The

visual problems resulting from these experiments were then productively and conceptually framed by broader philosophical concerns and anxieties with respect to the ideologies that permeated everyday life. As such, behind those unusual and minoritarian events can be found already emerging radical ideas about the human.

Rejecting the philosophical Western tradition by which mind and body were separated, and granting the mind a higher position in human experience, the ideas behind early explorations of the gloom suggested an emphasis on the body and its sensory dimension: corporeal sensation as a mode of knowledge offered new potent discourses about revisiting our understandings of human beings and society.

Although most of these artists and movements were in their own time unsuccessful, rejected, persecuted and short-lived, they would nonetheless ensure their legacy. For instance, the influence of the Bauhaus movement over the further historical developments of scenographic imperceptibility in theatre and beyond can be observed in two separate yet very similar strands of practices. After the demise of the Bauhaus under the Nazi regime, its artists emigrated towards the East and the West, and propagated ideas such as that of felt volume. As early as 1944 the Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda can be seen taking on Bauhaus aesthetics and ideas with a project such as *Roaming* (1944), unrealized as a result of the Nazi regime having closed down all theatres in the Czech Republic. At the same time, major Bauhaus artists left Europe and moved to New York, where their teaching would contribute to sparking a whole new Avant-Garde of performance among visual artists and architects. In the wake of a post-World War II society, the gloom's ability to critique the body-politic and inspire a radical revisioning of Western civilization would become crucial to those seeking the reconstruction of a society that could never be led again to engage in genocide. To many, the civilized body could not be conceived at such cost. The dehierarchizing of social agency amongst bodies of different genders, ethnicities, religions and other divisions became an ethos to this end. The convoluted spaces and bodies advanced by early Avant-Gardes as a form of resistance against what they saw as the growing ideological shackles that individuals were subjected to, found further and more radical outlets in performance, architecture and visual arts.

As the second part of the thesis demonstrates, this radicalization of the gloom suggests an imperative to move beyond recalcitrance to the ideological constructions at play in visual systems of social control and the body-politic. The mid-twentieth-century emergence of the black box, an environment no longer drawing from past architectural

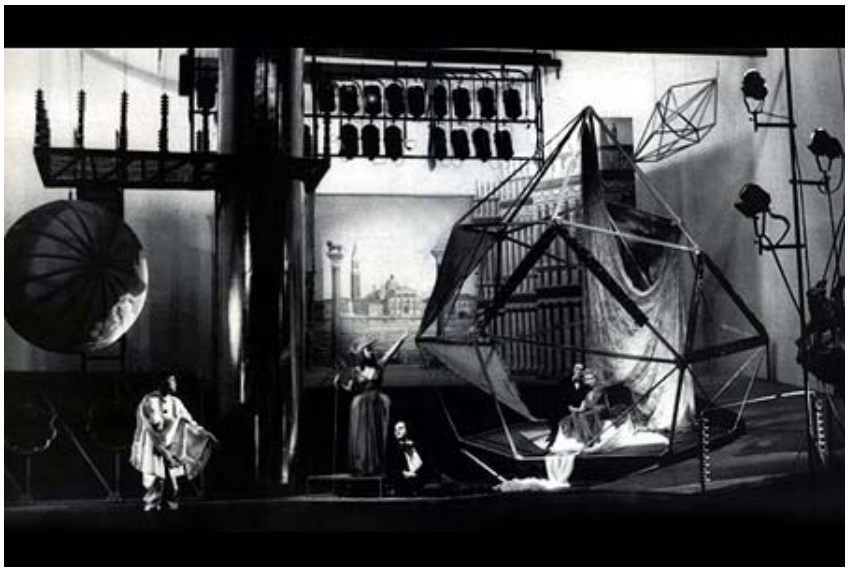
forms but evolving its own radical formlessness, embodies this next phase of the gloom in its attempt to extend beyond a merely subversive criticism of the 'ambiguous foundation of culture, body, and consciousness' (Kwinter in Acconci 2001: 47). The second part of the thesis analyzes the various ideas and practices that demarcate what we need here to recognize as these changing aspirations for the gloom.

After the early twentieth century's major advances in electricity, the second half of that century would see the advent of electronic media and the subsequent unfolding of digital worlds, all of which would inspire further possibilities of abstract and fragmented revisions of the body-politic while being predominantly implemented in the form of ubiquitous devices (such as televisions and computers) that participate in sustaining the ideological positioning of social subjects. Thus, as I hope effectively to demonstrate, the gloom would on one hand continue operating as a vertiginous criticism of the epistemological and ontological 'condition[s] by which subjectivity exists subjected' – to present it 'as being inessential [:] an insubstantiality that does not contain its own resources but knows them only in the exposure to another' (Lingis in Rapaport 1994: 267). On the other hand, it would produce the conditions (both practical and theoretical) for a (post)human and intersubjective being in which embodied subjectivity is 'a blotted, perky line, a sleazy gut and visual crackle in gelatinous, ridged, and shiny blacks, an indolent pocket where self and not-self me[e]t the superb puberty of a concept' (Robertson 2003: 228). We begin the exploration of this potency of the gloom with the emergence and impact of the black box.

2.1 Black box as paradigmatic skin

Profoundly inspired by the preceding works of Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia and the Bauhaus movement, Josef Svoboda began his scenographic work by reappropriating Bauhaus images and concepts as part of the performance *Tales of Hoffman* (1946). Putting all components of performance on a par with one another was a key concern to Svoboda as he sought to push all of them 'to act in unison with any of the others [,] to be capable of fusing with any of the others to form a new quality' (Svoboda in Burian 1971: 55). Like his influential predecessors, Svoboda's fusion was not conceived in a Wagnerian manner that would conceal a hierarchy that privileged some of the fused components: it was 'not a homogenous totality [but a] separat[ion] into a series of partial elements […] flexible and adaptable enough […] to be their

counterpoint or contrast' (Svoboda in Burian 1971: 56). Such dissensual fusion forecasted a visual and cognitive fragmentation that Svoboda called 'polyscenicness: an expression of a free and many-sided time-space operation […] breaking up the linear continuity of theatre action' (Svoboda in Giesekam 2007: 53).



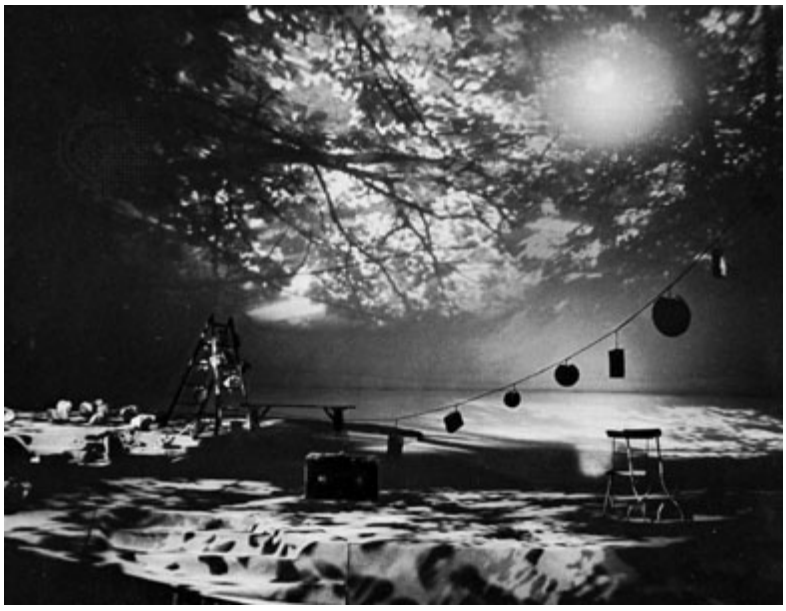
56 Josef Svoboda, *Tales of Hoffman*, 1946

Though polyscenicness in Svoboda's work stands for a non-linear form that challenges the possibility of narrative, it remains highly attentive to the work of affecting the audience's mind. Indeed, Svoboda's 'void' (Svoboda in Baugh 2005: 87) is 'abstract [and] undefined', 'transformable and kinetic', which allows it to be a 'psycho-plastic space […] that continuously form[s] and dissolve[s]' (Svoboda in Burian 1971: 55). Thus, a psychological level of experience continues through the speculative threshold. It operates as a phenomenal 'ebb and flow [part of] the pulse of the […] action' (Burian 1971: 55) undivided from 'the stream of scenic images created by the actor's performance' (Svoboda in Burian 1971: 55). In other words, in this work psychological and cognitive experience is 'not simply a rise and fall, a waxing and waning, but movement, processes, transmutations (Grosz 1995: 204) between spatial and corporeal qualities.

'Through its action, scenography becomes performance' (Baugh 2005: 142) on a par with the performer and as a performer. To Svoboda, as to Craig, scenography can achieve such a level of corporeal behaviour by way of modulating multipositional intersections of space and light to produce a

> scene which has a changeable nature. This scene also has what I call a face. This face expresses … Its shape perceives the light, and in as much as the light changes its position and makes certain other changes, and inasmuch as the scene itself alters its position – the two acting in concert as in a duet, figuring it out together as in a dance (Craig in Baugh 2005: 125).

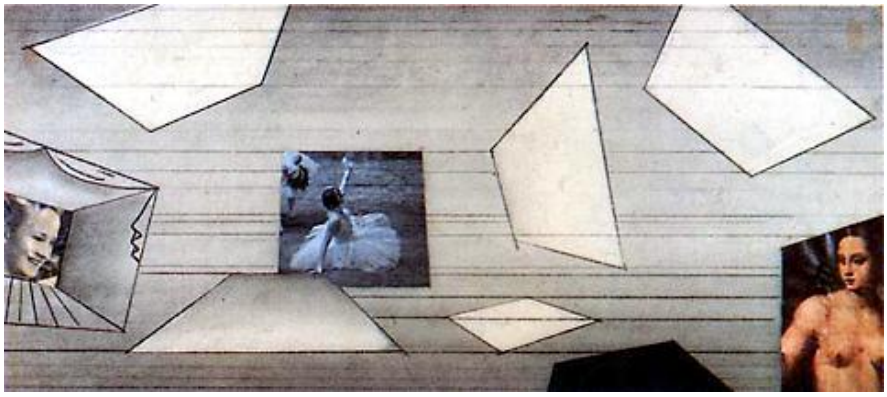
To this end, Svoboda also explored scenic structures based on screens. While he would have sometimes had his screens physically displaced onstage, however, much of his strategy for animating the screens and, as a result, the whole space made use of light and projections (without the screens actually moving). In the mid-twentieth century, the greater variety of lighting, projection systems and the advance of TV technology enabled him to explore a greater reliance on light to achieve scenographic movement. But, like his predecessors, Svoboda's obsession with light phenomena required alterations and innovations in the physical conditions of scenery and the stage.



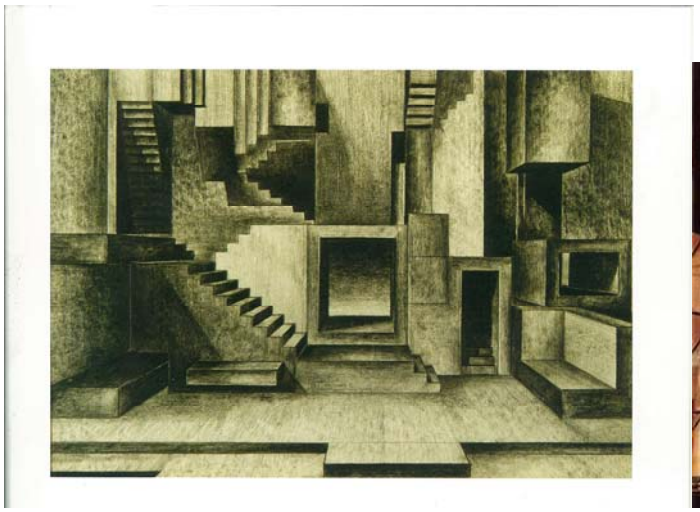
57 Josef Svoboda, *August Sunday*, 1958

In 1958, Svoboda tackled the spatial conditions of scenery and the stage by way of sculpting darkness in two separate works which were landmarks both for the creation of his company and for a black box theatre, both named Laterna magika, in Prague. In one work, Svoboda designed an innovative scenic structure of screens, projection surfaces and mirror foils for the play *August Sunday.* As all the edges of these surfaces could not be perceived, large dark areas cross-faded over brightly lit and/or projected

pockets of space in such a way that ‘a luminous atmosphere of great depth’ was achieved ‘yet as though tangible’ (Svoboda in Albertová 2009: 48). The same year, Svoboda represented the Czech Republic at the Universal Expo of Brussels: there, he turned the Czech pavilion into a black box environment to present his *polyecran* or *Laterna magika* where clear gaps of darkness enhance the definition of the screens’ borders. In both *polyecran* and *August Sunday*, darkness fractures the overall stage image, multiple focal points co-exist, and the outside offstage area apparently takes on the inside centre-stage. Indeed, Svoboda’s ‘discovery of the “shadow zones” – places which remain outside the main and necessary lighting of the set, and where it is suitable to place a screen for projections’ (Albertová 2009: 62) – sought to extend the on-stage beyond, into the off-stage, by means of creating a ‘link between the action and the projection, in such a way that one could not exist without the other’ (Svoboda in Albertová 2009: 54).



58 Josef Svoboda, *Sketch for Polyekran*, 1958



59 Josef Svoboda, *Hamlet*, 1965



60 Josef Svoboda, *Polyvision*, 1967

The advent of the black box offers such a porosity between inside and outside at its most basic and bare state since no *fourth wall* is embedded architecturally (the proscenium arch) and thus no axiomatic division is pre-inscribed. Whether reviving and augmenting Appian and Craigian stair-based sceneries such as in Svoboda's *Hamlet* (1965), where their apparent endlessness obfuscates the demarcation of the quality of being 'inside', or whether further complicating his *polyecran* structure in *Polyvision* for the Universal Expo of Montreal in 1967, the ambivalence of the onstage reaching out for the offstage and vice versa constitutes an augmentation of the black box's basic phenomenal qualities. Subsequently, Svoboda would go on to elaborate, and patent, even more ambiguous bordering devices such as *La Contra-Luce* (1967): a lighting instrument juxtaposing multiple and small narrow beams of light to create a kind of draped curtain, screen or wall, of light made further ambiguous by means of an innovative type of haze. *La Contra-Luce* is part of a range of lighting effects that Svoboda employed – following from the virtual disappearance of the offstage borders – to push the deployment of 'virtual wall[s] onstage' (Albertová 2009: 220).

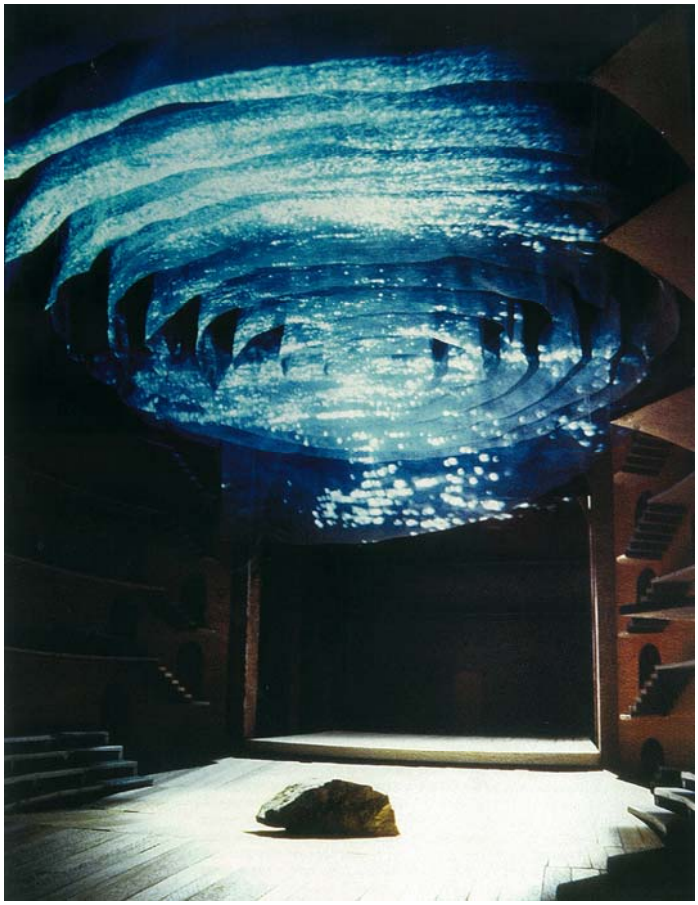


61 Josef Svoboda *La Contra-Luce*, 1984

Such consideration of visual porosity or semi-transparency was in part still linked to developments of the cyclorama in theatres. For the mid-twentieth century also saw innovative developments in synthetic silk textiles that rapidly came to replace rigid plaster cycloramas. The interest in visual porosity also motivated much larger screen-based sceneries as seen in the scenographies of Luciano Damiani for director Giorgio Strehler's *Cherry Orchard* (1973–4) and *The Tempest* (1977–8).



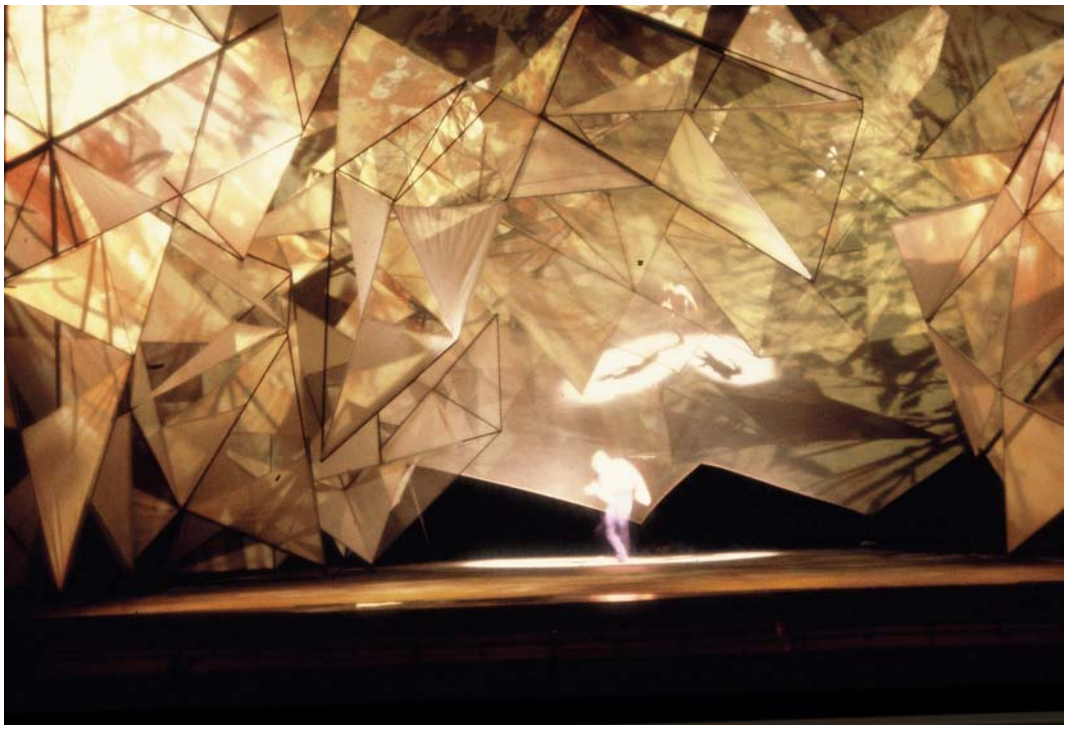
62 Giorgio Strehler, *The Tempest*, 1977-8



63 Josef Svoboda, *Faust*, 1989

These textile-based walls, as with the walls of the black box itself, do not simply perforate the horizontal planes and divides between onstage and offstage but also affect the vertical planes and divides between ground and ceiling. When Svoboda collaborated with Strehler on *Faust* in 1989 he created a large-scale spiral of silk screens for

projection connected to a flying system. The deregulation of inside/outside phenomena, as with *La Contra-Luce*, is achieved through an effect of transparency that is not 'literal transparency'. In this respect it is not the 'inherent quality of substance' of glass architecture, which enhances the clarity of visual contact. Instead it is a 'phenomenal transparency', the 'inherent quality of organization' whereby 'the transparent ceases to be that which is perfectly clear and becomes instead that which is clearly ambiguous' (Rowe & Slutsky 1995: 161).



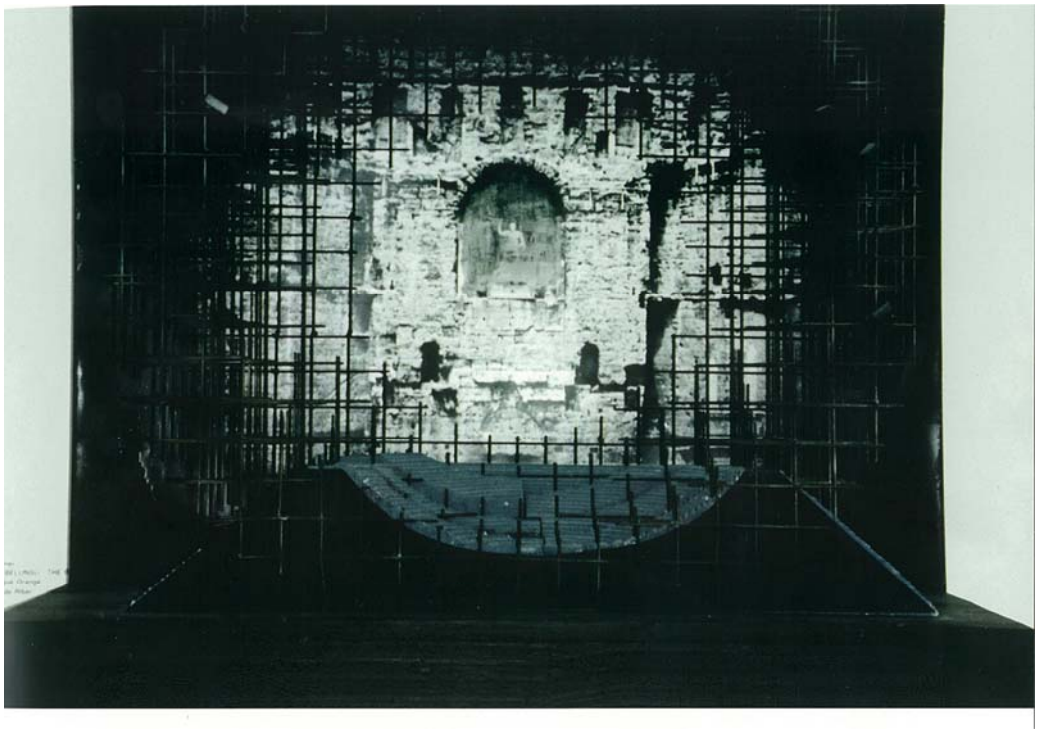
64 Josef Svoboda, *The Firebird*, 1972

Writing in 1970, John Epstein, director of the Black Box Group – one of the first black box theatre-based performance companies to emerge in the UK (1965) – described his company's work with screens and projections as 'relating *solid (actual)* objects to *projected* images', to achieve a scenographic phenomenon that is 'beyond the grasp of precise spatial comprehension because of its constantly moving and transitory nature'. It is 'not used to confuse the viewer but rather to heighten experience' by 'demanding [of the] audience [that it] attempt to distinguish the qualities of substance and materiality that an image is made of' (Epstein 1970: 34). Svoboda too sought the dissolution of tangible acuity by way of producing porous relations between the solid surfaces that mark the environmental borders and the volumetric space they contain,

between periphery and centre, between offstage and onstage. The material container of performance becomes an apparatus of not only of spatial but also of corporeal decompartmentalization. For Svoboda's conception was of a psycho-plastic space that required, and relied on, an ambiguous porosity that had to be embodied by performers:

> I always try to be sure that the actor is aware of the space in which he moves. That means that the space is designed not only to be seen front on, from the auditorium, but to be experienced as a total environment for the actor, who senses it physically like warmth or wind (Svoboda in Albertová 2009: 49)

In one of his last unrealized scenographies *Das Rheingold* (1988) Svoboda revisited the Wagnerian dramaturgy within a huge cave-like structure of dark scaffolds at the end of which a large and ancient-looking stone wall can be seen as a drastic but remote boundary to the volume of the stage. Yet the scaffolds can be seen as extensions of the offstage impinging on the onstage from all around. These operate as multiple and tentative proscenium arches, or fourth walls, that are (more or less) disintegrating (depending on light states) in that they both frame and unframe the backwall.



65 Josef Svoboda, *Das Rheingold* (unrealized project), 1988

As no human figure can be found in the model, the object raises questions as to how bodies could inhabit such a structure. Indeed, '[s]caffolding […] substitutes for a site [,]

by compression or condensation it transforms an atmosphere to a condition of access which is also a screen' (Robertson 2003: 166): 'irreducible and contingent [,] oblique and black [,] everything glimmers, delights, fades, goes' as it is 'attached […] to the senses [,] sheer porousness [and the] vertiginously unthinkable' of 'improvis[ing] unthought shape' (Robertson 2003: 77–9).



66 Josef Svoboda, *Graffiti*, 2002

In his last production *Graffiti* (2002), Svoboda attempted to embed performing bodies within the extreme porousness of a 'spatial projection onto a non-existent screen' (Albertová 2009: 220). Drawing from the Pepper's Ghost, he created

> a large screen made of polycarbonate material that is both transparent and reflective [while] in the flies above the screen is a large mirror surface. Video projection bounces off the screen onto the mirror surface and back down onto a virtual perpendicular plane behind the angled screen. This produces the effect of the projections appearing in mid-air (Giesekam 2007: 68).

Layered within the discrepant tangibility and antigravitational qualities of space, the body becomes a congruent part of the lighting phenomenon in terms of 'repress[ing], forget[ing] or disavow[ing] that spatialising tracing which marks out the border between inside and outside, which generates the field but cannot be located within the field' (Wigley in Buchanan & Lambert 2005: 197). Thus the kind of body that is discerned through the gloom may be understood first through a reconsideration of light. It is to be

no longer construed as ‘a transparent medium with its own clarity’ (Vasseleu 1998: 45) – ‘the light of the physicist [,] radiant energy travelling in waves or packets and to the laws governing its behaviour [– but as] ambient light [or] ecological optics [:] light as it fills space and interacts with the cluttered environment of the animal’ (Gibson in Noë 2004: 104). In other words, ‘the so-called “real light” of scientific understanding [–] the “natural light” of the perceiving subject […] converted into the “intelligible light” of ideas’ (Vasseleu 1998: 43) – gives way to ‘carnal light or [Merleau-Ponty’s] “phenomenal light” as a qualitative experience’ in which ‘the body is always other or di-visible in the same way in vision and touch’ (Vasseleu 1998: 59).

Thus we can suggest that the black box’s ‘bodied spatiality return[s] perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment’ (Garner 1994: 1) inasmuch as its carnal light restores how ‘vision and touch as well as the other senses [are] co-extensive with each other’ (Vasseleu 1998: 44). This, it must be noted, does not constitute a new homogeneous and holistic conception of perceptual experience but rather follows the vertiginous vicissitudes of ‘the dynamics of life’ (Svoboda in Baugh 2005: 142). Svoboda’s virtual walls have the effect of problematizing both the visual and tangible clarity of the performing bodies within them. Woven into bodies, these ‘contradictions of spatial dimension’ (Rowe & Slutsky 1995: 160) – inside and outside, two-dimensional and three-dimensional, solid and impalpable – are applied to corporeality and thereby pose challenges to common ideas about the body. Unlike Ernst Mach’s ideological proposition that ‘the space of the skin is the analogue of a two-dimensional, finite, unbounded and closed space’ (Mach 2004: 9), Svoboda’s performing bodies are the constituents of larger ‘nontotalizing structures’ (Taylor 1998: 12) in which bodied spatiality may be best described as ‘skinscapes’ (Manning 2007: 111): that is, ‘nothing but a strata of skin in which interiority and exteriority are thoroughly convoluted’ (Taylor in Manning 2007: 111).

The black box thus motivates the production of bodily spaces which, in its turn, compels the rethinking of bodies’ surfaces as porous and relational skins. These skins do not contain but precisely open the body to being perforated by the outside. This paradigm of a radically relational and interactive bodily surface suggests that skin is a ‘slippery surface […] of maximum interface and intensity [that is] continually enfolding’ (Imperiale 2000: 6–7) as it ‘doubles upon itself, duplicitous, touching itself as other’ (Manning 2007: 111), making ‘flesh [...] *touched-touching*’ (Derrida 2005: 100).

> [S]kin [is] an excitation screen [,] neither inside nor outside [but an] inflection of passage […] rhythmically express[ing] the vulnerability of surface by subtracting solidity from form to make something temporarily animate [:] this dimension extends beyond the visual plane of the surface, as if the entire skin were spun outwards in its excitable permeability [,] it shows us how to inhabit a surface as that surface fluctuates (Robertson 2003: 162–7).

Through the analogy with a porous 'skin [that] is the expression […] of the passage toward a continuous re-emergence [, a] metamorphosis in action' (Manning 2007: 113), the black box can be conceived as an enclosure prone to disclosure, or, to put it another way, a container working against its self-containment. Accordingly, then, embodied subjectivity in the black box may be revisited within the reappraisal of a consciousness seemingly closed down to re-emerge no longer autonomous and self-contained.

Such subjectivity may be associated with a seemingly primary animal state, but its reliance upon technology here would suggest a more complex state of being. This may be best described by Posthuman theory where

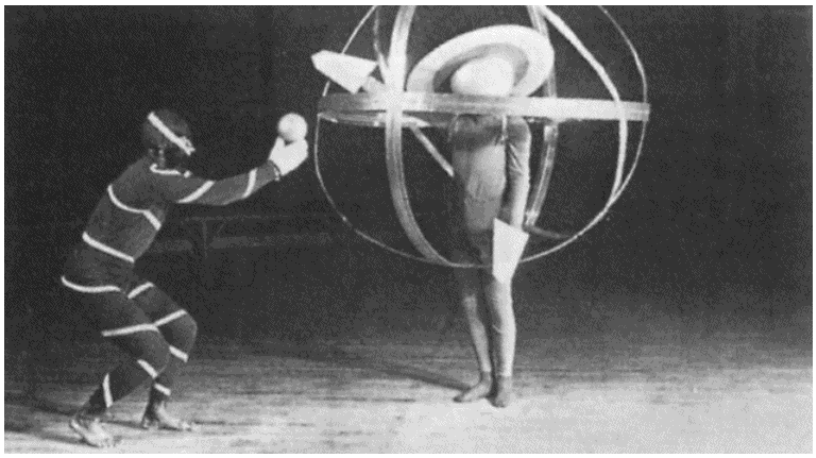
> [t]he unpredictable nature of complex dynamics implies that subjectivity is emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it (Hayles 1999: 291).

Having looked at the operation and effects of the black box we have arrived at Posthuman theory. That move from black box effects to the Posthuman is driven by a question: how are we productively to understand a subjectivity which relations of reciprocity with the world disrobe the subject from its singularity, autonomy and self-ownership? The following section will expand on Posthuman subjectivity by way of analysing practical and theoretical instances of the post-World War II Bauhaus' influence over certain artists in the United States.

2.2 Autopoietic encounters

Parallel to Josef Svoboda's developments of scenographic structures of visual attenuation in the black box, a set of Bauhaus-inspired American artists advanced further innovations in relational strategies between the body and its surroundings across performance, visual arts and architecture. These not only intensified the potency of uncertainty and unpredictability in the speculative threshold but also reflected emerging

critical discourses regarding the human being's relation to its environment in the growingly technological society of the second half of the twentieth century. To attend to these endeavours will enable us to explore further the gloom's conditions for and implications on the reciprocity of embodied subjectivity.



67 John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Willem De Kooning
and Richard Buckminster Fuller, *The Ruse of Medusa*, 1948

As a result of the Nazi persecution of the Bauhaus movement, some of its key artists emigrated to the United States and, in particular, one of its leading architects Walter Gropius found himself teaching at the Black Mountain College near New York. Thus the influence of the Bauhaus is noticeable there right from the end of the second World War. In 1948, Black Mountain College artists presented the performance *The Ruse of Medusa*. Although based on a 1913 Surrealist piece by Erik Satie, its visual and carnivalesque aesthetic is undeniably Bauhaus-like in terms of grotesquely extending the body into phenomena of felt volume. Performing in this piece, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Richard Buckminster Fuller would themselves soon develop radical approaches to the 'flexibility, changeability, fluency and so forth' (Cage in Goldberg 2001: 124) of spatio-corporeal relations. Cage and Cunningham subsequent collaborations revolved around chance processes of creation whereby the correlation between environmental and corporeal structures was highly unpredictable. In *Variations V* (1965), they not only used chance to create movement and sounds, but also required the music, dance, set and filmic projections to be devised separately and then brought together into one piece on the opening night of the work. All components overlap but none predominates. Chance enabled the disunification of the various components at play and thus produced the disparity of visual perception in the work.

Perceptual experience was predicated upon a multiplicity of stimuli and forms but none of these could be isolated and demarcated. Instead, each stimulus and form was partly disrupted by the others, resulting in an ‘operation’ of ‘declassification’ (Bois & Krauss 1997: 18) or ‘heterology’ of formlessness (Bataille in Bois & Krauss 1997: 15).



68 John Cage & Merce Cunningham, *Variations V*, 1965

Drawing from Bataille, Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss developed this heterology using the concepts of ‘base materialism’, ‘entropy’, ‘pulse’ and ‘horizontality’ (Bois & Krauss 1997: 7) which all converge ‘to bring things down in the world’ (Bataille in Bois & Krauss 1997: 18) including any ‘symbolizable theme’ and ‘given quality’ (Bois & Krauss 1997: 18). Such a ‘crisis of subject matter’ (Bataille in Bois & Krauss 1997: 14) can ‘liberat[e] our thinking [from] the servitude of thematics’ (Bois & Krauss 1997: 252) as it celebrates ‘what is excluded by idealism […] by the ego, capitalism, organised religion and so on’ (Bois & Krauss 1997: 53). Through chance and random processes, Cage and Cunningham undercut the subjective control of authorship and ownership. As they strove to make the work ‘happen […] in the observer himself’ (Cage in Goldberg 2001: 126), the viewer is not so much challenged in hermeneutic terms (interpretational challenge) but rather by a cognitive domain that resists the singularity of its receptor. To put it more simply, we may say that the viewer must attempt to integrate a multiplicity of points of view, stimuli, intentions and desires in him/herself. The artists’ relinquishing of authorial singularity in both their creative

processes and outcomes is paired with the invocation of the audience's relinquishing of their spectatorial singularity.

The Black Mountain College had an important impact upon the art scene in New York (Goldberg 2001: 127). Cage and Cunningham's concern with the formlessness of relational unpredictability may therefore be seen to flourish in various artistic domains and in particular in the further development of an abstract art of

> anti-form [where t]he focus on matter and gravity as a means results in forms that were not projected in advance. Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied (Morris 1993: 46)



69 Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1969

While in general terms the second half of the twentieth century saw the expansion of abstraction into various strands, of which Minimalism sought to pursue claims of an absolute reduction of all forms, further explicitly theoretical discourses show a continuing criticism of abstract artworks within which 'the body is summoned' (Wagner 1998: 256). This is seen in Robert Morris's critical exploration of 'the entire situation' (Morris in Ridout 2006: 8): the 'fact of co-presence in the act of spectatorship', of 'including the beholder's *body'* (Fried in Ridout 2006: 8). Attacks on any 'kind of *stage* presence' (Fried in Ridout 2006: 8) were motivated by an ideological drive to keep unspoiled the Pictorial tradition (which we noted in Section 1). In this the 'possibility of a spectator […] who has vanished, as it were, from the scene of her own spectatorship,

receded into the complete darkness of a non-existent auditorium the better to contemplate the wholly unsituated picture' (Fried in Ridout 2006: 8). By contrast, Robert Morris' works are situated by way of critically quoting the architectural features they rely on: *Untitled* (1969) is a large surface of felt presented as the melting double of the wall against which it is displayed. Similarly, Eva Hesse's *Untitled (Rope Piece)* (1970) is a network of ropes suspended in mid-air as another, again collapsing, ceiling.



70 Eva Hesse, *Untitled (Rope Piece)*, 1970

Abstraction in Hesse's and Morris' artworks has a relational and reciprocal dimension not only related to the presence of the architecture that contain them but also with respect to the presence of bodies: the intervention of the artist's body and hands on the material (cuts simply and blatantly made manually with a blade; knots that can only be done by hands) and its architectural inscription (simple and visible nails and strings that attest to the physical intervention of hanging) contributes, in addition to the textured materials employed, to the viewer's tactile invitation into and virtual friction with the works. By contrast, abstraction as the pure reduction and idealized isolation of both the viewer and the viewed relates to what Katherine Hayles (1999) calls the long-lasting tradition of 'the Platonic backhand [which] works by inferring from the world's noisy multiplicity a simplified [version, in which] complexity appears as a "fuzzing up" of an essential reality' (Hayles 1999: 12). Adding to this, Hayles proposes a second type of abstraction, 'the Platonic forehand', which starts 'from simplified abstractions and

evolves a multiplicity sufficiently complex that it can be seen as a world of its own' (Hayles 1999: 12–13). She then identifies this abstract scheme as pertaining to twentieth-century cybernetics and artificial life. As such, both schemes of abstraction are seen as privileging the abstract over the real since they take 'the abstract as the Real, downplaying the importance of material instantation' (Hayles 1999: 13).

Yet Hesse's and Morris' works suggest that 'even in the realm of pure abstraction there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension' (Lefebvre in Soja 1996: 46). Morris' 'entire situation' – 'like an encounter with another human being' – compels the audience's 'awareness of one's body as a presence in a situation' (Ridout 2006: 8). Morris and Hesse organize a 'multidirectional' sensory field by way of 'pushing through the picture plane to an open space that lay "beyond"' (Mercer 2006: 7–8) whereby the 'surface "purity"' becomes 'sullied' by means of leaving traces of the artist's body intervention on the material surface now turned into a 'freshly cut skin and exposed innards' (Morrison 2006: 144). The relational condition to making the work becomes a relational injunction to the viewer. In this way, abstraction continues to play or interplay with issues of simplicity and complexity but, unlike Hayles' twofold model, this interplay is not unilateral but constantly oscillating and thus not fixed. Morris and Hesse can thus be said to instantiate another and 'discrepant abstraction' (Mercer 2006: 7) that proceeds from the simplicity of the Platonic forehand – architectural surfaces – to the complexity of the Platonic backhand in order to recover the world's noisy and material multiplicity: wherein 'abstraction [can] resist […] the fixity of "meaning" that essentialism requires and gives rise instead to a plurality of readings which are generated by a process of semiosis that cannot be fully closed by any one singular interpretation' (Mercer 2006: 17). Accordingly, the 'encounter with [an] other' (Ridout 2006: 9) bestowed by such material abstraction is 'disquieting' (Fried in Ridout 2006: 9) inasmuch as this *otherness* cannot be reduced to an intelligible and singular identity.

The relational situation of the body in a discrepant abstract art enables us to uncover an embodied approach to space that seeks, like the black box, to interrogate ontological and epistemological assumptions such as material, cognitive and subjective autonomy and singularity. Abstract artworks such as Morris' and Hesse's can be seen as overlapping bodily presence and action with the pure architectural surfaces of the museum/gallery environment. These overlaps thus form a kind of critique of the architectural container as they point towards a much different type of architecture that is

embodied, interactive and transient. Similarly exposing such an approach, in 1958, while Josef Svoboda was presenting his black box-based screens at Brussels' Universal Expo, Yves Klein's exhibition *Le Vide* (*The Void)* offered its audience an empty gallery containing only a white curtain and an empty glass cabinet. So as to emphasize the whiteness of the gallery's space, Klein also introduced a blue fabric curtaining the front window of the gallery and served blue cocktails to the audience on the opening night. Resistant to the white gallery space, the colour blue invites the audience to look away from the gallery's walls towards the window and, through it, into the street, whilst simultaneously being aware of its ingestion, as they drink, into the dark interiors of the body. Klein's blue (IKB) is the overlapping point between space and body (as boldly exemplified by his more famous *Anthropometries*, 1960). As he attributed to his blue the conception of a 'void' (Klein in Nechvatal 1999: 367), the relational domain at play in his work suggests both a critique of the wholly visible and situating lines of the gallery or the canvas and the very questioning of relationality. Indeed, if neither the body nor the artwork are specifically positioned and distinguishable from one another but are simultaneously separated and imbricated (hanged blue curtain and ingested blue liquid; blue traces on canvas and blue skin), then relations can unfold in any and many degree of separation-imbrication, and possible new relations can be invented.



71 Yves Klein, *Le Vide*, 1958

Such prosthetic connection between space and the body lies at the root of Posthuman theory within Marshall McLuhan's proposition of a 'dis/connection advanced in the logic of the prosthesis' (McLuhan in Foster 1996: 221). Drawn from his

theory of ‘autoamputation’ (McLuhan in Hayles 1999: 34) where he ‘argued that humans react to stress in their environments by withdrawing the locus of selfhood inward’ and claimed that this ‘in turn facilitates and requires compensating technological extensions that project the body-as-prosthesis back out into the world’ (Hayles 1999: 34), McLuhan’s dis/connected prosthetic being informs Francisco Varela’s concept of autopoiesis: an unstable yet ‘structural coupling’ (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 336) between body and environment mediated by technological apparatuses.



72 Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973

Eventually offering an ontological restructuring rising out of this ‘incarnated coupling by sensing and acting’ (Varela in Hayles 1999: 157), Varela’s autopoiesis started as a ‘homeostatic self-regulating mechanism whose boundaries were clearly delineated from the environment’ (Hayles 1999: 34). Here technology confers an interaction that mediates the relation between body and environment in a unilateral way whereby neither one nor the other can change or evolve as a result. This is an important dimension of the ‘architectonic aspects of the multiperspective projective installations of the 1970s’ (Iles 2001: 34) such as Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) which plunges the gallery into darkness to reveal a projector’s beam of light spliced, or diffracted, to form a three-dimensional cone of light traversing the room. Seemingly static, this light can be penetrated by bodies and, in being so, is revealed as a line running across body parts and reacting to their contours and textures. The title then does

not refer to the lighting phenomenon alone but to its two-fold appearance, which can only be seen by way of physical immersion into it: the title refers to the light in interaction with the body which therefore truly constitutes the work. Yet, the lighting phenomenon remains a fixed one and, conversely, the body's interaction with it is limited to same interactions of body and light. Similarly, Dan Graham's *Picture Window Piece* (1974) does not fully exist without the integrated presence of the spectator. The work seeks to undo the window as a unilateral Pictorial device of framing by way of turning a building's window (at street level) into a projection screen: cameras located on both sides of the window capture inside and outside environments and project them onto the window so that the surface becomes a mirror as well as a transparent interface in which viewers see themselves on the street as well as overlapping with the indoor space and its inhabitants on the other side. Here again, the visual device is fixed and the imbrication of body and environment, though intrinsic and innovative, unmutable.

Varela then further developed autopoiesis as 'a reflexive vision of a man spliced into informational circuit that could change him in unpredictable ways' (Hayles 1999: 34). Here technology produces a more unstable, and as such potent, relational imbrication wherein the reciprocal domain of reflexivity allows some mutation. A clear example is Robert Rauschenberg's *Open Score* – part of *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* (1966) – which provides one of the first performative events to use sensor technologies of interaction to confound interaction and, in doing so, to innovate and mutate relations. In *Open Score* the movements of bodies trigger an incremental black-out around them: taking place on a tennis courtyard, at night, two tennis players held racquets electrically connected to speakers and the floodlights of the court; as each player hits the ball, the sound of the impact is captured and augmented while the light decreases in intensity at every hit until total black-out.

Though in *Open Score* lighting changes are entirely contingent upon bodily action and tactile contacts (emphasized through sound), this apparent bodily control over external phenomena is not secure not only because each body moves according to another body but also because the environment is visually altered by bodily action and, thus, in return, bodies must adapt to the decrease of light in order to succeed in executing another action that will further alter the phenomenon.



73 Robert Rauschenberg, *Open Score*, 1966

As the intensity of light reduces, the perception of distances and positions shifts. Increasingly, the body must substitute its visual ways of pinpointing the tennis ball in space and the moment to hit it with auditive and tactile senses: the textured sounds of the ball's impact upon rackets and ground, as well as of its passage through air, become the key sensory stimuli to attend to. As the body needs to retain a sensory understanding of the spatial order surrounding it in order to play the game of tennis, it is forced radically to modify its perceptual mode of experience and play. This, as with the previously mentioned works, suggests that dissolving walls, floors, ceilings and borders – any 'borderline of a spatiality exposed to the outside, offered – precisely – on its running border' (Derrida 2005: 103) – most clearly produces a subversive intermediary, in-between zone into which the body is critically invited to alter its sensory make-up. Since the body's presence triggers the revelation of spatial borders as porous interfaces, corporeality itself is conjured to attend to its borderline too: the 'incalculable limit of a being that is constantly taking form' (Vasseleu 1998: 128).

As an exemplification of these levels of autopoiesis and how they lead on to an even more radical conception of relationality and reciprocity, we can consider works by Joan Jonas. Jonas' seminal film *Vertical Roll* (1972) makes the body and technology 'as inseparable as the guillotine' (Kantor 1961: 212–13) by presenting her naked body visually eroded by self-interrupting electronic signals producing vertical glitches rolling

over her figure. Looped and bordered by the video frame, *Vertical Roll* conforms to Varela's homeostatic conception of autopoiesis.



74 Joan Jonas, *Vertical Roll*, 1972

Subsequently, Jonas created a series of 'black and white' live performances that were 'deeply material in their form, but ephemeral in their existence' (Iles 2001: 52) such as *Mirage* (1976), in which she extended her live body's presence with projections of pre-recorded actions of herself drawing and erasing white motifs inspired by New Guinean sand drawings on a black-board. While the film relates to a homeostatic autopoiesis, the performative event formulates an autopoietic reflexivity furthered in the way Varela revised it in terms of 'self-organization theories implying that radical changes were possible within certain kinds of complex systems' where the 'coupling [of body and machine, is] so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish' one from the other (Hayles 1999: 35). Varela identified such *dis/connection* as an oscillation between habits, or 'readiness-for-action' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 135), and their 'breakdowns [prone to catalyse] new modes of behaving [: thus,] *during a breakdown*' (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 328–9) the body is 'shaping a world into significance [as it is] transform[ing] itself through emergent behaviour' (Hayles 1999: 223).

In *Mirage,* the ‘sense of seriality’ of those ‘endless drawings’ (Iles 2001: 51) anchored in the video medium can be related to the habituated movement Varela calls readiness-for-action. Yet, as Jonas sought to explore the ‘demise of two-dimensional painterly representation’ (Iles 2001: 51), the video content is juxtaposed with her live body engaging in ‘jerky backward movements [that] appear to pull her image back toward us just as it is about to disappear’ (Iles 2001: 52). Kinetic repetition thus links the live and the pre-recorded. But, unlike the monotonous hands drawing with chalk in the video, Jonas’ repetitive and live movements change in time as her lack of balance increases towards highly vertiginous oscillations. Embodied habits such as drawing are therefore juxtaposed with the physical exploration of disequilibrium. Repetition is thus revealed as a mode both for replicating, consolidating and maintaining a system and for unravelling replication to explore new systems. Effectively, then, establishing a system and simultaneously dishevelling a systematic structure (such as the proprioceptive location of a centre of gravity in the body) echoes the mutating organism of Varela’s autopoiesis.

Faced with a being in the throes of mutation it is impossible to settle that being in discursive certainty thereby leaving the audience ‘unsure of where to locate the final meaning” (Iles 2001: 52). Indeed, ‘accompanying this [autopoietic] change is a corresponding shift in how signification is understood and corporeally experienced’ (Hayles 1999: 35). Through autopoiesis, being can be understood as a mode of constant transformation whereby the material world can never be absorbed entirely by discourse and knowledge but, because it is ever-mutating, requires discourse to break down into an uncertain structure of thoughts that also enables discursive mutations: ‘flickering signifiers, whose transient patterns evoke and embody […] the context of no context’ (Hayles 1999: 47). An autopoietic understanding thus shifts the experiential emphasis from the discursive to the physical or, as Varela would have it, ‘actualizes the birth of the concrete’ (Varela in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 329).

Autopoiesis places emphasis on a materiality that cannot be discursively stable and, as such, implicates the embodied dimension of subjectivity accordingly. Implicit in the autopoietic encounter then is the possibility for subjectivity to be withdrawn from the cognitive certainties of being, the discursive borders that frame being in terms of self-possession, autonomy and singularity. In an autopoietic encounter, ‘phenomenal experience expands my immediate horizons and takes me beyond myself to the world’ (Noë 2004: 217):

> [w]hat is knocked out from the subject's psychic landscape is the delusion of One-ness, the phantasy of omnipotence. To recognize this basic, ego-deflating principle is the ground zero of subject-formation (Braidotti 1994: 269).

By identifying a critical type of interactivity between the body and its environment in the black box, and emerging out of its visual uncertainties, this thesis has refined our understanding of the gloom. It has seen the gloom's operation as a desingularizing involvement through abstract visual artworks which appeared from the mid-twentieth century onwards, alongside the emergence of the black box. But the legacy of such spatio-corporeal autopoiesis in visual arts was then compounded and elaborated in architectural terms. In the case of James Turrell, it can be seen how more recent artists have developed autopoietic abstraction into the domain of architecture.



75 James Turrell, *Spread*, 2003

After seminal works such as *Soft Cell* (1993), in which Turrell explored spatial inhabitation through the sensory deprivation of a soundproof and lightproof box, the artist developed a series of works called *Ganzfeld*, drawn from early twentieth-century inquiries into sensory deprivation aimed at unravelling the *total field of perception* ('ganzfeld'). Part of this series, *Spread* (2003), is a large luminous room inserted inside the museum space and mixing various kinds of artificial and natural light in such a way that 'the picture plane is almost pulled over your head like a shirt. The light from inside then meets the light from outside in such a way that it becomes insignificant to determine from where exactly the light comes' (Turrell in Nechvatal 1999: 341). Entering through a rectangular cut in the museum's wall, one's sense of the spatial configuration starts shifting from rectangularity to its melting down as the walls and

corners that are perceived recede as one moves towards them. The work does not actually deprive audiences of any singular sense but rather attenuates and confounds vision. As a result, the inside space's ends, or limits, remain equivocal in visual terms and must be eventually verified by tactile means: thus 'no image' can be settled thereby 'avoid[ing] associative, symbolic thought' (Turrell in Nechvatal 1999: 123).

As a consequence of this experience the body itself is unsettled in terms of its own embodied thinking: one can no longer move in a way that is familiar and evocative of one's feelings, ideas and self. Instead, one must step out of one's kinetic habits since, throughout the process of finding out the spatial borders, the body must hesitantly tip-toe and undergo physical disorientation and imbalance as the perception of the space changes at every step. One must therefore develop a more intensely relational and responsive experience with one's surroundings just as these themselves appear to react to their inhabitants.

In the second half of the twentieth century, other examples of such autopoietic interactivity can be seen in the architectural domain in the form of actions proposing 'the experience of urban space not as the result of a compositional order but as a *dérive*, an erratic accumulation of synesthetic experiences' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 80). So too there are speculations, such as Nicholas Negroponte's *Soft Architecture Machines* (1975), on a 'responsive architecture' where 'walls that move to the touch – relevant to the function of support or moving back in retreat – that change color and form: streamlining themselves to the wind or shrinking down when unoccupied, are all possible', but would require 'a dramatically different relationship between ourselves and our houses, one characterized by intimate interaction' (Negroponte in D'Estrée-Sterk 2003: 88). These examples, as the following sections will demonstrate, signal a meeting point between architecture and scenography which will inform later developments in both fields. But before we attend to these further developments, it is necessary at this juncture to make detail further the conceptual and discursive modelling of the effects of autopoiesis and the corporeal and kinetic innovations in play. In order to do this I shall report on a second phase of practical research developed specifically to enable this modelling. This phase established a structure of autopoietic interactivity using digital technologies of projection in the black box. The description of this work, and its potential implications, writes first-hand experience into the narrative. Thus the next section of the thesis seeks to become more able to identify, in a more detailed way,

the specific issues bearing on subjectivity in the context of a spatiality that does not support its embodiment in singularity.

From here, architecture, visual arts and scenography will then be observed further in an attempt to formulate theoretically the form of reciprocal being that is implied wherever relations between body and space have been engineered to be obscure, uncertain, unsettling and unpredictable.

2.3 Feeding upon light

From the onset of the black box's emergence, the presence of live bodies was exuded through spatial phenomena that may be described as aberrant inasmuch as their tangibility and shapes were incomplete and questionable. In this respect, Josef Svoboda's 'non-existent screen' is a key concept for understanding the spatiality of the black box since it embedded all light, objects, scenery and bodies within its confusing materiality. This, as we have seen in the previous sections, was reflected in other fields of practice where the position of the live body was increasingly established in relational and reciprocal terms.

Such reciprocity between the body and its surrounding is also part of the hypothesis that concluded the last phase of my practice: namely, that it was possible for a lighting phenomenon to occur solely out of live responsiveness to the body's presence and mobility. This relational structure might suggest a critical type of co-presence prone to an autopoietic breakdown inasmuch as visual positioning would collapse and give way to new modes of perception and, through them, new modes of physical kinesis and of subjective embodiment.

Whilst these new modes may be apprehended up to a point through the analysis of historical precedents, the fact of their embodiedness presents a problem for a merely discursive commentary. It suggests, instead, that there is a need to incorporate experiential elements and processes into the work of developing and refining understanding. Elsewhere it has been asserted that 'discursive constructions affect how bodies move through space and time, influence what technologies are developed, and help to structure interfaces between bodies and technologies' (Hayles 1999: 207). Here, by contrast, as a consequence of developing a technological device (digital lighting) that interfaces with the body in uncertain and unpredictable ways in order to test its hypothesis, the thesis is able to suggest a reversal of the aforementioned

affective structure wherein new modes of moving through space and time may produce new discursive constructions in the embodied subject. The implementing and trialling of such a device should make it possible to develop more profound understanding of a subjectivity embodied by way of an autopoietic breakdown. In establishing its hypothesis by practical means, this specific phase of exploration contributes to an overall journey of practical experimentation that seeks to consolidate and develop further the overlooked legacy of the scenographic gloom.

In the previous stage of research practice, *Cycloramic lighting*, the digital projection of the static drawings I had produced led to a particular point in the inquiry where the body's moving presence in the projection compelled its content to move on the body's surface. I concluded this phase with speculation about a possible light whose occurrence and kinesis would pivot entirely on the body's presence and movement. In other words, I sought to know whether the previously observed relation between body and light could be expanded in such a way that even the appearance and disappearance of light could be triggered in response to the body's presence.

The use of the digital programme Powerpoint for the purpose of projecting various and static drawings as a slide show became obsolete. Or rather, the digital nature of this medium could be more profoundly utilized in terms of what is referred to, in digital practices, as interactive systems or softwares. However, an interactive system requires digital programming, which is not an area of expertise of mine. Therefore I turned to digital programmers and developers to discuss the possibilities of creating an interactive or responsive lighting software that would still be implemented via a digital projector. From the onset of these discussions it became apparent that digital programmers working with interactive systems are customarily used to interactions being triggered by hands and fingers touching a screen, a surface or an object. As a result, the suggestion of a space that is entirely responsive to the entirety of the body was not well understood by programmers. I thus decided to draw a sketch which would include elements that programmers were used to but that could also be understood without these elements (and thus begin to approach my speculations).

Not conceived for realization, this prototypical template, which I called *Interactive Scenario*, visually presented key operational concepts at stake in the research as applied to common understandings of hand-triggered interactivity. The drawing shows bodies placing their hands against a screen, resulting in a small beam of light appearing right next to the hand. At the same time, the sketch also discretely

suggests an attempt to discard the screen: the projected light comes from behind the screen, traversing it and continuing throughout the volume of space in front of the screen and in which bodies are located. Thus, the body might not only perceive and play (with hands) with the light on the screen but it might also perceive that same light in the space, finishing on the floor, where the whole body may also be affected by the light. Furthermore, the drawing suggests that as the hand moves across the screen's surface, the light beam follows and grows. But this growth was envisioned as occurring independently from the body's kinesis so as to provide additional and unpredictable stimuli to which the body could respond. After presenting and explaining this sketch to digital developers, I proposed that they rethink this scenario by removing the screen and considering the entire volume of space as a screen, and thus abandon the hand's contact with the screen as a trigger of the interactive systems, instead considering the entire body as a stimulus for light's responses.

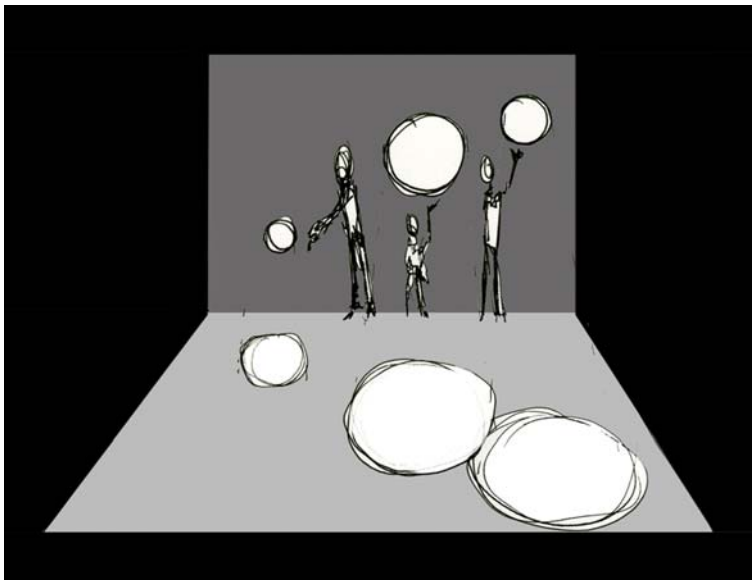


Fig. 11 *Interactive Scenario*, 2008

The programmers first created the skeleton of a custom-made digital software in which lighting phenomena were entirely responsive to the body's movement. This, as with any custom-made digital programming, had to be first evolved within the virtual space of the computer whereby initial aspects of the visual phenomena and the tracking of motion could be tested on the computer screen and with respect to small-scale objects such as my hand. Within this two-dimensional context, the basic assets of the software could be developed, the first of which concerned responsiveness with respect

to the appearance and disappearance of light. Something in the physical world had to be detected (tracking) in order to trigger this and it was initially decided that movement would switch on the light, and thus stillness would switch it off. The second basic asset of the software concerned the visual appearance of light itself: its textures, forms and behaviours. It is in this asset that the key perceptual qualities of the light were evolved. Once these basic properties were created, the software had to be tried out in practice in order to consolidate its skeleton technically and develop it further towards making it partly autonomous with a view to providing unpredictable phenomena to which the body could respond.



Plate 2 *Kinetic LX 1*, 2009 (also see DVD excerpt Kinetic LX 1)

Initial experiments with the software carried out in a black box show that my body was confused by the lighting's responsiveness: any single movement triggered the emergence of light. Even the mildest shifts occurring within the fabric of the t-shirt I was wearing would impel small white shards of light to appear. Moreover, when trying solely to move my left arm, it appeared that the rest of my body was moving too, since light occurred everywhere on me. Thus, in order to develop some control over the responsiveness of light, I rapidly stopped moving in the everyday ways I am accustomed to. Instead, I would repeat a simple gesture again and again, reducing it and slowing it down in order to ensure that only one arm was moving and thus illuminated. This involved keeping an awareness of my body's contrived stillness while paying

attention to how my arm moved or stopped moving. When such precise and dual awareness and control of all body parts is achieved, the light should become manipulable, almost graspable in a haptic turn of sensation from vision to touch.



Plate 3 *Kinetic LX 2*, 2009 (also see DVD excerpt Kinetic LX 2)

The stillness of the entire body that was required in order to switch the light off was very difficult to achieve. At first, whenever I was attempting to be still, light would appear and show me areas of my body that were still moving, trembling. Those were usually small areas on my body, to which I would normally not pay much attention. Some of the trembling movement was coming from within my organs: lungs but also visceral activities. To be still meant to calm the internal activity down as well as all segments of my body's surface. Effectively, the stillness that would trigger complete black-out was the most physically testing. Opposite to the stillness of relaxation, it is the kind of stillness that Andre Lepecki (2004) links to exhaustion and disappearance as expanded modes of perception: 'stillness-in-motion [enables] shifting the limits of our senses of time and space' (Lepecki 2004: 141). In my practice, physical stillness altered the sense of space because its triggering of darkness and the loss of visual content of volumetric spatiality were paradoxically paired with a stronger sense of being anchored, grounded, in space due to the compelling effort to remain still. Yet the sensation of the environment's solid materiality was paired with a highly transient physicality of my

body because the efforts that were required to be still were not sustainable for very long and thus constantly ran the risk of failing; it was a restless state of vertigo.



Plate 4 *Kinetic LX 3*, 2009 (also see DVD excerpt Kinetic LX 3)

With a view to creating a domain of interaction where both body and surrounding phenomena are responding to and affecting one another – and since I was becoming physically acquainted with the initial assets of the software – autonomous and random lighting behaviours were developed and added to the programme. These were aimed once again at confounding my perception and physicality so as to provide new stimuli for me to respond to. To be able to observe my reactions, these random occurrences were first thought through as bold and obvious disturbances of the responsive phenomena: for instance, light would initially respond to bodily movement by highlighting any moving part of the body but then some of these highlights would start expanding and floating away from the body. Requiring light to behave in such different ways meant that the behaviour of this digitally-engineered lighting could not simply replicate the real properties of light's propagation. We thus looked at types of natural hazy phenomena to diversify the light's behaviour as necessary. We selected the behavioural properties of clouds which were then algorithmically introduced into the software. This additional behaviour provided an unpredictable feature yet one that could be controllable since one particularity of clouds' behaviour, trailing, could be implemented either as an expanding phenomenon diverting from the responsive light's

behaviour (thus away from the body's movement, as if wind had changed directions) or remain still connected to the responsive lighting phenomenon (by keeping the former aligned with latter's direction, position and speed). Diverted trailing offered surprises with which I could not always engage, whereas aligned trailing allowed me to continue developing the kinesis unfolding from the responsive light. It must be noted here that these two distinct lighting behaviours are not clearly identifiable as such on video footage, as indeed they are fused with one another and as a result look quite similar. Seen from an immersed perspective, however, they were physically felt as very distinct: moving an arm would bring light onto it and allow me to make that light travel in space as I moved my arm (like a torch). Simultaneously this movement would leave light in its passage and thus call for a secondary awareness of that trailing's presence and what it may reveal. It felt very much as if I was moving my hand across the surface of a table and bits of skin were being temporarily left behind. It was as if the contact between hand and table remained visibly in place, only dissipating long after the hand had moved away. But instead of it being simply a hand it was the entire body which was involved. Overall, then, the developing complexity of this digital lighting made sensations and perceptions of a tactile kind grow stronger as I was kinetically honing the interaction with light.



Plate 5 *Kinetic LX 4*, 2009 (also see DVD excerpt Kinetic LX 4)

The technology and related experiments produced in practice suspended a particularly habituated mode of perceptual relation and enabled a new and more complex one to unfold. As such, the work can be further analyzed from the perspective of Posthuman autopoiesis whereby tactile perception constitutes a sensory breakdown as it shifts from the habituated tactility of the hands to the development of a new tactile habit in the entire body. This involved a challenging relation between the body and the surfaces accommodating it (mainly the floor) as my body had to balance its weight in more tentatively elastic and destabilizing ways than in everyday life. Punctured by often painful failures to adjust, the process of habituation exposed a more complex tactility involving new proprioceptive relations with space and revealing how touch is deceptively assumed to be limited by a tactile perception contained in the hands. Indeed, 'habitus' is particularly informed by 'tacit conceptions wherein somatic inscriptions – of the body's sensorium into instruments, and of prosthetic perceptions into the body – become naturalized': and thus habit runs the risk of appearing as a biological given and a 'primary interface' (Iles 2001: 72–3). Touch is naturalized in the hands: extended by the arm, the hand can be the sole barrier against tactile contact, a distancing touch that prevents proximity; but the hand can also afford a forceful grasp or a sensuous embrace. A whole range of cognitive activities is codified in the behaviour of the hands and how they animate or limit contact, thereby participating in the management of self-autonomy. But if sensorimotor habits are 'a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body' (Connerton in Hayles 1999: 200), the distinction between hands and body, and the positioning of the hands as primary interface are all merely constructed. Unravelling such habits through practice would then suspend their tacit conceptions and cognitive subtexts.

To conceive of the whole body as a hand indeed complicates and disrupts tactility's cognitive regulation of physical encounters. However, throughout those developments of ways of perceiving and moving (including being still) that were new to me, I always remained aware of that which in my body had been previously habituated. This was felt as a physical and psychological resistance against returning to my usual ways of looking, touching and being effortlessly still. I sensed my entire body in a tension between old and new habits. In this sense: 'presence remains as that which belabours the body as generative counterfeit' (Lepecki 2004: 9). Nonetheless, the sensory and kinetic transformations occurring against the background of prior habits no longer produced the same sense that prior habits would have.

The conventional movements with which I was familiar are attached to sensations, feelings, emotions and even precise thoughts: shoulders going up in a certain way when irritated, and going up in a different way when perplexed. Although I became more aware (on an *ad hoc* basis) of this cognitive codification ingrained in my body, the unusual movements I was discovering did not seem merely to reconfigure cognitive expression through the body, but instead to collapse cognition itself. While performing unusual movements, even once habituated, no cognitively definable sensation or thought would come into sharp relief. What I visually observed on video recordings did corroborate the absence of meaning and signification in my bodily presence. Thus, although the movements continued to display little meaning, they elaborated an increasing sense of contact between my body and another presence, as if the volumetric space had become a moving entity. And, again, video recordings showed my body moving as if in a dance with another body. This exteriorization of awareness and corporeal materiality is also relatable to the demise of cognitive legibility because the relation, or encounter, between my body and the space cannot be described in terms of emotions or meanings. Within such discursive illegibility, the perception and recognition of a subjective identity are destabilized. From an immersed and embodied viewpoint, this was quite simply felt as moving like and with another where the other lacks discursive and subjective qualities: a slippery other against which both body and self are reconsidered.

Indeed, in my practice, the reconfigured expansion of tactile perception – co-extensive with the breakdown of visual orientation and positioning – informs how the body can no longer regulate its relation to the outside and separate itself from it, therein developing 'a relational self whose desire to empathize predominates over display' (Foster 1992: 495). Embodied subjectivity then becomes defined by an experiential reciprocity where it is affected by the outside, mutates and transforms its relation to the outside in order to affect it in return:

> [t]he living being resolves its problems not only by adapting itself – which is to say, by modifying its relationship to its milieu […] – but [also] by modifying itself through the invention of new internal structures and its complete self-insertion into the axiomatic of organic problems (Simondon in Hansen 2002: 346).

Indeed,

> it is impossible for a being to undergo the effect of some other without that effect being mutual. … Every effect modifies the object that is its

> cause. There is no dissociation of the subject and the object – nor any original identity – there is only an inextricable reciprocity (Lichtenberg in Baudrillard 2005: 41).

This, in Posthuman theory, relates to how the more an organism is engaged in an autopoietic breakdown the more 'there is no clear line between those who act and those who are acted upon' (Hayles 1999: 217) and the more the 'observer [becomes] part of the picture' and thus 'can never be made of information alone' (Hayles 1999: 246). Accordingly, Katherine Hayles proposes considering a Posthuman subjectivity where 'what binds the decoder to the system is not the stability of being a member of an interpretive community or the intense pleasure of physically possessing […] rather it is the decoder's construction as a cyborg [:] another flickering signifier' (Hayles 1999: 47) where identity is 'emergent' and 'distributed' (Hayles 1999: 291). However, this uncertain multiplicity of being has given rise to negative and positive constructions of the subjectivity it presupposes. In its negative construction, the Posthuman subject is doomed to radical disconnection: 'leaving the body behind [to be] anti-human [and] apocalyptic' (Hayles 1999: 291). On the other hand, the positive construction revolves around a type of connection where it 'is not a question of leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness' (Hayles 1999: 291). By focusing on the body-organism's ability 'to transform its interiority precisely by opening it to forces in the environment', Posthuman theory formulates a subjectivity that 'encompass[es] the body as a locus of such forces' (Hansen 2002: 348). By repositioning being at a 'level of sensation [that] would be the original locus of openness upon things, or contact with them" (Lingis 1986: 59), the Posthuman being displays a particular attention to and cultivation of the 'fleshy, objective foundations of subjective consciousness as it engages and is transformed by and in the world' (Sobchak 2004: 2).

This positive, emergent and risky face of the Posthuman allows for 'apprehend[ing] the body as multiple, protean and capable, literally, of being made into many different expressive bodies' (Foster in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 495), that is, 'leap[ing] outward into the new' (Hayles 1999: 222) and 'producing new kinds of subjectivities' (Hayles 1999: 217). These are 'pleasurably tight coupling[s] [and] erotically charged violations with potent new fusions [where] the cyborg becomes the stage on which are performed contestations about the body boundaries that have often marked class, ethnic and cultural differences' (Haraway in Foster 1996: 221).

This Posthuman conception of the cyborg refers to a relation between body and technology wherein being is socio-politically confounded, resisted and innovated as such. Through practical experiments to engage and interface my body with the black box via digital technologies, I had advanced some way towards demonstrating, and verifying, the possibility that an embodied subjectivity can mutate by way of suspending the behavioural and cognitive codification of its singular identity. For the fundamental, and unique, function of the lighting system I had developed was to further expose the black box's intrinsic capacity to support moving forms whose shifting edges cannot confirm the delineation of a finite form. Posthuman theory thus allows us to understand the black box's suggestion of a new and critical dimension in the being's relation to the environment and others. As a container in which nothing can be phenomenally contained, as a form undoing its finitude and the finitude of all other forms within it,

> the black box [is] a depoliticizing space in the sense that no body politic can be placed on view [yet it remains] rooted in the human body [wherein] this body is made tantalizingly available through proximity and three-dimensionality (Wiles 2003: 257–8).

Wiles' concept of the black box as 'depoliticizing space' prompts us now to add another element to the way we politically conceive of the black box, and in doing so to deepen the discussion of it. To this end, the 'presencing [of] a more embodied spatiality [allows] to re-see the black box, not for what it reveals but for what it conceals': a 'void', or 'primordial gap', where 'formless matter' constitutes a critical and 'collective body' (Hannah 2003: 32). Indeed, as the black box bestows a renewed understanding of the individual being, it necessarily also suggest a different kind of human collectivity. However, in Dorita Hannah's position, which also draws from a Posthuman perspective, the 'non-representational space' (Hannah 2003: 23) of the black box, an 'uncommitted space' of 'darkness once constituted by a pinpoint of signification' (Hannah 2003: 29), can be related to a gendered environment, which she calls a 'cyborg-womb' (Hannah 2003: 28). She pursues this Posthuman contradiction by finding a 'surplus' or 'overwhelming excess of meaning' (Hannah 2003: 27) in which she nonetheless specifies representational constructs: 'abject interior', the space of 'grief', 'night and nightmares' and the 'dark continent of femininity' (Hannah 2003: 29).

The conflicting proposition of a non-representational structure that is articulated by thematic metaphor does not seek to expose the depoliticized dimension of the black box as such. Instead it seeks to define it as a dangerous and feminine vessel where the analogy with the womb enables a liberation of the construction of femininity from its politicized subtexts of procreation, maternity, peacefulness, passivity etc… Rather than advocating the Posthuman potential to undo gender constructs, Hannah re-constructs femininity (and, with it, the black box) in representational terms whereby political structures for understanding bodies and subjectivities are not resisted but are subversively rewritten by adding to them the very terms from which they were traditionally distinguished (namely masculinity).

But, if the black box provides a formlessness which is a slippery and risky 'in-between' (Hannah 2003: 24), or 'interval' (Hannah 2003: 27), between dialectical constructions of the human being (between self and other, masculinity and femininity, etc...), then all of these should be suspended

> to reach a continuum of intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of non-signifying signs (Deleuze and Guattari in Nechvatal 1999: 153–4).

Similarly, since the black box locates visual phenomena between form and formlessness, light and darkness, then darkness alone can no longer be taken to predominate and thereby produce those negative and violent associations of grief, nightmares etc… Indeed, the argument that the black box's radical darkness is to be seen in terms of a singularly depoliticizing force, as Hannah does, is predicated on a flawed claim that darkness is the key innovation in the mid-twentieth-century scenographic developments of the black box. As I explained previously, the expansion of darkness and its control were a scenographic strategy in Richard Wagner's music dramas. But the Wagnerian approach to darkness significantly differed from the twentieth-century experiments that led to the black box insofar as his use of the dark sought to delineate it from light, thereby requiring that the audience attend to light only. In inverse contrast, Hannah can be seen to accentuate and privilege darkness, thereby pushing light to the background. But both cases are similar in that a dialectically hierarchized and politicized ordering of light and dark is maintained, as opposed to an assertion of that which is unformed and in flux.

To comprehend the depoliticizing dimension of the black box in terms of darkness and formlessness, their differentiation from light and form needs to be revised. The model instead is that of a dissolve. Correlated with his haptic, quasi-non-visual, conception of a phenomenal light, Merleau-Ponty conceived of darkness by way of evacuating the conception of night from any theme and symbol. He stated that night is

> depth without foreground or background, without surface and without any distance separating it from me. All space for the reflecting mind is sustained by thinking which relates its part to each other, but in this case, the thinking starts from nowhere (Merleau-Ponty in Gunning 2009: 23).

By associating the darkness of night with the cognitive void of 'nowhere', Merleau-Ponty seeks to undermine the epistemological tradition by which cognition is framed by representation and thematization. However, 'nowhere' does not stand for an empty nothingness. Since 'there is nothing neutral about blackness' (Wiles 2003: 254) and thus the black box cannot be seen as an 'inert container' (Wiles 2003: 258), its darkness is rather to be understood, as Merleau-Ponty does, as an emergent mode of re-conceptualizing the cognitive act of thinking itself:

> a room without either doors or windows [,] a useless room [–] a functionless space [that] would serve for nothing, relate to nothing [–] language itself, seemingly, proved unsuited to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful and functional [; yet] how does one think of nothing? How to think of nothing without automatically putting something round that nothing, so turning it into a hole, into which one will hasten to put something, an activity, a function, a destiny, a gaze, a need, a lack, a surplus …? (Perec 2008: 33–4).

In the specific case of the black box, I have argued by two conjoined methods, both theoretically and through laboratory experiment, that it can induce a corporeal presence and kinesis which disrupt one's customary physical habits, their associated cognitive subtexts and their individuating or singularizing effects. And throughout the practice the absence of meaning in movements and gestures was constantly filled by thoughts about a 'lack' (the loss of prior habits) as well as a 'surplus' (the sensations of moving with another who is much heavier and bigger than me, thereby becoming part of me too).

Thus practice has highlighted an epistemological and ontological domain which is highly embodied and relational insofar as it evolves an inter-corporeal and inter-subjective domain of experience. However, the dialogic quality of co-presence does not provide any fixed and autonomous agency. Rather, in the gloom of the black box, the

cognitive experience can be re-apprehended as one that does not belong to the thinker, that is not singular and individuated, but emerges out of the unsettled overlapping of body and space. It 'sketches a body letting go of proprietary expectation, or habit, in order to be questioned by change [and] whatever change is looks something like this – a *leaning*, a consciousness *towards*, a showing *to*' (Robertson 2003: 164–5) the outside. This might be described as an ontological and epistemological departure and vertigo which, drawn from the effect of the black box, require us to engage with a philosophical journey into redefining a human condition where

> to know is to 'break out', to escape from moist gastric inwardness and fly out beyond oneself, toward what is not oneself, over by the tree and yet outside of it – for it eludes and resists me, and I can no more lose myself in it that it can be dissolved in me – outside it, and outside myself (Sartre 1992: 389).

In this epistemological state, an ontological shift occurs whereby

> [t]he reality of another for me [cannot be] a given fact, only a 'possibility', which I can never mimetically appropriate as my own. That imaginative, empathetic imitation which for earlier thinkers was the very foundation of human sociality is here abruptly dismissed (Eagleton 1990: 186).

Here human relations and collectivity are not predicated on a reciprocal affirmation of singularities or singularity but on an ontological inversion where 'to-be-in-the-world understand[s] this "being-in" as a movement' – the 'fleeting and puzzling image of breaking apart' – allowing 'consciousness to exist as the consciousness of something other than itself' (Sartre 1992: 389):

> no longer a question of attaining a definite status as a thing, a permanent fixture, nor of clinging to, having an identity, but of moving, changing, being swept beyond one singular position into a multiplicity of flows […] to proliferate connections (Grosz 1995: 184).

In this relational mode of being, the human collective may be reenvisioned in terms of a disparate multiplicity in which (power) relations can never be settled. Unlike the 'rationalisation of social or conceptual space' (Bois & Krauss 1987: 245–6) that organizes a dialectical opposition between inside and outside, self and other, the space of the black box offers 'an experience [that] dislocates us [,] its essence being to put us "besides ourselves"' (Bataille 1987: 260) and suggest, accordingly, human relations and interactions thinkable without a relational order based on conceptual divisions between self and other. A new human collective or landscape may then be unfolded away from any authoritative injunction of individual singularity and reciprocity.

Though less concerned with the political ordering of human relations and more interested in its spiritual and religious equivalent, Simone Weil can provide us with a theoretical starting point regarding a reenvisioning of the human collective away from the ontological, dialectical and 'imaginary' 'illusion […] that being carries the principle of its preservation within itself' (Weil 2008: 7). Rather subversively, Weil conceives of an ontological stance, 'light', against the dialectical ordering of self and other she calls 'gravity' (Weil 2008: 1). Gravity stands for the political grounding of an idealized 'base' whereby 'law generally puts force on the side of baseness' (Weil 2008: 2). Thus, justice is 'obedience to the force of gravity' (Weil 2008: 3) inasmuch as it is a 'search for equilibrium': for the 'analogous desires' (Weil 2008: 7) of 'wish[ing] to see others suffer exactly what we are suffering' (Weil 2008: 6). In this model, human relations are based on a 'desire for vengeance […] a desire for essential equilibrium' (Weil 2008: 6). In contrast, light is a kind of food freed from gravity, like 'chlorophyll', wherein 'to feed upon light' (Weil 2008: 3) constitutes an ontological vertigo of the body-politic's gravitational base: the 'tearing out' of a 'dark night', of a 'void' by means of a 'grace [that is] the law of the descending movement' (Weil 2008: 4). However, in this descent one 'come[s] down by a movement in which gravity plays no part': this is a 'second degree of grace' for one cannot elevate oneself through it but rather 'lower[s] oneself' (Weil 2008: 4), 'seek[ing] equilibrium on another plane' (Weil 2008: 6) to find that 'I also am other than what I imagine myself to be' (Weil 2008: 9).

Implicit in Weil's elaboration of a being whose relations to others are not based on an affirmative and singular selfhood is the recognition of a fragile otherness in oneself and its unfolding as an ethical matter of the human collective. While she develops her analysis of such otherness with respect to external and desingularized forces of a spiritual kind (thereby forming a critical discourse on spiritualism), we may equally observe the outside's 'majestic potentials of the convulsive seizure' (Walter in Iles 2001: 47) as a contender to 'radically destabiliz[ing] the ontological foundations of what counts as human' (Hayles 1999: 24). Either way, that which is external to being (material objects, technologies, environments, the world, the realm of the divine) must be seen as an unstable and vertiginous component of being which new equilibrium resides in how this otherness can become the hinge of being's relations to the outside:

> not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contours of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated […] so that the seer and the

> visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139).

As a mode of reciprocal disorder, this 'feeding upon light' is not an easy experience but a vulnerable and risky endeavour: 'whoever endures a moment of the void either receives the supernatural bread or falls. It is a terrible risk, but one that must be run' (Weil 2008: 11).

> 1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold about five seconds.
> 2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
> 3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds (Beckett 1971: 11).

Having experientially reached moments of relations between myself and the black box that produced phenomena, sensations and thoughts aligned with the key speculations underlying the practice (co-affective interaction, bodily/kinetic innovation, haptic perception and cognitive disturbances), the work has also enabled me to extrapolate further and broader implications to these speculations. In particular, the phase of practical experiments most recently described prompted the consideration of an ontological renovation. In this the embodied expansion of subjectivity is cognate with a collective domain of intersubjective and intercorporeal experience based on a desingularizing otherness. This would suggest that the point of development reached by the practice might allow for, and indeed require, the inclusion and confounding of other individuals as a mode of developing the work further. Thus, in the final stage of the practical research journey, I opened the work to other practitioners, including new digital developers, a performer and a sound composer. This stage will be discussed later on in the thesis, after having developed a more comprehensive understanding of the conceptual and philosophical ramifications of the concept I introduced above, ontological vertigo.

To develop this understanding, the study will pursue the analysis of the gloom in architecture, visual arts and theatre from the emergence of the black box (mid-twentieth century). Having already described how all these fields have undertaken various aspects and qualities of the gloom from the early twentieth century, the tracing of their further

development will demonstrate a lineage that has relevance to understanding the contemporary state of the gloom.

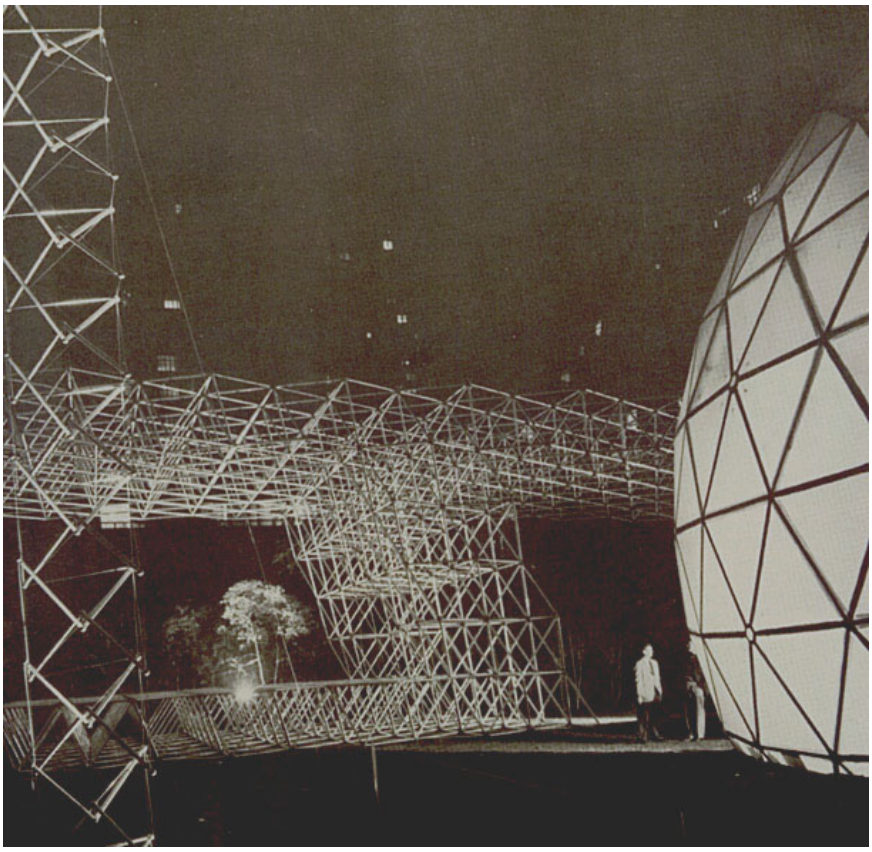
In particular, the following sections will analyze the historical precedents by which 'kinetic and responsive structure, temporal event, and flickering screen' attracted 'architecture's return to the stage at the end of the twentieth century' (Salter 2010: 80). The elaboration of what may be referred to as 'soft architecture' will provide more evidence regarding the ontological 'drift' of a 'speculative cognition' (Robertson 2003: 77–9). Indeed, 'the transitory performances of and within architecture [will, again,] help us pose complex questions straddling the territories of stillness and movement, façade and depth, stasis and morphogenesis, and permanence and evanescence' (Salter 2010: 85). These will provide an understanding of the relational changes and challenges at play between being and world, which will then be observed in performance arts and theatre where, again, the radicalism of the gloom has found even more potent conceptions and instantiations.

2.4 Soft architectures

In this section, I shall present summarily the practices and speculations that have progressively developed architecture's own resistance to and departure from the politicization of spatial subtexts and orders which commonly participate in the autonomization and classification of subjects. The large scale on which architecture operates makes it a highly politicized domain: the size of its visual phenomena has traditionally been used for the purpose of reinforcing national and ideological identities. However, in the twentieth century architecture can be seen to shift away from such political subtexts. A return to experiments found at the Black Mountain College provides, through the work of Richard Buckminster Fuller, an initiation into such an architectural venture. Here again the model of Posthuman autopoiesis can make sense of the positioning of a space where inside is established as dependent upon and through the outside: architecture is thus conceived as an organism which interiority (including its inhabitants) is in constant (ex)change with respect to its exterior surroundings.

Already perceivable in his *Dymaxion House* (1929), Buckminster Fuller's interest in spatial mobility and 'ephemeralization' (Fuller in Gorman 2005: 20) drew, as Antonio Gaudí did, from 'nature's own co-ordinate system' (Fuller in Gorman 2005: 115) – which he explored in Ernst Haeckel's drawn observations of microscopic

organisms – to find ‘independence from “grids” – sewage, electricity, schools and water’ (Gorman 2005: 194). The same year that he participated in the Black Mountain College performance of the *Ruse of Medusa*, 1948, a student of his, Kenneth Snelson, produced the *X-Piece*: a simple structure based on an innovative structural principle, derived from the scaffold, that Buckminster Fuller took up, to expand it the following year by constructing his first geodesic dome, and to patent this in 1962 under the term Tensegrity (tension-integrity).



76 Richard Buckminster Fuller, *Geodesic Dome and tensegrity mast*, 1959

Tensegrity can be roughly summarized as ‘the use of isolated components in compression inside a net of continuous tension, in such a way that the compressed members (usually bars or struts) do not touch each other and the prestressed tensioned members (usually cables or tendons) delineate the system spatially’ (D’Estrée Sterk 2003). In a tensegrity structure, weight is not conducted to the ground but distributed across all the nodal points and thus suspended. This allows structures to *defy* gravity and thus sometimes produce drastic antigravitational effects, as in Snelson’s *Needle Tower* (1968). Resulting in ‘lightweight architecture’ (Gorman 2005: 177), tensegrity is

particularly suitable for constructing ‘superstructures for embedded substructures’ (D’Estrée Sterk 2003) as well as architectural environments ‘extend[ing] in a modular way in all directions’ (Gorman 2005: 115): ‘portable and foldable […] low-environmental-impact shells, temporary shelters, earthquake-resistant water sheds and sunscreens’ (Gómez Jáuregui 2004). There is therefore an adaptative, and bodied, quality to tensegrity structures exemplified in the way they ‘hous[e] a “central nervous system”’ and, like a body, have an ‘exoskeleton’ (Gorman 2005: 115). And indeed, since then, tensegrity has also been shown to be a principle of internal bodily structures, or bio-tensegrity: ‘the skeleton and the central nervous systems are not just framing supports for bones, tendons, muscles and neurons, but a set of compression components suspended within a continuous tension network’ (Gómez Jáuregui 2004).

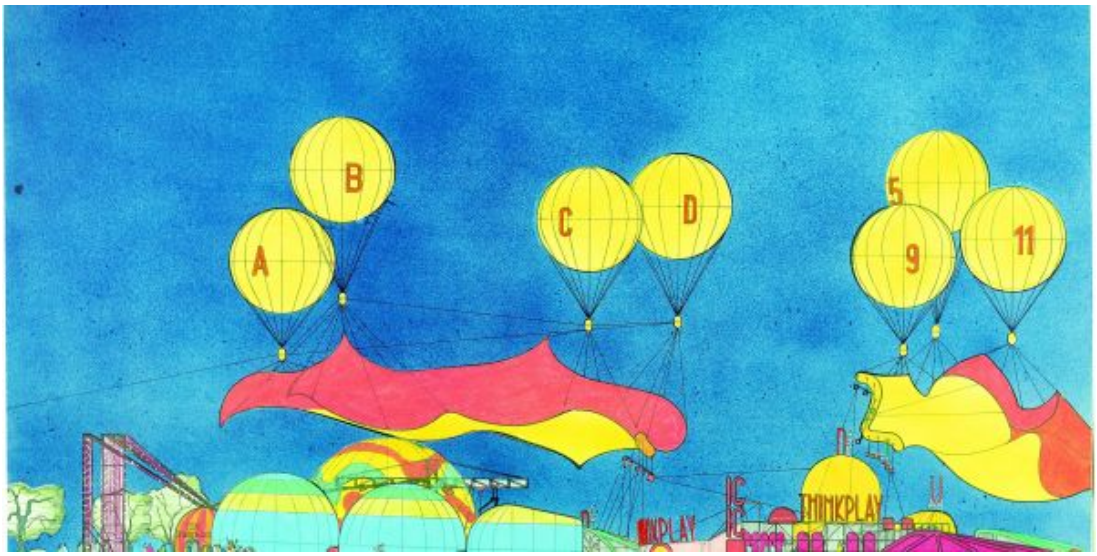


77 Richard Buckminster Fuller, *Cloud Nine Cities*, *c*1960

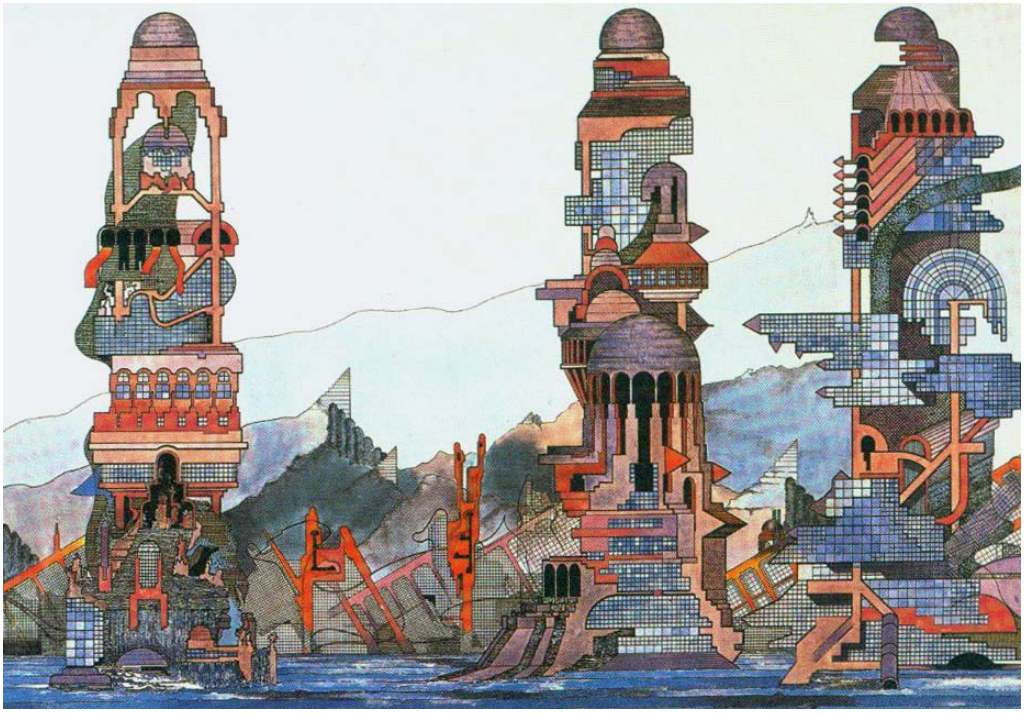
Tensegrity can be seen as a development from the scaffold in terms of augmenting its responsive and adaptative intelligence (D’Estrée Sterk 2003). As a result of its extended lability, tensegrity creates a speculative threshold at the core of the architectural practice. It enables speculations as to impossible built structures evolved through a ‘radial view’ and ‘def[ying] the vertical axis’, the dominant ‘linear view’ (Gorman 2005: 115): see Buckminster Fuller’s *Cloud Nine Cities* (1960) shortly followed by the moving cities of Archigram (*Walking City*, 1965; *Plug-In City*, 1965; *Instant City*, 1968–9). Thus not only does tensegrity formulate the possibility of a

kinetic architecture responsive to its environmental surrounding and the human body but it also animates, in return, new potentials for dwelling, and therefore new modes of bodily behaviour and movement:

> The Gestalt psychologism that impregnates all conceptions of form at the origins of the architecture of the modern movement undertakes its displacement from the simply visual to the synesthetically complex precisely in the culture of the postwar period (De Solà-Morales 1999: 22).



78 Archigram, *Instant City*, 1968-9



79 Archigram, *City of Towers*, 1981

Alongside the development of tensegrity, other architectural experiments can also be found to echo some of tensegrity's key phenomenal impact. These include resistance to partitioning space, its allowance of inside/outside interpenetration, its ambiguous emphasis on volume rather than surfaces and its scaffolded tactility and interactivity: see experiments in inflatable architecture by architects such as Graham Stevens (an assistant of Buckminster Fuller), Ant Farm (*50 X 50' Pillow*, 1969), Archigram (*Inflatable Suit Home*, 1968) and Coop Himmelb(l)au (*Restless Sphere*, 1971): 'walls no longer exist. Our spaces are pulsating balloons. Our heartbeats become space' (Coop Himmelb(l)au in Salter 2010: 81).



80 Archigram, *Inflatable Suit Home*, 1968



81 Ant Farm, *50 X 50' Pillow*, 1969

Convoluted spatial phenomena occurring indoors were seen in events such as *Dylaby – A Dynamic Labyrinth* (1962) at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, where multiple rooms of the museum were turned into a labyrinth, part of which was plunged, by Daniel Spoerri, into complete darkness to guide viewers through the touch of walls and floors covered with textured, hot and cold, dry and wet materials. In parallel with this groups such as the Situationist International and GRAV disrupted architectural orders on an urban scale, to produce 'the experience of urban space not as the result of a compositional order but as a *dérive*, an erratic accumulation of synesthetic experiences' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 80). Importantly, these various experiments and speculations do not merely seek to empty the architectural container of any discursive reference but rather to produce a 'condition of infinite interpretation and misinterpretation [because] vistas are endless, detail is endless' (Cook 2003: 143). They propose a soft 'topography' – an architectural 'form of representation that articulates rather than depicts' (De Solà-

Morales 1999: 6) – as they are 'particular, singular, and their description should not eradicate their individuality [but should] reject a topology [:] not a question of *logos*, of universal ideas, but of *graphe*, of writings [,] taking plurality not only as a starting point but as multiplicity within which to situate any segment of […] contemporary reality' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 7).



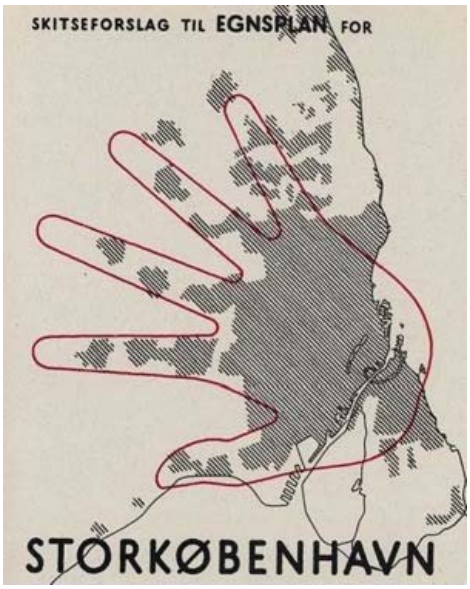
82 Coop Himmelb(l)au, *SoftSpace*, 1970



83 Coop Himmelb(l)au, *Restless Sphere*, 1971

Architecture can only shift from representing a singular ideology to articulating multiple ways of being and living by allowing and mobilizing the imbrication of facets and fragments of this multiplicity. For example, we can turn to the urban landscape of Copenhagen which, since 1947, adopted a new approach to urban planning, the 'finger plan', for the city's future developments. Based on the shape of a hand, the plan shapes the city to grow outwardly into its natural surroundings through its five fingers and thus, simultaneously, retains 'fingers' of countryside reaching towards the city's centre. Through the frictions between these two sets of natural and built fingers, 'the architectural object no longer establishes a stable and hierarchical relationship between itself and its surrounding' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 21). Rejecting any 'rational totality' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 7) – the 'kingdom of sameness; the region where the landscape is similar; the site where differences are put aside and expansive unities are established' (Porphyrios in Velibeyoglu 1999) – the finger plan further enables the 'city [to] delineate […] itself as a manifestation of a spatial community situated amidst a number

of widely divergent social praxes [: an] interpositioning into a larger non-transparent space' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 19).



84 Copenhagen, *Finger Plan*, 1947

Traditionally, urban architecture had been framed by two conceptual models: 'Urban Identity' and 'Generic City' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 5) which are 'causal [and] representational' models (Grosz 1995: 107). In the urban identity model the 'body or subjectivity' is seen as the cause 'and the city, the effect' (Grosz 1995: 105). The Generic City, on the other hand, conceives of a representational 'isomorphism between the body and the city' which become 'congruent counterparts' (Grosz 1995: 105). In both models, the city forms a unified architectural domain as a 'statist representation' (Grosz 1995: 107) of the 'averageness' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 14) of the 'body-politic [,] an organized, cohesive, integrated body' (Grosz 1995: 107):

> against any attempt to conceptualize the city-as-a-whole […] macro-viewing the city […] with a modernist and masculinist hegemony of the visual, an authoritarian viewpoint that allegedly eradicates difference and heterogeneity, silences subaltern voices, obscures the immediacy and sensuality of urban life, and works only to reproduce its own academic and intellectual hegemony' (Soja 1996: 313).

By contrast, Copenhagen's finger plan offers another conception, a '*thirdspace*' or 'thirding-as-othering': an 'intimate ethnography-geography' (Soja 1996: 313) that is a 'two-way linkage' of 'interrelations', in which the body and the built space are 'mutually defining' within a 'fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of

disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments' (Grosz 1995: 108). Reflecting and accommodating the 'flux and flex' of a 'transitoriness [that] effectively dissolves any other insistent perspective from the city's space' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 14), urban architecture conceived around specifically bodily premises of 'transit' (Grosz 1995: 107) – 'allowing human beings to migrate like birds' (Gorman 2005: 184) – articulates a 'deterritorializing energy' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 11): 'a form of itinerancy, a cruising that is not a territorializing or partitioning of space, but a folding of partitions' (Ricco 2003: 55).



85 Friedensreich Hundertwasser, *Waldspiral*, 1998-2000

Echoing scenography's bodied spatiality, such a conception of urban architecture as a multiplicity of shifting layers that never form a whole has most often only found practical outputs in the form of speculative projects. Nonetheless, it informs various architectural practices concerned with buildings, smaller architectural units and the body in the second half of the twentieth century. One of the rare architects to have pursued many aspects of Gaudí's work (Wade 2009), Friedensreich Hundertwasser, created the manifesto *Speech in Nude for the Right to a Third Skin* (1967) in which he

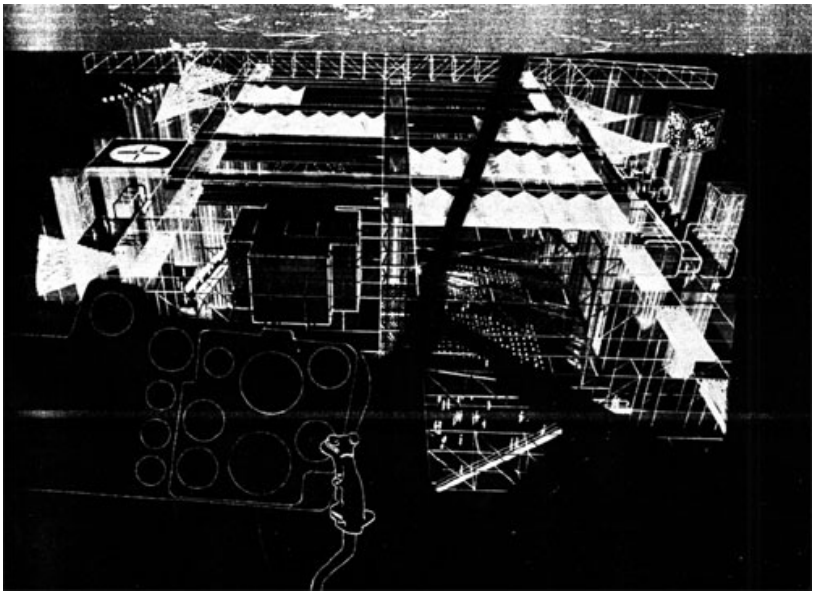
presented architecture as an interface between a network of five types of layers or skins extended from the body: the first three skins are the 'natural epidermis […] clothes [and the] house', the last two skins were the 'social environment' and the 'planetary skin […] the air we breathe and the state of the earth's crust (Restany 2001: 10–11). Hundertwasser favoured focusing on the friction of the first and the last skins, epidermis and planetary skins, as his *Mould Manifesto against Rationalism in Architecture* (1958), later renamed *Sacred Shit Manifesto* (1979), envisioned the birth of a 'wildly proliferating architecture' and 'the material uninhabitability of the slums' (Hundertwasser in Harries 1997: 240): 'when mould forms on a wall, when moss grows in the corner of the room and rounds off the geometric angle […] we become witnesses of architectonic changes' (Hundertwasser in Harries 1997: 241).

Although Hundertwasser's focus on mould, as 'matter out of place', could remain a mere 'contravention' of the 'systematic ordering and classification of matter [– which always] involves rejecting inappropriate elements', or 'dirt' (Douglas 2002: 44) – his interest lies in the relation between the mould and the architectural surface, and specifically how the mould erases it, making it incomplete as part of architecture's 'mediated […] condition [– a] relationship with its surrounding […] that is always adventitious, improper and extrinsic' (De Solà-Morales 21). Thus he sought ways to erode surfaces through a painterly and mosaic-like approach that expels the rectangularity of borders and produces new layers and porosity. Importantly, the visual complexity and irregularity of his work are also an invitation to the inhabiting bodies to participate. Hundertwasser would leave certain surfaces blank for inhabitants to fill: such as the areas of the facades surrounding windows where each inhabitant could paint and repaint over to the extent of their arms' lengths.

> If the space presented is complete, what's left for the viewer is to relive the space – this is the domain of fiction, the impulse is preservation (conservative); if the space presented is not yet complete, what's left for the viewer is to try out the space, attempt the space – this is the domain of essay, the impulse is change (radical) (Acconci 2001: 18).

To conceive of architecture as a structure of incompletion which then hosts participation from its inhabitants is to constitute a type of resistance to controlling the movement of dwellers and, in turn, to authorship on the part of the architect. When body and building enter into a 'partner[ed]' relation wherein 'the manipulators and the manipulated become exchangeable' (Howell in Giesekam 2007: 202) the body is impelled to interact and 'maintain some equilibrium [sensory and cognitive] amidst the

disorder' (Giesekam 2007: 202). A collaboration between architect Cedric Price, theatre director Joan Littlewood and cybernetician Gordon Pask on the *Fun Palace* (1963–74) specifically proposed an architectural environment 'seeking [the] maximum flexibility' and incompletion of the scaffold by means of a 'skeletal frame in which multiple interchangeable module-like environments could be constructed, rearranged by a mass-scale moving gantry crane that ran the length of the structure' (Salter 2010: 310). *Fun Palace* would have been made of 'inflatable structures and volumes, variable screens, pneumatically controlled floors [and other] moving structures', 'without divisions between spectator and performer' since only 'warm air currents, vapour and light curtains [would] serv[e] as walls' to encourage an 'ever-shifting […] social behavior [in] the participants' (Salter 2010: 310). It would be a 'university of the streets [and] laboratory of pleasure, providing room for many kinds of action' (Price and Littlewood in Salter 2010: 310).



86 Cedric Price, *Fun Palace*, *c*1964

This building was unrealized, as with most of the aforementioned architectural examples. But the actual realization of performative and mobile scaffolded constructions in the street and indoor performances of the Living Theatre, contemporaneous with the *Fun Palace*, suggests that it was performance and its scenography that continued the work of producing more tangible architectural and bodily suggestions, where indeed 'topography cathects with the desire to release identity and dissolve into material [to] wander […] among solidities' (Robertson 2003:

165). Thus, if ‘the liberation of architecture in the twentieth century paralleled a similar trajectory to the liberation of stage scenography, not only in the transformation of static materials into things kinetic but also the dynamization of the perception of space itself’ (Salter 2010: 82), this has occurred by way of scenographic anticipations and propositions of an architectural ‘form in which space, technologized through materials and media could become expressive – almost performative’ (Salter 2010: 82).

Indeed, ‘captivated by the potential of the stage as a proving ground to research architectural issues [, to] open up and challenge common precepts of architectural discourse’ (Salter 2010: 79), some architects relocated their ‘architectural research laboratories [...] in the controlled safety of the theatre space’ (Salter 2010: 80). They sought to create a ‘dancing architecture’ (Goldberg in Salter 2010: 80), an ‘architecture in a state of becoming, revolving, pulsing’ (Salter 2010: 82) according to ‘the richness of erratic drifting, of mobility with no predefined goal’ (De Solà-Morales 1999: 127). This would be a ‘fragmentation [that] fractures projects into particles difficult to recompose [as] the unfinished, the partial, and the cumulative have become predominant’ (De Solà-Morales 1999: 23).



87 Diller + Scofidio, *The Rotary Notary*, 1987

Derived from scenographic innovation, architectural incompletion in the works of Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio (Diller + Scofidio) is explored through collapsing visual clarity and creating in-between spaces or what they called an ‘interscenium’ (Diller + Scofidio in Salter 2010: 80). This was the ‘updating of the proscenium [by ways of an] ocular-saturated stage’ (Salter 2010: 80) using rotating and foldable walls and mirrors, and inspired by Duchamp (*American Mysteries*, 1983; *The*

Rotary Notary, 1987). We see here that scenography's own resistance to, disturbance and rejection of the framing device that is the proscenium arch (which led to the black box) were now becoming of interest to architects who sought to relinquish any architectural framing of the body. As a result, the ordering agency of such frames was critiqued and abandoned and the 'terms "figure/object" and "ground" [which were] both determinant and all encompassing […] totalities [,] have come into question [and] are no longer thought to explain the true complexity of phenomena' (Eisenman 1992: 424). The search to 'animate form' (Lynn in Salter 2010: 85) led architecture to being rethought as a 'stage set' (Tschumi in Salter 2010: 85), breaking through the organizing frontal interface, or *fourth wall*, of the proscenium arch. In doing this architects released much of the control their constructions had upon bodies' behaviour and mobility. So too, in reconceiving architecture as 'porous, projective, polymorphous' (Kwinter in Acconci 2001: 53), architects posed important questions regarding their authorship of the architectural phenomena inasmuch as their inhabitants were also now questioned by the built in terms of finding ways to inhabit it. These problems of autonomy and dependency are well summarized by

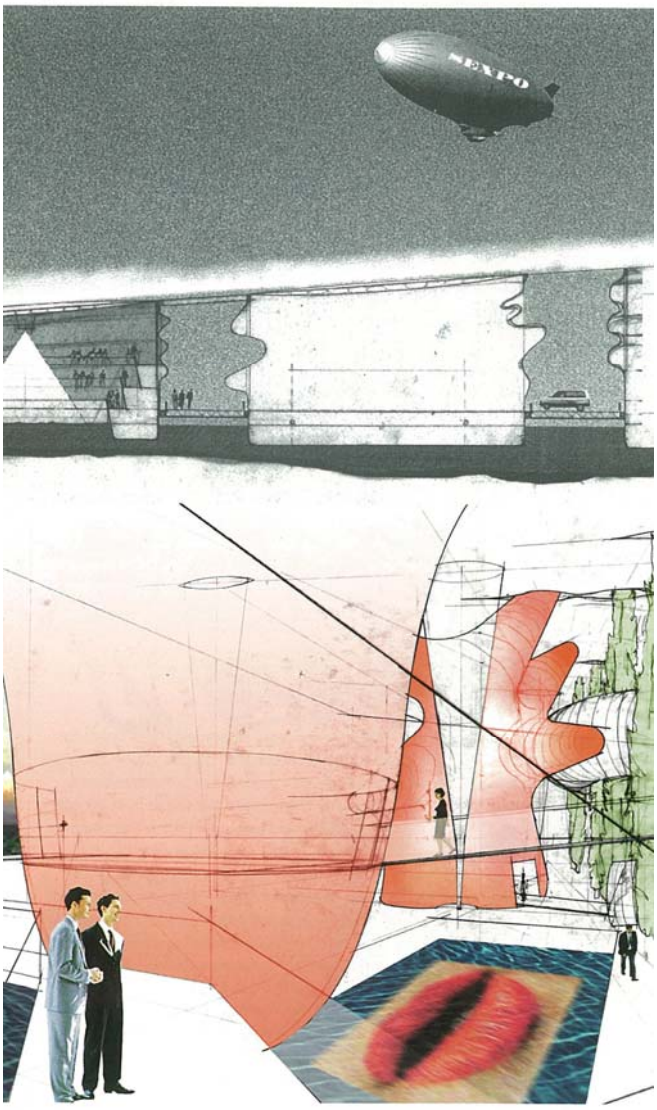
> Eisenman's conception of spacing [which] transforms the problematic of motivatedness from a restrictive into an enabling constraint […] as the means of liberating architecture from the task of discovering a figure in the ground (Hansen 2002: 13–14).



88 Diller + Scofidio, *Blur Building*, 2001

Spacing as a confounding rather than a defining mode of dwelling may be best illustrated by Diller + Scofidio's *Blur Building* (2002) where tensegrity and responsive intelligence coalesced most conspicuously to create an architectural haze-machine aimed at confounding the body's perception of its presence in the environment. By these means it pushed bodies into intensely improvisational interactions with their surrounding. The architects initiated the conception of *Blur* with a script or what they call a

> Dramaturgy Of Seduction: seduction and tension to accentuate the power of the sense: being in close proximity; foreplay; having a loss of orientation; succumbing to desire; acting out passions to the point of exhaustion and seeking the next adventure (Diller + Scofidio 2002: 41).



89 Diller + Scofidio, *Sketch for Blur Building*, 2001

The sensuality of seduction informs two main aspects of *Blur*. Firstly, the building's relation to its environment is based on a constant friction: it is located above a lake from which it drains water and turns it into a cloud of fog wrapping around the building. This interaction is engineered by means of an intelligent system embedded into *Blur* which allows it to detect wind power above the lake in order to drain calculated amounts of water that forms a cloud that is neither smaller nor bigger than the building. In return, the building's skeletal tensegrity enables the fog to become its semi-transparent walls through which the landscape is always partially visible (and certainly always felt due to the wind). Secondly, people's relation to the building (and thus to its surrounding) is also relatable to a sensual and seductive domain of experience. Having to wear a particular parka (with embedded LED lights), their entrance into this hazy metallic labyrinth requires progressive adaptation to the reduction of visual information and the correlated need to engage in tactile perception. Bodies slow down and find, increasingly, the correct grasps and grips to ensure their mobility. We may thus talk of a vertiginous sensuality since it requires 'rebalancing the senses' (Diller + Scofidio 2002: 195). 'The fog mass is primarily an experience of visual interference, thus the reliance on vision competes with *Blur*'s most notable characteristic, obscurity' (Diller + Scofidio 2002: 195). It thereby creates an 'immersive environment in which the world is put out of focus so that our visual dependency can be put into focus' (Diller + Scofidio 2002: 195).



90 Diller + Scofidio, *Blur Building*, 2001

Whereas architecture had traditionally provided static containers to protect its inhabitants from the shifting vicissitudes of the outside world, here in *Blur* such a tradition is turned on its head as the building enhances the problems posed by the natural world to human beings. To do so, *Blur* requires a static structure and so it may be said to intersect the static and the kinetic, the inside and the outside. Such an architectural paradox has found various conceptual discourses to support it. Among these, like many other architects (De Solà-Morales 1999: 9), Peter Eisenman's theories draw from the conceptual terms of Gilles Deleuze, whose philosophy is not only much concerned with architecture but also contains ideas which are presented as images of a spatial kind. Eisenman's conception of spacing as *dis-positioning* comes from his interest in Deleuze's notions of the 'fold/unfold […] of an object-event' (Eisenman 1992: 425) where the 'object-event' or 'objectile [is an] other kind of event, one in which a displacement of the static environment is […] an interpretation in which the environment is problematized' (Eisenman 1992: 424–5). It is a 'disjunctive synthesis between a fluctuating field and a form that erupts in its midst' (Frichot 2005: 72).

This apparent conflict was integral to Deleuze's 'Baroque House', in which space is two-fold:

> upstairs the voluminous space of the house is entirely dark, it has no windows to the outside, in fact, it is quite difficult to tell exactly how expansive it might be [because it is made of] drapery diversified by folds [while] downstairs there are windows, a door, and a rather formal set of steps that allows us to enter or exit (Frichot 2005: 65).

In Deleuzean terms, half of the house is a *striated space* with walls, doors, windows: 'the plane of consistency (grid) […] the outside of all multiplicities' (Deleuze in Lorraine 2005: 166). The other half of the house is a 'smooth space' (Colebrook 2005: 198): 'uncemented stones, where every element has a value in itself but also in relation to others: isolated and floating relations, islands and straits, immobile points and sinuous lines' (Deleuze in Buchanan and Lambert 2005: 11). Not 'concerned with framing space but, rather, with a temporal modulation that implies a continual variation of matter' (Eisenman 1992: 425), this 'formless field of attraction' (Crary 2001: 366) 'articulates possible new relationships between vertical and horizontal, figure and ground' (Eisenman 1992: 425). These are 'multiplicities [...] defined by the outside […] by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities' (Deleuze in Lorraine 2005: 166). Overall, then, the Baroque House is a construct that stands for the Deleuzean 'event [:]

precisely what punctures (or is subtracted from the axioms governing) a situation: it has a "site" in a situation but this does not belong to the latter, it is *supplementary* to it' (Burchill in Badiou 2000: viii).

The *smooth space* is a 'liquid groundless space' (Crary 2001: 359) that is 'a grounding without ground […] the need to build on air, to build in the void' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 59). As such, it is a space of conflictual sensory experiences: surfaces become depths, borders become membranes, vision is disorienting, etc. ... While the *smooth space* hints at 'the realm of the five senses' (Frichot 2005: 65–6), it only does so by means of creating sensory disturbances – a 'seeing that can no longer interpret [, a] 'shortcircuiting of the role of vision' (Hansen 2002: 369) – by 'inventing laws of liquids and gases (Deleuze in Crary & Kwinter 1992: 293) that produce an 'understanding of vision best conceptualised as a fluid or gas in motion' (Haralambidou 2006: 6). Here images are 'after-images, or effects of light that appear and disappear' (Frichot 2005: 71). Consequently, vision can no longer support either physical or cognitive certainty and the s*mooth space* thus provides an 'escape from figuration, illustration and representation' (Frichot 2005: 71–3).

In the case of Diller + Scofidio's *Blur*, then, the dramaturgy of seduction is not represented visually but embodied in the people and the building. There is no static depiction of sensuality but a changing experience of it. Now, as I have previously argued, such sensuality is unsettling and vertiginous. Therefore *Blur* can be said to impel its inhabitants to consider new understandings of seduction and sensuality. In its project of confounding bodies, it simultaneously (and *autopoietically*) enables them to change their ways of interacting with others. The building makes it impossible for bodies to move as they normally would and they must now elaborate new ways of moving. By unsettling their physical and cognitive understanding of their surrounding, *Blur* requires its inhabitants to produce new physical and cognitive modes of experiencing without any settled understanding.

In this sense, *Blur* may be said to fulfil a specific aspect of the Deleuzean *smooth space*, namely its virtuality where the 'virtual [is] that which resists representation' (Frichot 2005: 71). To take the argument about spatial effects a step further we need now to consider this virtuality. It can be thought of in relation to the real 'as a kind of presence not as a kind of non-presence' (Noë 2004: 216):

> concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent

> to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts (Massumi 1995).

From here we can, in general terms, suggest that by 'folding back to a function that projects beyond the hypothetical ground of things' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 70), architecture undertakes a speculative and 'dynamic threshold between the virtual and the actual', between 'flexibility' and 'inertia', between 'locality as the space in the real [and] disclosing the invisible [….] the virtual as that which might be' (Juel-Christiansen 2002: 11). Or, as Grosz says:

> The capacity of walls, boxes, windows, and corners to function in more than one way, to serve not only present functions but others as well, is already part of the ingenuity and innovation of the virtual in the real (Grosz 2001: 90).

In this way, architecture can not only morph in 'respon[se] to changing social, cultural and technological conditions' (Kolarevic and Malkawi in Salter 2010: 88) but also provoke social, cultural and technological changes by enabling bodies and spaces to be 'disjointedly connected to random others and objects through the spatio-temporal layout' (Grosz 1995: 110). Virtuality as the 'excess of that which has been actualised […] effectively allow[s] an opening for future actualisations, or future built forms' (Frichot 2005: 67). And, as it critically also involves bodies, it thus allows an opening for future bodily and subjective forms too.

The virtuality of the body may be understood as what Deleuze called, drawing on Antonin Artaud, the 'Body-without-Organs [or] BwO [which] is in constant metamorphosis'. This is 'an intensive and unshaped matter' (Colombat in Bensmaïa 2005: 145) which follows the spatial exploration of 'all the ways in which matter manners or articulates itself' (Colebrook 2005: 200). The constant metamorphosis may be conceived as 'the indeterminacy of the fold [: that] is neither figure nor ground but contains aspects of both', 'an in-between or third figure' (Eisenman 1992: 426) that 'occup[ies] the in between space that allows intensities and desiring flows to circulate before actualizing themselves in different shapes of thought and in living organisms' (Colombat in Bensmaïa 2005: 145).

Cognitively unstable, the BwO is predicated on an 'excess of meaning' (Bensmaïa 2005: 145) 'where concept continually moves in all directions and reinvents itself' (Conley 2005: 217) thereby making 'perceptible the process of [its] deformation' (Frichot 2005: 70). Thus 'the event should not be treated as something whose sense is

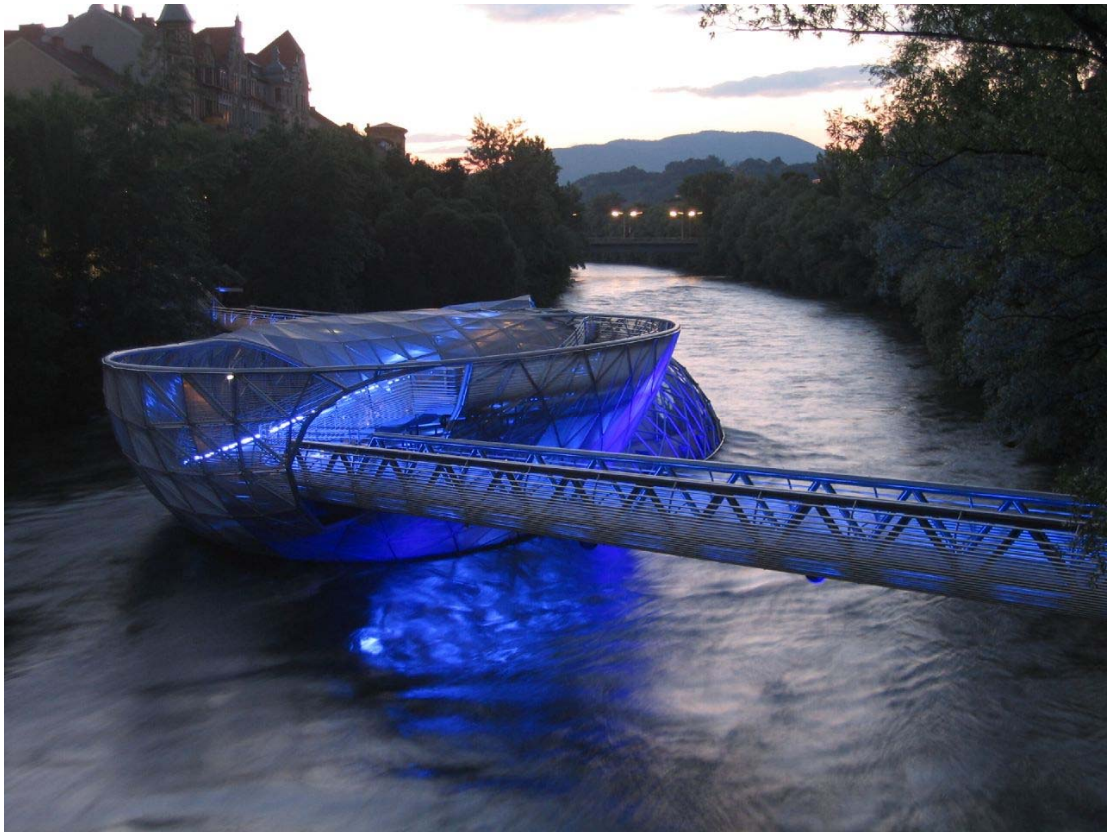
to be sought and disentangled' (Deleuze in Frichot 2005: 66). Rather it is to be observed in terms of the forces and matters it puts into friction, and in this way 'spacing begins to suggest a possible figure/figure relationship' (Deleuze in Hansen 2002: 13). To return from here to *Blur* 'it can be noted that its concern with a discrepant sensuality can be associated with the proposition of new human relations where it seeks to confound and renovate the most personal, relational and possessive confines of being. Before examining how such an interior dimension of being becomes precisely the ground upon which being can be radically reconfigured, we shall need first to describe the intercorporeal and intersubjective relations at play in the architectural gloom. For these are the catalysts of another form of being.

To get there we can examine other architects like Diller + Scofidio who show a particular interest in proposing new types of human relations through their buildings. For instance, Vito Acconci's architecture is similarly predicated upon encouraging 'bodies' transit from here to there, like the rolling heat of sex itself seeking the exquisite maximal state between frenzy and control' (Kwinter 2001: 48). Once again here the relation between the body and the architectural object is coterminous with the relations between bodies in that object. Acconci's structures are thus often interactive and inclusive of multiple bodies. With *Adjustable Wall Bra* (1990) Acconci created an open and modulable container which somehow functions as two seats.



91 Vito Acconci, *Adjustable Wall Bra*, 1990

Using a basic flying system, *Bra* evidently refers to specific body parts as well as to the membrane or skin that normally covers them. However, here nothing is covered, concealed or contained. The object rather 'proposes a performance and practice of the *hinge* […] between inside and outside […] a total modulation of openness and closedness [...] activated, completed, *turned on*, only with human energy and effort [: a] promiscuous and articulated fold, a magically flexible erotic device that grows and contracts and slips and slides, assembling and disassembling in a perpetual act of play and tumescence, involution, connection, and humor' (Kwinter 2001: 48).



92 Vito Acconci, *Island on the Mur*, 2002

Completed one year after *Blur* was dismantled, Acconci's *Island On the Mur* (2002) is a permanent theatre-house, using tensegrity in order to be positioned on the water of the river Mur in Austria. *Island* comprises two imbricated large transparent domes that create two spaces (a theatre and a café) that are both indoor and outdoor. Acconci's interest lies in the intersection of these two domes whereby each space always comes into being with the other, as they also do with respect to their natural environment: a 'playground is formed by the collision and by the melting' (Acconci

2001: 78). Multiple ways of inhabiting the building are offered just as multiple ways of seeing and seeing through the building are encouraged. All bodies present in the building can see and be seen by all other bodies. Just as *Island On the Mur* is made of a two-fold structure that is in constant dialogue perceptually, bodies are forced to undergo a highly intercorporeal and intersubjective domain of experience. It must be noted, furthermore, that the presence here of a theatre stage as part of the building is evidently no coincidence. As the cafe is located behind and partially overlapping with the stage, it can be seen as an extension of the stage that augments the way the stage always looks back at its audience (the cafe users become audiences who can observe both the stage and the auditorium of the theatre). The reciprocity of presences and gazes is thus intensified as part of the intercorporeal/intersubjective domain provided by the building.

This then becomes key to understanding the gloom's sensual critique of the fact that 'in contemporary social space, if you're not actually fucking, you're probably getting fucked' (Kwinter 2001: 53). By contrast the gloom suggests an 'uninhibited polyphenomenality of display' (Rabinow 1992: 249) as a way '*to become part of the environment*' (Eisenman 1992: 423). Here the 'body is deprived of its substance and appears to be on the verge of disappearing' (Taylor in Manning 2007: 112) in an 'orgy' where all sensory and cognitive shackles have been released, for, indeed, 'who brings a Walkman to an orgy?' (Kwinter 2001: 53–4).

Where 'we have neither a determinate space to inhabit nor determinate principles of space to inhabit us' (Flaxman 2005: 177), the reciprocal uncertainty of this relationship is exported onto and between bodies. Like many of his predecessors, Acconci has speculated on such an architectural and relational condition projected onto the scale of urbanism. In *A City that Rides the Garbage Dump* (1999), Acconci conceived of a mobile city based on the transit of its waste products. Following Hundertwasser's obsession with the volatility and formlesness of dirt, *A City that Rides the Garbage is* made of floating balloons, architectural fragments that are constantly mobilized and travelling in order to manage a more exposed sewage system. This makes it an urban 'garden [where] everything is interstitial: the bug, the worm, and certainly the mole have their role and there is interference at every turn' (Cook 2003: 143).

Conceived thus, Acconci's city is radically disenfranchised from any existing urban model in that the entirety of the urban landscape is made to modulate

unpredictably. In doing so, it refers to a type of human condition best described by the term ‘nomadism’, one that Deleuze associated with the *smooth space* and to which I shall return. For now we can note that to become nomadic in the way required by Acconci’s sort of architecture would first require a period of adaptation where being undergoes radical transformation. This flows from the fact that

> [t]he Incorporation of Random Play and a Margin of Underdetermined, Uncontrolled Investment are now seen to be necessary ingredients of any strategy aimed at Innovation [,] offer[ing] itself to inhabitation as an Aleatoric field, anticipating and actively prefacing its own detournement (Hadid and Schumacher 2002: 8).



93 Vito Acconci, *A City that Rides the Garbage Dump,* 1999

Given such a creative approach, unpredictability in the built must bestow a similar underdetermination and detournement upon the author who creates and the being who inhabits it. This in its turn gives rise to a new series of questions: what is the extent of this sort of dissolving subjective makeup and ‘impersonal ontology’ (Deleuze in Buchanan and Lambert 2005: 13)? What remains of subjectivities that ‘space the

void' (Eisenman in Hansen 2002: 369), 'giv[ing] to [their] being [the] inconsistency [of] the "void" [or] position[ing themselves] on "the edge of the void"' (Burchill in Badiou 2000: viii)? How does the radical sensuousness, or 'erotic hope' (Slade in Robertson 2003 79), of such beings promote an understanding their new (inter)subjective conditions?

2.5 Scenographic bodies

The analysis of architecture's particular investment in the gloom has highlighted its potential for forging new models of human relations and interactions. Rather than conceiving of the societal domain on the basis of a singular understanding of its agents, the gloom inaugurates a reversed conception, in which the human collective is understood in a particularly divergent and disparate way. This in turn informs a multiplicity of understanding of its agents.

This section will therefore inquire into this multiplicity of being as part of the gloom's ontological innovation, with the aim of consolidating our understanding of its philosophical discourse. To this end, the narrative will return to visual and performance arts practices, where the term 'performance arts' is used to refer to performative practices that have emerged from within the development of installations in the visual arts of the second half of the twentieth century. From the mid-twentieth century, galleries increasingly hosted performances by visual artists who have frequently used their own body temporarily to occupy the white cubes. Like black boxes, white cubes have provided more flexible and intimate environments for exploring performative modes concerned with immersing and interacting with their audience. In making work in these spaces, performance artists have challenged both architectural and corporeal agencies in and out of galleries. As a consequence their works and processes shed light on an issue with which we have already been principally concerned, namely subjective mutations. This chapter thus develops an ontological argument which starts from the study of such performance artists and thereafter moves on further before pursuing it further through theatre practices.

Offering 'doubts […] about the ideological reality of the moment [and] about the relationship between individuals in the silence of their separate lives' (Tronche 1998: 41), Gina Pane's performances have been seen to focus on a disturbing kind of intimacy which Anne Tronche attributes to what she calls the 'scenographic body': the

‘intimate recognition of the body and its urges [constitutes an] initiatory sensuality [that goes] beyond the limitations of the retina’ by organizing a ‘relationship between body, space and light [in terms of] how can one give voice to that which has no voice?’ (Tronche 1998: 41, 49). Working in galleries and outdoor environments, Pane presented performative events based on embodying the suffering of others contemporary with the artist. Yet these others were not presented or represented as singular identities. Rather, Pane aimed at undoing distinctions between self and other and found a shared otherness by ‘becoming conscious of the ghosts which are merely the reflection of myths created by Society [to unfold] the body (its expressiveness) [and] translate the indefinite search for the Other’ (Pane in Vescovo 1998: 73). The work may thus be said to reject the ‘tattoos that culture has incised for millennia’ (Dehò 1998: 13) by searching and ‘mak[ing] us search our minds for the unexpressed and inarticulate’ (Gombrich 1993: 169) ‘into that area in which new languages are invented’ (Tronche 1998: 41). In doing so, Pane’s scenographic body drew its new language from intense and painful intersections between her body and the material world.

These intersections prompt a necessary consideration of a mode of intimacy that is very unlike any notion of a ‘protected intimacy’ (Bachelard 1958: 3) that might be a self-contained site of personal intelligibility and definition. Normatively, *intimus* connotes the interiority of personality, psychology, identity and the self as the secluded, and singularly owned, confines of character. In this model, the concept of home, as Gaston Bachelard argues, is a paradigmatic effect of how such ‘intimacy […] has magnifying properties’ (Bachelard 1958: 202). Here ‘dwelling becomes a kind of casing’ (Benjamin in Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 14) where the ‘essential experience of the home is the window [as an affirmation of its] enclosed privacy’ (Pallasmaa 1992): ‘the world would get along better if pots and covers could always stay together’ (Bachelard 1958: 83). As a result, the intimacy of such homely self-containment and autonomy is a ‘privilege of autovalorization [:] deriv[ing] direct pleasure from its own being’ (Bachelard 1958: 6). The socializing and ‘inscribing practice’ of intimacy ‘correct[s] and modulate[s] the performance’ of bodies (Hayles 1999: 200) by creating an ideological border or ‘tension between the home and the world’ which ‘represent[s an] authentic way of life’ (Pallasmaa 1992).

Furthermore, it has been argued that such a normative conception of intimacy has been ‘raised everywhere and assiduously to a concept and an ideal’ (Kwinter 2001:

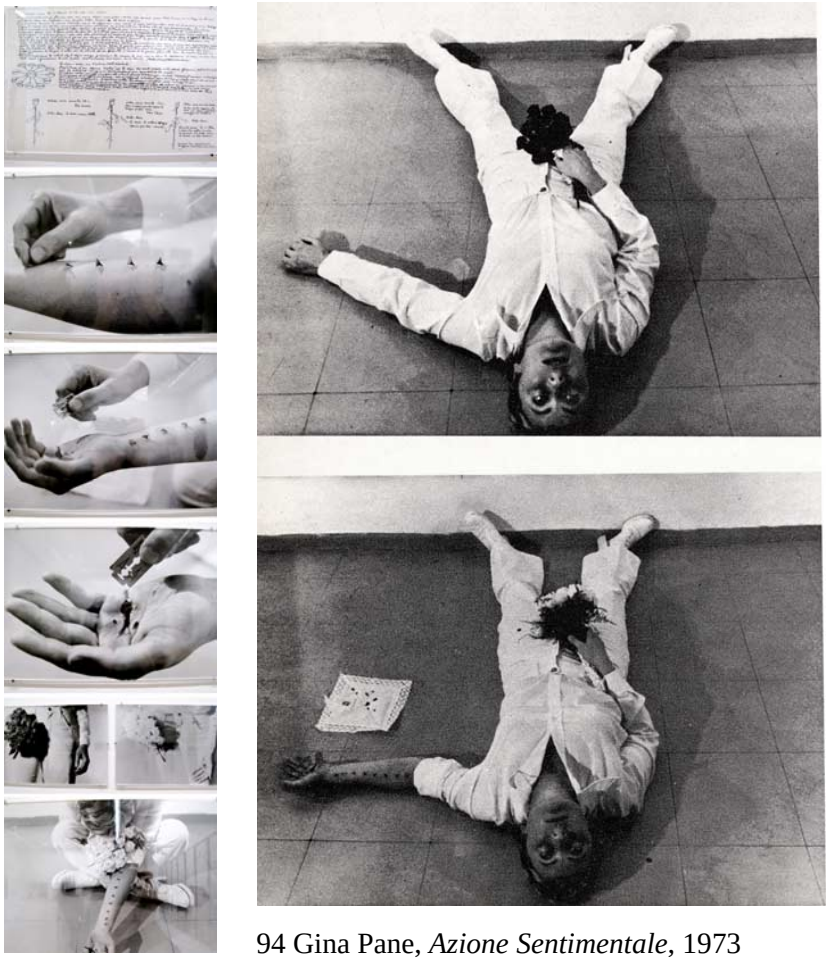
53), creating ‘a decadently rich private world, on one side, and an impoverished public one, on the other, with none but the most rigid and routinized connection between them’ (Kwinter 2001: 48). This ‘intimate vision of society’ (Sennett 2002: 5) is produced by ‘intimate tyrannies’ wherein the ‘governing of a multitude of habits and actions by the sovereign authority of a single source need not arise by brute coercion; it can equally arise by a seduction’ (Sennett 2002: 337). Intimacy thus constitutes ‘the arousing of a belief in one standard for measuring reality’ (Sennett 2002: 337–8). This amounts to ‘the measuring of society in psychological terms’ (Sennett 2002: 5), ‘the “psychologization” of social life’ (Žižek 2000: 32), ‘unspoken expectations’ regarding the clarity and meaningfulness of the ‘inner psychological concerns of each person’, the ‘claustrophobia’ of ‘domestic routine’ and ‘the net of governmental surveillance’ (Sennett 2002: 337).

Intimacy, as the product of making ‘the fact of being in private, alone with ourselves and with family [...] an end in itself’ (Sennett 2002: 4), conceals a rather public, and indeed deceptive, ideology of autonomy. For even ‘the ongoing sensations of the domestic scene cannot be tamed so easily as Bachelard suggests’ (Frichot 2005: 62). Indeed he himself does not seem entirely satisfied with such an autonomous intimacy, in that he attempts to assimilate it with the hallucinatory experience of daydreaming. Like ‘trance or reverie’ (Crary 2001: 3), ‘the daydream is a domain of resistance internal to any system of routinization or coercion’ (Crary 2001: 77). Daydreaming was conceived by Freud as a psychological ‘tension’ or ‘commotion’ (Freud in Crary 2001: 363–5) falling under the notion of the uncanny: ‘involv[ing] feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced’ (Royle 2003: 1). Remember, as we saw much earlier, ‘the autonomy, the privacy that Freud seems to be arrogating for himself […] (figured at the end of the letter by the insularity and sensory remove of his hotel room) is a futile evasion of the deindividuation which he experienced in the piazza’ (Crary 2001: 370).

In contrast to this model of intimacy and its attendant ideological operation, Pane explores an ‘intimacy perceived as violent because it disrupts the autonomy of the individual’ (Leach 2006: 200). This is an ‘incorporating practice[… that] perform[s] bodily content’ (Hayles 1999: 200) within material problems that decenter being. She makes use of individuating habits such as the domestic routine of facial make-up and the mundane ritual of birthday celebration but relocates them within a destabilizing material context. She uses blades as lipstick or presents a funereal image of herself

devoured by maggots juxtaposed against a birthday-cake celebration. By ‘making it possible to feel the texture of the various materials [, to] enter into the substance [and] the torments of matter’, this ‘wrenching from within’ (Tronche 1998: 49) produces an otherness that is no longer dialectically distinguished from, and consolidated against the self, but is instead a ‘passion for the Other expressed in terms of a global sense of solidarity, reflecting […] ethical beliefs’ (Tronche 1998: 41). This otherness may be described as the undecidable conflation of all that exists outside oneself but that is also at the same time part of oneself, whereby the self is always incomplete and ‘one can communicate only by means of [that] break’ (Vescovo 1998: 69, 73):

> ‘[e]ngaging with a disappearing image has some results for the formation of subjectivity, or precisely, a subjectivity that acknowledges its own dispersion [:] an embracing of the self's relations with others and with all matter, which is, after all, in a state of constant dissolution’ (Marks 1997: 109).



94 Gina Pane, *Azione Sentimentale*, 1973

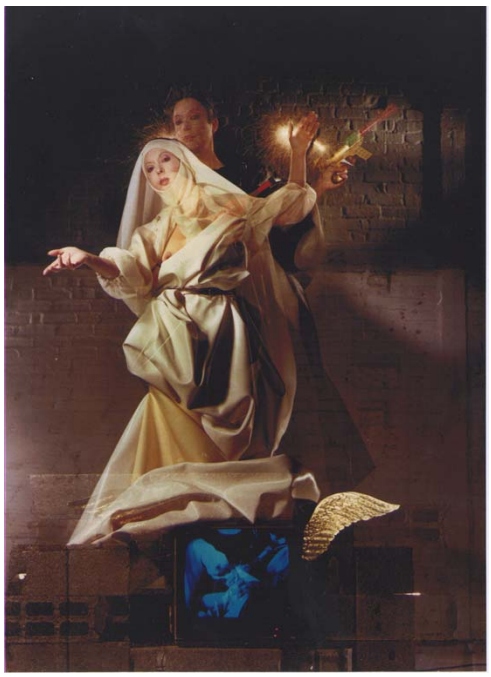
In *Azione Sentimentale* (1973), Pane expanded her live presence through photography, film, drawing and writing presented throughout multiple rooms of the gallery. In this way, she constructed an iterative process of splitting, cutting and spacing oneself out. For instance, the content of photographic records colonizing and littering the clean white walls of a room is transposed in another room into an actual performance in which the body grafts itself onto the white environment (by dressing all in white) while breaking from it with red blood spilling out of Pane's skin. As she takes the thorns off roses' stems to perforate her forearms, these appear to become the roses' stems, although the thorns are now reversed, planted in her skin, and the blood they draw out evidences Pane's body opening to the material world.

White cubes and gallery spaces are commonly differentiated from black boxes on the basis of common assumptions such as 'the white wall brackets the body against its surface [whereas] the black-ness of theatre space threatens to devour the body it envelops' (Hannah 2003: 30). By contrast, Pane's work shows a body both embracing and extracting itself from this bracketing in a way similar to the black box experiments that plunge the body into and extract it from darkness. The (dis/)position of such a body echoes the architectural proposition of a 'dis[/]connection between the built and what goes on around it', of an 'appearance *ex abrupto'* (De Solà-Morales 1999: 21). In these circumstances embodied subjectivity is decentred from itself and others or in a state of dis/connection with itself and others: the '*division* of the subject, first split because constituted by its other to become in the long run its own other, and in the end multiple and elusive – polyphonic' (Kristeva in McDonough 2009: 130).

Pane's mode of decentring subjectivity towards its polyphonic and irreducible otherness can be found in various performance artists of the time who sought to draw from the body an 'indefinable space – at least indefinable in traditional terms [since there is] no central focus' (Brus in Faber 2008: 8). In other words, the presence of the body which would normally provide a central focus in the work serves precisely the opposite function of decentring itself, its space and the other bodies involved in the encounter of the work.

This effect can be shown from artists such as ORLAN. She and her commentators have emphasized the disclosure and development of a decentered subjectivity, with particular affiliation to Baroque aesthetics, the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. While both thinkers are contemporaneous with her work their theories rely, in part, upon their study of the

Baroque subject. Although effectively reaching very different outcomes, Deleuze and Lacan drew similar insights from the Baroque with regard to its play with a break in subjectivity based on 'permanent catastrophe and not straightforward progress, loss of any stable referent in history and not the subject as bearer of an already accomplished meaning' (Buci-Glucksmann in Doy 2002: 143). Concentrating on her own body, ORLAN has appropriated multiple forms and images from various eras. Her Baroque approach is best contextualized by its influence on Deleuze's notion of the *fold*: 'the baroque trait twists and turns its folds […] fold over fold, one upon another. The baroque unfurls all the way to infinity' (Deleuze in Doy 2002: 149). In turn, the *fold* informed Deleuze's conception of the *event*: 'matter as explosive […] overflowing its boundaries, and before which the frame eventually disappears' (Eisenman 1992: 425).



95 ORLAN, *Assumption of Black and White Virgin on Video Monitor Playing with Toy Guns*, 1983



96 ORLAN, *The Reincarnation of St ORLAN*, 1993

Through a variety of media and technologies, ORLAN has transformed her body into a large array of other bodies and faces. These began with masks and prosthetic extensions but in the surgical creation of the alter-ego Saint-ORLAN she drew from Bernini's famous Baroque sculpture of St Teresa. The cognitive dissonance of this statue, mixing 'glory' and 'perdition' (Buci-Glucksmann 2010: 1), populates all of ORLAN's work from *Body-Sculptures* (1964) to the performative surgeries of *The*

Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN (1990–93) and more recent works. Progressively, ORLAN's body has mutated and, like her endless identities, has come to exceed any aspect of its original form. She, like the Deleuzean 'event [,] comes between sign and object', producing a semiotically 'out-of-focus condition' (Eisenman 1992: 424). The effect may be described as 'a non-equivalence or "inadequation" between signifier and signified [, a] "non-fit" [, an] "overspill"' (Foster 2002: 86) where the signified, the object or the body, flickers away from its signifiers and discursive signifiability.

To understand such slippage between materiality and discourse we may turn to Lacanian theory where 'there is something of the signifier that exceeds meaning, something inadequate that is its very materiality' (Belau 2002: 153). To Lacan this gap is constitutive of a being that can never fully circumvent its materiality in discourse. But the gap is always bridged by structures that create illusions of singularity. This is what Lacan called 'suture', where 'suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse' and thus 'the general relation of lack to the structure – of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of' (Miller 1977: 26). As a result, Lacanian theory is primarily concerned with exploring notions that seek to render how the gap is filled up and suture hidden.

On the other hand, where Lacan sees the split or sutured subject as a condition that cannot be lived, Deleuze suggests some viability to it. By repositioning the Lacanian perspective within a Deleuzean framework, commentators on ORLAN are able to propose that in using her 'skin' like the 'shifting signifier' of Baroque 'drapery', ORLAN's practice precisely mobilizes 'the exposure of a gap […] between skin and the body' (Doy 2002: 160): ORLAN's 'body is itself the material of the fold' as it explicitly makes a 'break' between signifier and signified, enacting a 'practice of being cut' according to 'the Lacanian "line of suture" [that] is this line of fold which operates the undoing of boundaries' (Buci-Glucksmann 2010: 8).

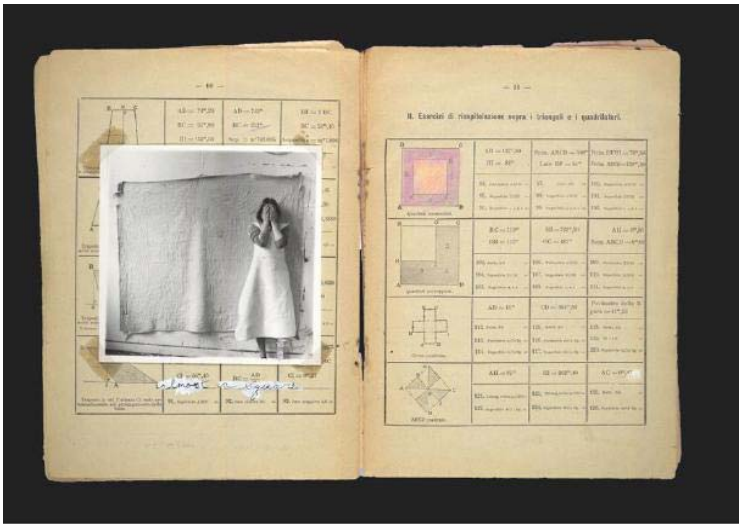
ORLAN explores how the 'baroque fold emblematizes the point of view in which the subject must give up its autonomy' (Bal in Doy 2002: 141). As subject she offers a self that is constantly 'reborn' (Doy 2002: 179) in an otherness that is not entirely the identity of another but found in the gap that separates one from another, made explicit through non fusional overlapping. As an embodied subject she can be said to dissolve 'distinctions between inside and outside' (Doy 2002: 160) and undertake the Deleuzean relational mode of 'becoming' as 'merging with one's environment' (Deleuze in Braidotti 1994: 260). Here 'becoming fold' (Buci-

Glucksmann 2010: 6) is ‘co-exist[ing] with [the] environment in a “play of folds”’ (Doy 2002: 150), ‘paint[ing] oneself gray on gray’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 218): a ‘camouflage [that is] not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled’ (Lacan 1981: 99). As Grosz explains:

> [C]amouflage, the capacity to imitate one’s habitat or surrounding, far from performing an adaptative function, witnesses the captivation of a creature by its representations of and as space, its displacement from the center, from a ‘consciousness’ of its place (in its body, located in space) to the perspective of another (Grosz 1995: 190).



97 Francesca Woodman, *House 3*, 1975-6



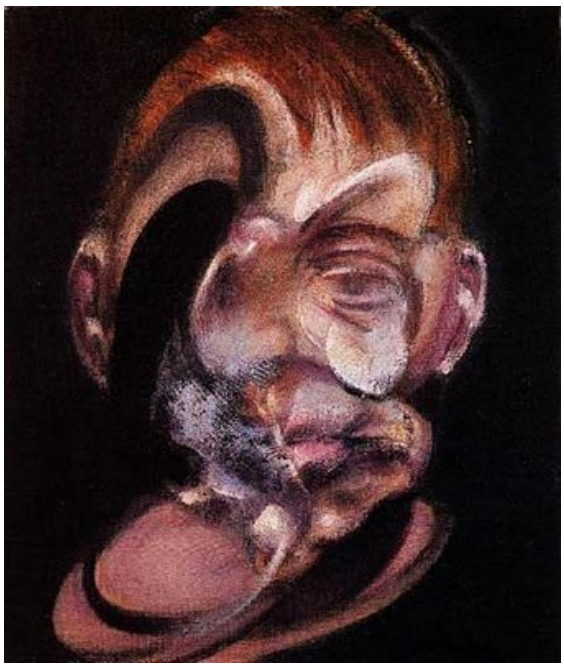
98 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled* from *Some Disordered Interior Geometries*, 1980-1

If ORLAN offers one example of dissolution in and by the embodied subject, a related set of experiments with the fractured body is offered by Francesca Woodman. ‘Me and Francis Bacon and all those Baroques are all concerned with making something soft wiggle and snake around a hard architectural outline’ (Woodman in Dunhill 2008: 9). In Woodman’s photographic self-portraits, the shifting illegibility of facial and bodily features in motion is contrasted with the legibility of environmental features ‘pulsations’ where ‘there is no suggestion of permanence or a stable identity’ (Cayzer 1999: 109). Bacon similarly described his own work: ‘if the thing seems to come off at all, it comes off because of a kind of darkness which the otherness of shape which isn‘t known, as it were, conveys to it’ (Bacon in Boyne 1991: 290). In her book *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* (1980–81), Woodman utilized an Italian educational manual of geometry from the 1900s to initiate, produce and display photographic self-portraits in which she softens and fractures the rigidity of the axiomatic structures of the architectural environments she inhabits: as if ‘hang[ing] a geometry book from the balcony […] so that the wind would tear through its pages’ (Duchamp in Dunhill 2008: 11–12). Embodied subjectivity is spliced with the outside in such a way that the singular features of both are affected. However, the outside here is not merely the environment or background around the figures but also the outside material presence of the artwork itself. The blurring of bodily contours in Woodman’s, as in Bacon’s, work boldly reveals the photographic and painterly media in which they work. Rather than producing a seamless overlap of body, environment and medium, their works exacerbate gaps between them by drawing conflicting relations between each other. As a result, ‘the viewer not only watches in a variety of media-viewing positions but also sees the deconstructions and alterities of media performing each other’. This amounts to a ‘shift’ towards ‘a pluralistic, changing, interactive viewer’ (Klaver in Giesekam 2007: 22).

This is what Deleuze had implied in his analysis of haptic perception in Bacon’s work. He finds that the work

> no longer tells a story and no longer represents anything but its own movement, and which makes these apparently arbitrary elements coagulate in a single continuous flow. Certainly there is still an organic representation, but even more profoundly, we witness the revelation of the body beneath the organism, which makes organisms and their elements crack or swell, imposes a spasm on them, and puts them into relation with forces (Deleuze 2003: 129).

Thus far from simply romanticizing primitive faciality (West 2004: 218) or 'invit[ing] us to take refuge from the twenty-first century in the age of the baroque' (Doy 2002: 175), the viewer of these bodies extending into, and camouflaging themselves with, the media that make them visible, can no longer establish a discursive understanding of their corporeal and subjective singularity. In attempting to specify their presence, the viewer is invited into a relation wherein his own singularity must be put in jeopardy: a 'voyeur [who] is not, therefore, in a position of pure manipulation of an object, albeit distant, but is always threatened by the potential exteriorisation of his own function' (Rose 1986: 194). Bacon and Woodman's works of portraiture 're-establish contact with the spectator' (Doy 2002: 149) by conveying 'psychic security […] in ruins' (Doy 2002: 169).



99 Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait*, 1973

By way of following further these experiments with corporeal singularity we can look next at later work by ORLAN. Moving from the productions of 'an internal discourse based on experience and actual practice but avoiding the purely autobiographical' (De Solà-Morales 1999: 142) to the explorations of new encounters, in one of her most recent self-portraits, *The Harlequin's Coat* (since 2007), the artist has created a large-scale (plexi-)glass work of a Baroque kind, a bio-reactor in which live skin cells that have been extracted from her body are co-cultured with skin cells

from other human bodies and animal species. Growing together since 2007, those invisible cells are placed in Petri dishes located in diamond-shaped Harlequin motifs, where they are nurtured to evolve and form a living and hybrid skin, or coat. Although the work takes the overall form of a wall within which a human body, larger than life, frontal and standing upright, has been delineated as a frame for the cells, these effectively cannot be directly seen.



100 ORLAN, *The Harlequin's Coat*, 2009

The installation thus also includes the projection of pre-recorded and microscopic video footages of the cells in action. These become visibly crucial to the carnivalesque motif of 'Arlecchino [which, like] all carnivalesque *commedia* masks [seeks to] liberate […] the [subject] from the hierarchical, sexual, gravitational, ontological constraint of normal existence' (Wiles 2004: 141).

This sort of experiment may be said to result from a polyphonic process by which the subject's division and incompletion allow its expansion. It implies a renewed mode of encounter with others. This can be seen in Dan Graham's two 16mm film loops

Body Press (1970–72). In this work two naked bodies (male and female) are standing up, back to back, in a tight circular and mirrored room. Each body holds a camera and, as they slowly move in a circular motion, they film themselves and each other by angling the camera towards the distorting curvilinear mirror walls, or towards the other behind, or by passing the cameras to one another. The resulting work presents the footages from each camera on separate screens. Much of the footage is abstract but has clearer moments of filming which include images of body parts from each other, close ups on indeterminate skins and bodies' distorted reflections in the mirror, which all seem to fuse into a new and grotesque body. Throughout it is impossible to identify the bodies individually or even to delineate one from another. The small size of the space makes it impossible for them to capture their entire bodies in the camera. Instead bodily fragments appear and disappear, and the encounter remains a material one without sense: the friction of bodies whose awareness of one another is intensified by material means but disengaged from any relational meaning.

In *Body Press* the spatial structure created by Graham is core to the kind of meaningless encounter described earlier. It informs the physicality of the bodies inside as well as the problems of vision experienced by them and captured on camera. Graham went on to apply these ideas on an architectural scale. In *Cinema* (1981) he conceived, but did not realize, a commonly cubic building whose lower floor is a cinema in which the projection screen is an actual wall of the building made of two-way mirrored glass. Audiences inside watch the film superimposed upon the everyday world that is unfolding behind it, and audiences outside watch the film superimposed upon the indoor space of the cinema and its inhabitants. As Graham wrote, *Cinema*'s 'screen' is 'an optical "skin"' where 'spectators on both sides observe both the opposing space *and* a reflection of their own look within their own space' (Graham 1999: 94–5). Here again the materiality of the built environment prevails as 'the psychological circuit of intersubjective looks and identifications is echoed in and is a product of the material properties of the architectural materials […] the properties of the two-way mirror glass' (Graham 1999: 95).

Graham's *Theater-Cinema* (1986), another unrealized architectural piece, pursued the 'two-way mirror power' in conjunction with the traditional architecture of the Renaissance's 'pavilions' (Graham 1999: 174) and the seventeenth-century 'green theaters' where the 'Baroque garden [...] (where the play was being performed) would become part of the stage design' (Graham 1999: 138). Graham refers to such garden as

a *mise en abyme* which is prone to decentering cognition: ‘the garden as a theater and the theater garden within the garden […] a sense of a representation within representation’ (Graham 1999: 138). In this project, Graham develops this cognitive complication through additional architectural elements as well as lighting and projection that transform the pavilion into a cinematic screen which reflects its environment and viewers. In this way, the work subverts the ‘Renaissance “picture-window”’ and how it ‘creates a picture plane that places the world at a measured distance for the viewer on either side’, propelling ‘inequalities of power’ between bodies (Graham 1999: 54).



101 Dan Graham, *Model for Theater-Cinema*, 1986

To summarize our exploration thus far, we can observe that as the gloom precipitates subjectivities into networks of intersubjective and intercorporeal relations, the decentering of these encounters also involves the dehierarchization of power relations. This particular observation has also been made by Hal Foster in relation to artworks which ‘make a new medium out of the remnants of old forms, and […] hold together the different temporal markers in a single visual structure’ (Foster 2002: 137). These provide, he argues, a ‘mnemonic dimension of the outmoded that might still be mined today’ (Foster 2002: 139). So, if we look back to the works of Dan Graham just discussed, we can see that the media involved are tripartite: architecture, film and the body. Although these are fused visually in the work, conceptually they refer to different temporal contexts. While film certainly attests to the present context of the time,

architecture in Graham's work always hints at other periods (early Modernism, Baroque, Renaissance, Primitivism, etc...). The body then interfaces with these media and eras and thereby suggests that aspects of the past can be critically brought back to the present.



102 Gabriel Orozco, *Island within an island*, 1993

Alongside Graham's work may also be placed artworks in which Hal Foster notes the 'non-synchronous' and 'incongruent' (Foster 2002: 137) critique. These include the photographic works of Gabriel Orozco. In *Island within an island* (1993), Orozco used the medium of photography to collide urbanism and primitive sculpture where the latter operates as a heterotopian reflection of the former. As a result of the materials employed and juxtaposed, the city's form is critiqued in various ways: in terms of its limited accessibility and interactivity, its physical and conceptual rejection of architectural decay and detritus, and its objection to ephemerality. To put this another way, following Foster, we may say that the work laments how such architectural potentials used to be acceptable and celebrated. *Island within an island* presents a trace (sculptural) within a trace (photographic) thereby (and as the title suggests) it is a *mise en abyme*. Its critical power thus lies in how it stands rooted in the problem it critiques. Here Orozco is problematizing the isolation of the island as the cultural isolation of a nation – one that involves rejecting other cultures, other modes of dwelling and living. Here again we might invoke the concept of nomadism, for the kind of dwelling Orozco presents is volatile, uncertain of its own end. Dwelling is here conceived as passage which simply leaves an ephemeral trace in the material world. The activity of

mnemonic mining is done by replicating and downscaling the forms of our sedentary society with unstable and raw materials that suggest nomadism which is, at base, the primitive origin of dwelling itself. Here though it evokes a 'melancholia that is, paradoxically, detached from its lost object' (Foster 2002: 169) so as to be used for a critical re-examination of our contemporary world. Indeed, in this work we see primitive nomadism positioned as part of the dirty periphery of what it reflects, a derelict idea which has lost any currency and which cannot, as a result, be recalled in its integrity but is instead sacrificed to its unwelcoming present.

In Foster's analysis, the work is based on the admission that there are 'too many lost objects to track, so many that it makes one vertiginous' (Foster 2002: 169). It is 'enact[ing] this vertigo' to 'survive it'. This is the 'vertigo of coming-after' (Foster 2002: 169). The mnemonic vulnerability of the individual human mind can be described as one where 'all the time the mind […] is reduced to the state of a container overflowing with, burst by its contents – like a suitcase into which objects keep being put which stops being a suitcase in the end, since it ceases to enclose the objects entrusted to it' (Bataille 1987: 260). This displays an aspect of how subjectivity is split or broken by the material world where recollection itself can never be fully preserved and owned. By as it were opening itself to its own incomplete memory, being can no longer operate through the singularizing self-ownership as seen in 'the vertigo of Faust, overwhelmed, at the top of the tower, by the endless expanse of territory offered up to boundless ambition' (Morris 1998: 151). Being disenfranchises itself through, and with, the material world so as to collapse its singularity. With it collapses the singular and linear order of the spatial and temporal constructs which inhabited and framed subjectivity. This amounts to a Deleuzean

> vertigo [of] great dimensions, depths and distances which the observer cannot dominate [and thus where] hierarchy [is] abolished [:] not only that regulating the divisions between the Origin and the first-, second-, third-order copies determining authenticity [but] also the secular projection of that process in hierarchical myths of space (the top of the tower) and time ('meta'-narrative) (Morris 1998: 151).

We must note at this point, however, that the materiality by which subjectivity is refracted is not merely that which pre-exists the subject. It is instead its alteration by the subject's own material presence and interaction with the world. In this way, being may be said to upset the '"material sincerity" of the external ideological ritual' and disband the '*locus* of the fantasy of the ideological edifice' from the 'subject's inner

convictions and desires' (Žižek 1997: 6). Being finds otherness in its most internal confines and actualizes 'sensations of vertigo and disorder as sources of pleasure' (Virilio 1991: 12). This constitutes an *intimacy from the outside* where actions are exposed at, and thus undermine, pre-constructed experiences of the world. It is a 'pursuit of vertigo [as] consist[ing] of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic […] spasm, seizure, or shock' (Caillois 2001: 23). In this endeavour, the authors and their audiences are polyphonically 'weighed down' (Deleuze 2003: 129) or undertake a 'view from below' (Soja 1996: 313). This can be described as:

> the vertigo of Plato, discovering 'in the flash of an instant, as he leans over its abyss' that the simulacrum, the 'other' that his philosophy strategically creates, can destroy his philosophy's foundations. It is the vertigo of a *critical* distance, in which 'the privileged point of view has no more existence than does the object held in common by all points of view' (Morris 1998: 151).

Up to this point we have tracked experiments in the refraction of subjectivity and corporeality through mainly visual art forms. Here now we need to re-engage with theatrical practice. For in the work considered hitherto it is arguable that the dissolution of the author's own subjective framework through creative practice is a more direct and obvious process whenever the author is also the sole subject and object of the work. In theatre practices by contrast the author is most often physically excluded from the work, and thus needs to find tactics to disseminate its dis/positioning to the many other individuals and subjectivities involved. As such, theatre practices present more complex methodologies and these, in their complexity, are also more difficult to penetrate. In order to address this difficulty, and by way of concluding this inquiry within the domain of theatre, I shall now focus on specific creative processes and productions undertaken by some contemporary theatre-makers. In these we shall place the undoing of their authorial and subjective control alongside analysis of the implicated spectator's experience. This extension of the range of the argument will then complete the account of the ontological and epistemological transformations at play in the embodied and polyphonic subjectivity that is the domain of the gloom. In doing so we shall encounter 'the horizon latent in our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought' (Merleau-Ponty in Iles 2001: 40).

2.6 Praxis of the gloom

This section is concerned with providing a comprehensive analysis of how the polyphonic arrangements of intercorporeality and intersubjectivity can unfold in theatre practices and experiences where the greater number of individuals involved (makers, performers and audiences) most often tends to produce, and be inhibited by, collective and hierarchical structures (at the top of which stands the director). It is most often the case that the collaborative levels at work in theatre-making complicate the processual possibility of undoing the singularity of authorial identity and control. At the same time, however, this very dimension of collective or shared making in theatre could lend itself particularly well to elaborating new ontological structures of group interaction (collaboration). These in turn might portray the societal potential of the gloom more potently than in solo and more individually-based formats of practice. In order to understand how the author can disrupt subjective control and transpose such disruption through performers and/or audiences, this section analyzes some distinct, though correlated, tactics of this kind which emerged in the late twentieth century.



103 Frank Castorf and Bert Neumann, *Der Idiot*, 2006

Bert Neumann's scenographies for director Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne theatre in Berlin have been discussed in terms of 'the disruption of the sovereign viewpoint' based on 'roaming vagabond viewpoints' (Oberender 2004). This becomes 'a patchwork of selected views, never generalized as a totality' but producing 'a rather dissociative effect on the stage action [as] it specifically increases the heterogeneous motives in the action by enlarging its self-disruptive moments' (Oberender 2004).

Erasing the architectural separation of auditorium and stage, and filling the entire volume of the theatre, vast networks of cameras, projectors and screens populate and complicate further labyrinthine spatial structures made of intricate and disparate sets of low-tech, often scaffolded and foldable structures, to produce what Neumann calls *neustadt*, 'new cities'. These *bricolage*-based and temporary environments are produced as prototypical models of urbanism inasmuch as they are immersive and permeated by media. Their departure from real-life urban landscapes lies in how impermanent and unfinished their built structures are, and how their mediatized dimension is drastically revealed as a layering that disrupts and deconstructs the space it is woven in (as opposed to participating in the rigorous structural order of space as they do in everyday life).

Performing and viewing bodies are similarly immersed in, and disunified by, the disparity of the event's scenographic layers. As a result, they have to learn to navigate 'the conflicts, ambiguities and tensions [of] media surfaces, real environments, electronic boards, glass walls and hidden spaces [brought] into one visual field' (Van Den Berg 2006: 66). They become part of what Boris Groys has termed, in relation to Neumann's *neustadt*, a 'submediale space': an environment presented as if it were 'behind an image or covered up under the image' thereby 'compelling audiences to examine the fault lines in their own fields of perception' (Van Den Berg 2006: 66). In a 'theatre where all the means that make up theatre […] maintain their own forces but act together, and where one does not just rely on the conventional hierarchy of means' (Goebbels in Lehmann 2006: 86), performers and audiences can no longer be determined by a single relationship but must engage in multiple relations with the various forces at play. Producing 'distance' and 'tension' between the scenic elements 'the stage […] has something to do with the buildings, with the architecture or construction of the stage and its particular laws, and which also finds resistance in these' (Goebbels in Lehmann 2006: 86).

These remarks on the multiplicity of theatrical elements are from Heiner Goebbels. In his own work he organizes submedial perceptions and relations particularly through sound and its relation to light and imagery. In the operatic performance *Hashirigaki* (2000), a large curved cyclorama accommodates the projections of wriggling lines partly dissolved by the inclusion of a light box that appears rather like a cloud of light. Neither light nor projections are aimed at live bodies and those become visually incomplete, making it difficult if not impossible to associate the singing voices with their respective bodies. The visual aspects of the stage create a

‘mask that “ghosts” the “character” and renders him/her a spoken “it” as opposed to a speaking “I”’ (Lehmann 2006: 10), ‘bringing to light that the word does not belong to the speaker […] does not organically reside in his/her body but remains a *foreign body*’ (Lehmann 2006: 147). Sonically, the voice(s) of the singer(s) seem to come from all the bodies on stage, from the entire environment and beyond. By ‘appropriat[ing] the body's vocal apparatus and us[ing] it for ends alien to the self’ (Hayles 1999: 211), sound and image are associated by way of a ‘divide line’ wherein ‘once someone’s vocalizations and body sounds are spliced into someone else’s [–] grotesquely becoming half one person and half another [–] the effects can [widen and] feed back into [other] bodies, setting off a riot of mutations […] cutting through bodies as well as through the programs that control and discipline them’ (Hayles 1999: 211).



104 Heiner Goebbels, *Hashirigaki*, 2000

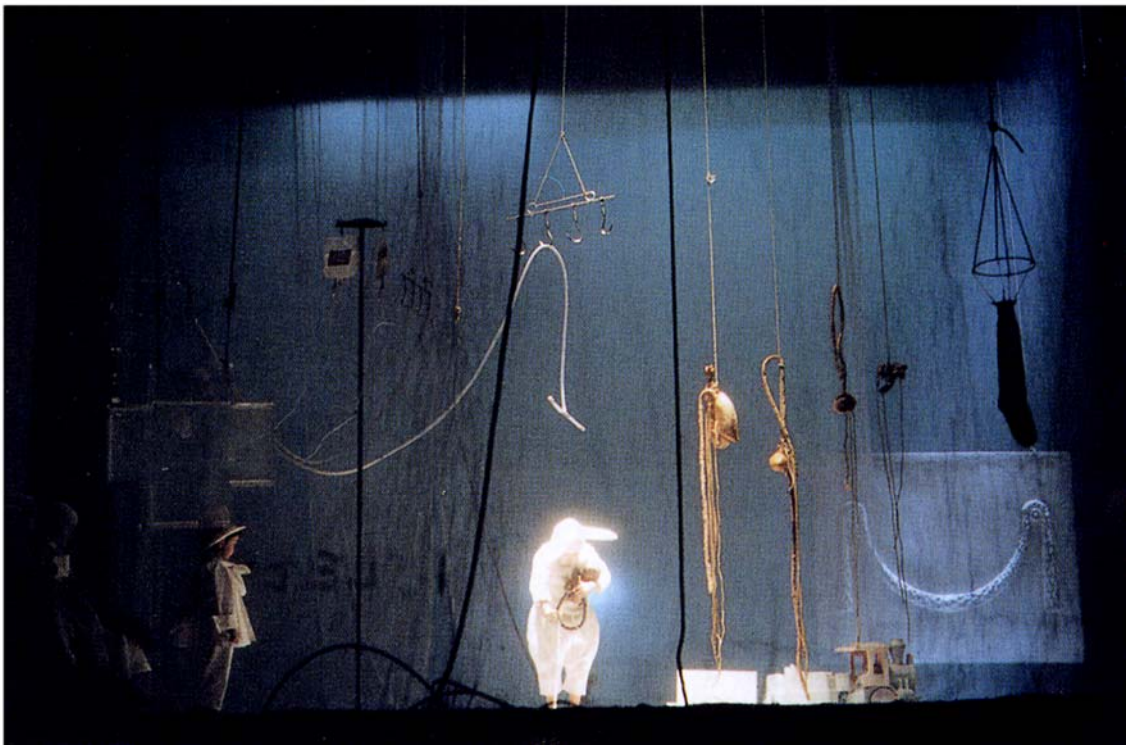
Although in calling his work ‘musiktheater’ he was referring back to Wagner, Goebbels’ mode of disunified scenography precisely rejects at every level holistic fusion of a Wagnerian kind: ‘I want to keep the different quotes or cultures or languages which come into performance […] transparent [by] put[ting] something in opposition to them, but not in the way of making a melting pot’ (Goebbels in Tusa 2007: 136). In opposing the *Gesamtkunstwerk*’s ‘hypotactical way of connection that governs the super- and subordination of elements in order to avoid confusion and to produce harmony and comprehensibility’ (Lehmann 2006: 86), Goebbels undertakes ‘the abandonment of totality […] understood not as a deficit but instead as a liberating possibility of an ongoing (re-) writing, imagination and recombination, that refuses the

"rage of understanding"' (Lehmann 2006: 88). He explores the 'non-hierarchy' of '*parataxis*' which creates 'sequences and correspondences, nodal and condensation points of perception' (Lehmann 2006: 94), or, as Goebbels describes it, 'distances on stage that I as a spectator can then cross' (Goebbels in Lehmann 2006: 86) by allowing them to 'enter the body and break down its limits' (Lehmann 2006: 120). The effect is to make 'the spectators […] experience themselves as living organisms involved in an exchange with their environments' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 119).

Setting themselves against 'the quest for an all-comprehending "signifying vision"' (Soja 1996: 313), Goebbels and Neumann are concerned with 'a space that formulates a movement and has a time' (Goebbels in Lehmann 2006: 86). Being made distinct from everyday life, it consequently gives initial 'attention to physical experiences' (Lehmann 2006: 120) signalling a 'space of vision [that] is not to be found in the visual representation of an object nor in the object itself but in the "traces" of perception, a reminder of the visceral, inevitable relationship between the images viewed and the viewer' (Van Den Berg 2006: 57). To do so, such authors or performance-makers place themselves at an uncertain distance from the various components of their work as a way of anticipating the audience experience. They do not hold a higher understanding of the work that would then be unilaterally passed on to or concealed from the audience. They dwell on an 'aesthetics of atmosphere as an antithesis to semiotic aesthetics' (Lehmann 2006: 120). As Lehmann says, it is 'postpon[ing] the production of meaning' and 'contradict[ing] the established hierarchy, at the top of which we find language, diction […] gesture' (Lehmann 2006: 86–7).

This epistemological opposition to human cognition as we know it plays an even greater part in the work of the company Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio (from here on referred to as SRS) where bodies' tensed relations with their material surroundings make them seemingly lose all ability to communicate. Like Goebbels and Neumann, SRS's creative team, Romeo Castellucci, Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi, have also rejected any fusional 'style [or] synthesis' (Castellucci 2001: 97; all translations from this are the author's own). To do so, they have evolved a process they subversively call '*theatrical hand*' (Castellucci 2001: 25), a formulation which operates as a dissident appropriation of the '*military hand*' and the '*artistic hand*' (Castellucci 2001: 25) which they consider the 'prey of a cultural universe imbued with the military and religious coalition' (Castellucci 2001: 30). The *theatrical hand* operates on the basis of a conception of complete images that are deemed beautiful (the *artistic hand*) which are

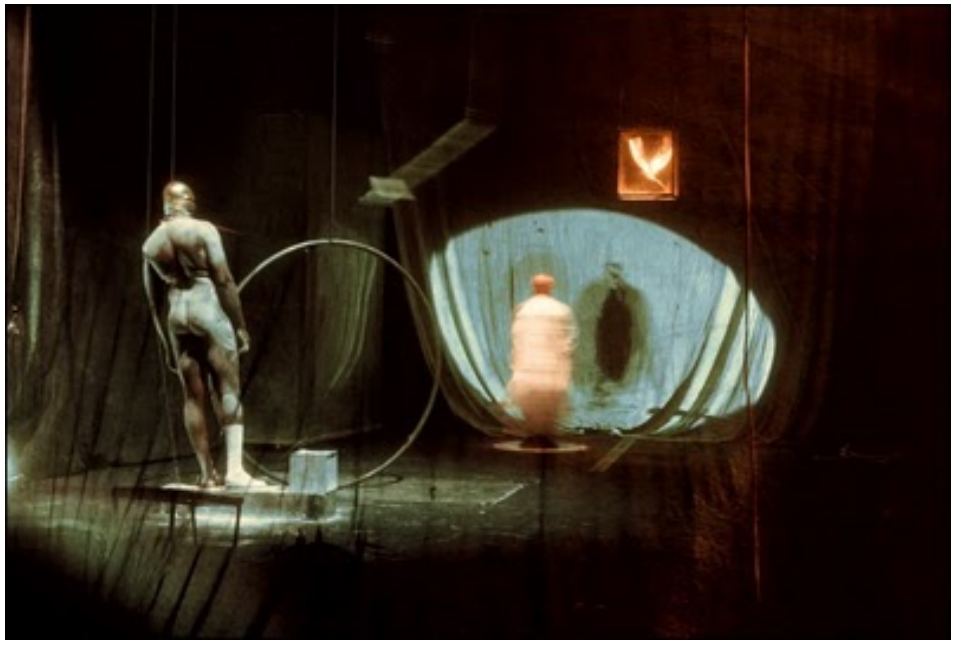
then purged and simplified by way of cancelling out the core of the images so that only their traces and residues remain. This is in effect a reversed use of the *military hand* which would normally simplify visual structures by way of deleting their minor and peripheral elements. As a result of SRS's destruction of images and cultivation of the residues as the scenography, 'conceptual signifieds are not only absent, their absence itself is […] signified' (Counsell in McKinney 2009: 161) so as to articulate the 'negation of representation in representation' (Castellucci 2001: 97).



105 Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, *Genesi from the Museum of Sleep*, 1999

In this way, Castellucci argues, the work makes 'power', 'oxygen', 'joy' and a 'sense of intimacy' (Castellucci 2001: 28) 'phenomenologically felt' (Castellucci 2001: 31) and critically revised. Indeed, similar to the views of a critical intimacy noted earlier, this 'intimacy' is 'not the situation of our insertion into the world, but of the world's insertion into us' (Castellucci 2001: 32). Power, then, is the ability to 'extract precisely from the real, that is always disappointing, the supremacy of experience' (Castellucci 2001: 97), 'catch[ing] experience in the act of [re]making the world available' (Noë 2004: 176). By 'grafting ourselves onto the world that surrounds us and opening this world within us' (Cache in Harris in Buchanan & Lambert 2006: 42) gaps emerge within us and force a new relation to the world. In order to realize this in

practice, SRS create scenographies of visual traces and sonic vestiges of images, bodies and spaces that are all left lingering on stage like ‘something abandoned in a rush by an anonymous presence gone elsewhere’ (Castellucci 2001: 183–4; present author’s translation). These residual presences are created out of all sorts of transparent, translucent, reflective and opaque surfaces and objects that permeate the entire volume of the stage up to the bordering line of the proscenium arch where they tend to accumulate. As such, the space takes on a heavy and stifling density by which performers are devoured: the ‘REDUCTION of forms’ through ‘REMAINS, RELICS’ – turns space into ‘*a LIVING ORGANISM* [whose] MOVEMENT […] creates tensions of a much higher level of complexity than the actor’s movement’ (Kantor 1961: 213).

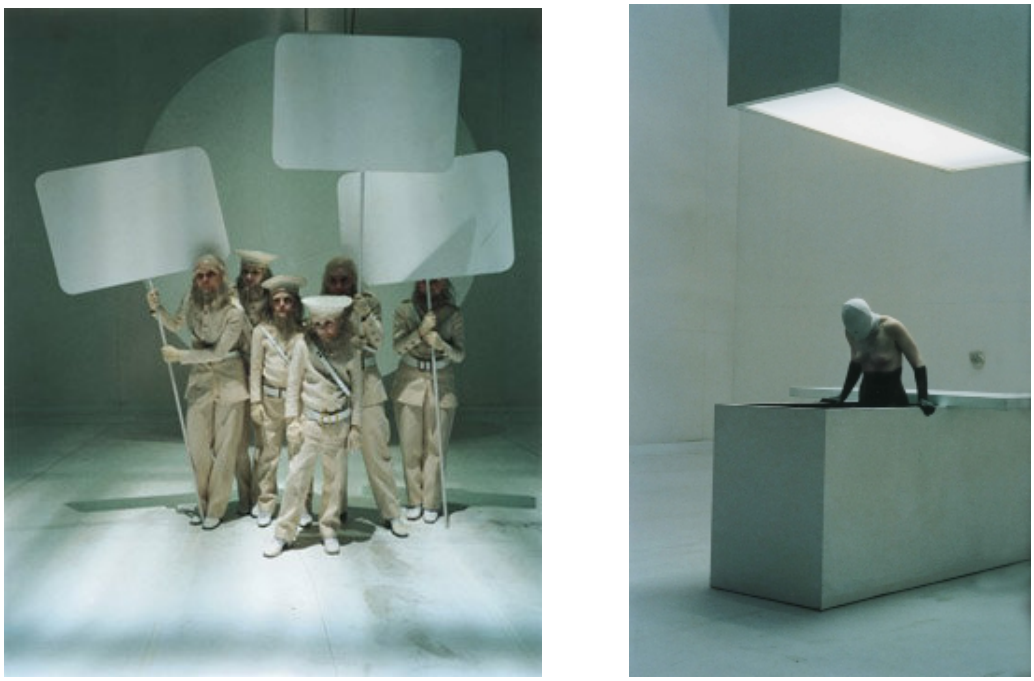


106 Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, *Genesi from the Museum of Sleep*, 1999

The proscenium arch’s *fourth wall*, the usually invisible wall that interfaces stage with auditorium, is given a material substance that blurs the volume of the stage behind and thus works to augment the material presence of the stage, thickening its air and weighting its inhabitants. Further, the stage imagery becomes somehow two-fold as it is stretched between the two-dimensional plane of the proscenium arch’s *fourth wall* (now revealed) and the three-dimensionality of the stage (now obscured). As a result, tangible ambiguities and tactile titillations compete perceptually with visual discrepancies, and the audience is thrown ‘on the border of properties of touch and vision’ (Bora in Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 15). ‘Touch, which was already onstage,

enters the scene' (Derrida 2005: 307), but it belongs to the stage's spatial substance rather than to the bodies in it. Thus, since touch is a 'prerequisite for movement and action' (Noë 2004: 100) but also 'acquires content through movement' (Noë 2004: 97), the movement of space becomes emphasized at the cost of the bodies' movement. It is a brutal attempt at inserting that hazy world into bodies, us.

On SRS's stage, 'the frustration of the intangible becomes its temptation' (Cook 2003: 143) as touch itself becomes, in Derrida's words, the articulation of how 'to tamper with, to change, to displace, to call into question […] a setting in motion, a kinetic experience' (Derrida 2005: 25) – 'to touch is to break with immediacy, with the immediate given wrongly associated with self-presence' (Derrida 2005: 293). No longer a discrete divide, the (now) tactile interface that is the proscenium arch recovers a 'touch [which] is a spacing out or interruption as the paradoxical and intervallic "medium" of con-tact' (Derrida 2005: 223). What we have described as a representational paradox functions in such a way that we can come to conceive of an operation where 'to inscribe presence is not to (re)present it or to signify it, but to let come to one and over one what merely presents itself at the limit where inscription itself withdraws' (Nancy in Derrida 2005: 276).



107 Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, *Tragedia Endogonidia, L#09*, 2004

Shifting the proscenium arch's function from a window of cognitive clarity to one of cognitive imprecision necessarily sets up a new kind of (cognitive) encounter and relation between stage and auditorium, a relation that could be said to be drawn from the black box. Indeed, if the proscenium arch can be said to draw a clear model of relationality *at a distance*, its occupation by SRS turns it into an interface of proximity. It is therefore not surprising that the work of SRS has also explicitly explored the use of black box environments. In *Paradiso* (2008), a black box is occupied by a large white cube containing a smaller black box wherein there is a 'tension between the two rooms that evokes a state of unresolved conflict with the exclusion of any narrative development' (Di Matteo 2009).



108 Romeo Castellucci, *Paradiso*, 2008

Upon entering the white cube, audiences found a 'blinding white room' inside of which 'a black rose window, like a deep well, reveals itself to be a narrow passageway [that] leads the spectator into a darkened room without outlines' (Di Matteo 2009). First only the 'sound of gushing water can be heard [and then] suddenly

one's sight is drawn to a small area of light, very dim, feeble', disclosing liquids, 'a pool that glimmers faintly with an opaque and ghostly quality' and above which 'a presence comes into view at the top of the room […] walled in from the waist down' (Di Matteo 2009). This scenographic body is quite literally torn between darkness and light, but the division is unsettled and constantly oscillating. The half-bodied presence moves slowly, allowing a little water to flow out around the edges of its body, until it recedes entirely inside the wall, leaving an empty hole from which more water bursts out, pouring down like a waterfall. The body's retreat into complete darkness echoes our own entrance into the space, blinded by darkness. Its return into the semi-dark space then further parallels the audience who have become habituated to the darkness, coping with it enough to perceive the edges of the body coming back through the hole (a circular hole similar to the entrance hole of the space). Aurally, the phenomenon of the bodily presence also becomes refined as one starts hearing alterations in the sounds of water produced by the movements, coming and going, of the performer mixed with the sounds produced by the audience's presence.

The parallelism of reciprocity that audiences are invited into goes even further. For the performing body is positioned in such a way that the head seems to be orientated and directed towards audiences in the space. But although 'the spectator feels watched, as if caught in a trap' (Di Matteo 2009), he or she can never be sure of being observed due to the imperceptibility of the performer's face. The correspondence between 'the struggling figure and the viewer's visual effort' (Di Matteo 2009) elaborates the relation of one to another by means of a shared domain of corporeal disorientation and visual imprecision. It is an encounter or relation based on becoming 'almost imperceptible' (Di Matteo 2009), a 'continuing "void", which is elusive and breaks up the meaning of what can be said' (Di Matteo 2009). As such it recalls another similar moment from a different time and a different place:

> [I]n the deepening gloom […] heading on foot for a particular point often she freezes on the way. Unable till long after to move on not knowing whither or for what purpose […] all is black. For an eye having no need of light to see. (Beckett 1981: 7–8)

The immersive detachment or distance that exists between audience and performer may be thought of as a condition and relation of non-intentional reciprocity in the moment of encounter. As the singularities of performer and audiences are countered by material and phenomenal conditions, *Paradiso* proposes an experience of human

encounter conditioned by the impossibility, perceptually, physically, psychologically or subjectively, of one being able to grasp an other. Encounter thus relies on the overlapping of that which does not constitute the singularity of the self from all agents involved in the encounter. Endlessly looped, *Paradiso*'s event can be understood as a pulse that seeks, through repetition, to produce new habits in oneself as in others. It is an attempt at consolidating a new relational domain of encounter which differs from, and opposes, the pressing everyday forces of identification and comprehension.

The reiteration of a reciprocal domain of becoming imperceptible as a matter of coming together may be said to implicate audiences in an 'intima[cy] that is radically Other [and that] Lacan expresses with a single word "extimacy" [:] within the circle of the subject one discovers that what is the most intimate of its intimacy is the extimacy of the Other [, this] Other who, more intimate than my intimacy, stirs me' (Rapaport 1994: 257). While we needed in an earlier chapter to reconsider intimacy, here we now need to draw on Lacan to take further our thinking, by encountering 'extimacy'. Extimacy is an 'experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that nontemporal locus [– that opens] another locality, another space, another scene' (Lacan 1981: 56) which, to Lacan, was part of the unviability of the split subject, always sutured. Like the 'optical vertigo' of an 'ego [who] has lost control of the organ of sight', which Lacanian theory refers to as 'scotoma' (Foster 2004: 293), the possibility of a decentered and incomplete subjectivity comprising of the unknowable presence of an outside otherness or '*méconnaissance*' (Lacan in Fielding 1999: 197) was both the basis of subjective development and not an achievable state of subjectivity. Others have moved on from here, however, to re-model Lacanian theory so as to define and establish the conception of a viable ontology that repudiates 'a psychism supposedly located in a bipartition between interior and exterior' (Miller in Belau 2002: 153):

> [t]he remainder produced by subjectivation [...] is neither exterior nor interior, but not somewhere else either. It is the point of exteriority in the very kernel of interiority, the point where the innermost touches the outermost, where materiality is the most intimate. It is around this intimate external kernel that subjectivity is constituted (Dolar in Belau 2002: 152).

While 'suturing […] paradoxically elicits experiences of a decentered and detotalized consciousness' (Rapaport 1994: 290), a 'pleasure or jouissance that is alien to the subject' and 'utterly fails to define or circumscribe [any] subjecthood' (Rapaport 1994: 258) can be experienced and lived; and '*extimacy* [can formulate the livable] limits constituting beings as others, the limits of alterity within' (Egginton 2006: 79).

By hybridizing Lacanian theory with a phenomenological 'understanding of corporeal intersubjectivity' (Fielding 1999: 196), the concept of extimacy becomes the springboard for deploying another model of subjectivity. In this model, 'to "live" a thing is not to coincide with it, nor fully to embrace it in thought' (Merleau-Ponty in Vasseleu 1998: 42):

> for if these experiences never exactly overlap, if there is always a 'shift', a 'spread', between them, [this] is not an ontological void, a non-being [but the site of the] joints where the multiple entries of the world cross [, where] I hear myself both from within and from without (Merleau Ponty 1968: 148).

The shift from one model to another may be summarized thus:

> [W]hereas Lacan sees the original schism or alienation in our relations with others first generated by the mirror stage as impossible to overcome, Merleau-Ponty, while agreeing that the body is never fully united […] does not intuit this alienation to be insurmountable [, it] can be overcome through establishing relations with the other […] once the other's gaze has fixed the subject as an object, robbed her of being, and she in turn has posited the other as object (Fielding 1999: 195).

As a 'mutation in our most intimate relational system' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 76), extimacy is 'an intimacy with a process of becoming, not with a person' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 114): the

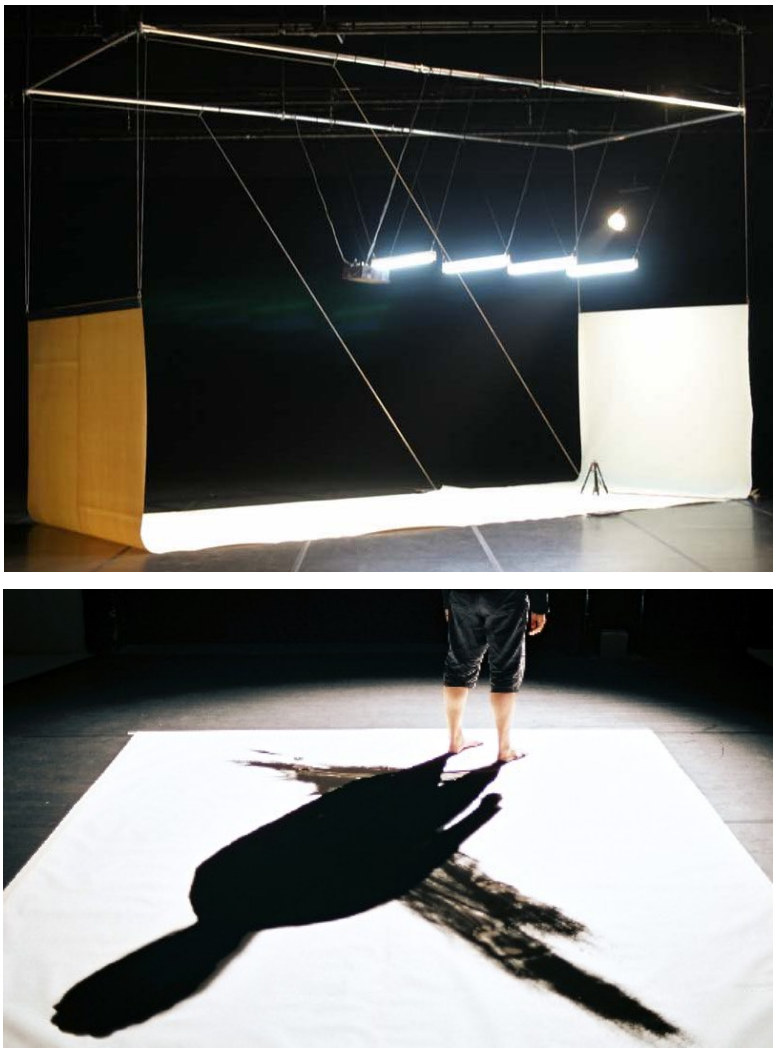
> singularity of [a] nomadic, floating subjectivity [that] rests on the spatio-temporal coordinates that make it possible […] to coincide with nothing more than the degrees, levels, expansion and extension of the head-on rush of the 'outside' inwards (Braidotti 1994: 145).

The embodied dimension of such subjectivity lies in an open-ended intentionality to intend nothing but the undoing of one's individual self. It is a type of 'self-divestiture [...] rethought in terms of a certain form of self-expansiveness' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 56) through

> a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations and intensifications [in terms of] labyrinthine maps of voluptuous pleasures and intensities [that] shake up the body's forms and sensations (Grosz 1995: 204).

The philosophical, and indeed specifically ethical, understanding of the extimate being, its relation to others and the human collective (or society) it signals can be taken one step further, and then concluded, by returning to an account of my own practice and its collaborative elaboration. In order to do so, however, I shall initially

conduct the conceptual argumentation by means of the observation and analysis of another's work. Echoing my own practical and convoluted process of inquiry into the gloom, João Fiadeiro's performances articulate exemplary enactments of a self-divested individual or '*im*personal narcissism' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 56) that is a mode of 'contact that apprehends and holds onto nothing' (Lingis 1994: 222).



109 João Fiadeiro, *I Am Here*, 2003

After his seminal *Self(ish)-Portrait* (1995) and *I am sitting in a room different from where you are in now* (1997), Fiadeiro's third solo performance, *I Am Here* (2003) pursues his engagement with a domain of encounter that is founded on his physical presence being spliced within the phenomenon of the black-out. This is the mechanism for operating his and our deindividuation, conceived as a 'sustainable model of an affective, depersonalized, highly receptive subject which quite simply is not one, not

there, not that (Braidotti 1994: 145). This example from Fiadeiro's work will in its turn be used to model and support the development of a collaborative stage in my practice, a stage that constitutes its end point as a proto-processual inquiry.

Located in a black box, *I Am Here* unfolds through a syntactic and generative use of a cyclorama, projections, lighting and black-outs. The first half of the piece opens with four fluorescent tubes revealing a large cyclorama positioned diagonally across the stage, its two ends suspended vertically and its middle section laid against the floor, to suggest a soft enclosure, a room, another container. At the centre of the cyclorama, Fiadeiro stands up still, dressed in black, with his shadow cast upon the *cycloramic floor*. All are suddenly plunged in darkness and then the silence is broken: blinded, the audience hears energetic breathing and the textural sounds of something rubbing against a surface. Light goes up and reveals the same space, with Fiadeiro standing in the same location and position. Yet his shadow is now partly destroyed (dark matter has dispersed beyond the shadow's outline), and the vertically suspended far end of the cyclorama is imprinted with a still and dark image of Fiadeiro's body in movement. Fiadeiro breaks his stillness and walks to the image: takes a pen, draws the outline of his two-dimensional and oblique replica and walks back to his initial position. During this time, although Fiadeiro's shadow followed him as one would expect, his dark shadow on the floor remains the same and we thus understand that it is made of a black powder which was deposited exactly according to Fiadeiro's real shadow. (It must be noted that the visual illustrations presented here do not show actual moments of the work, but alterations made by Fiadeiro for the purpose of documentation. In other words, the artist has chosen deceptively to re-present the work by way of still images of new moments derived from the show. I shall return to this mis-re-presentation after describing the piece. For now it is important to mention this since the following textual description of the work will not entirely match the images alongside it.)

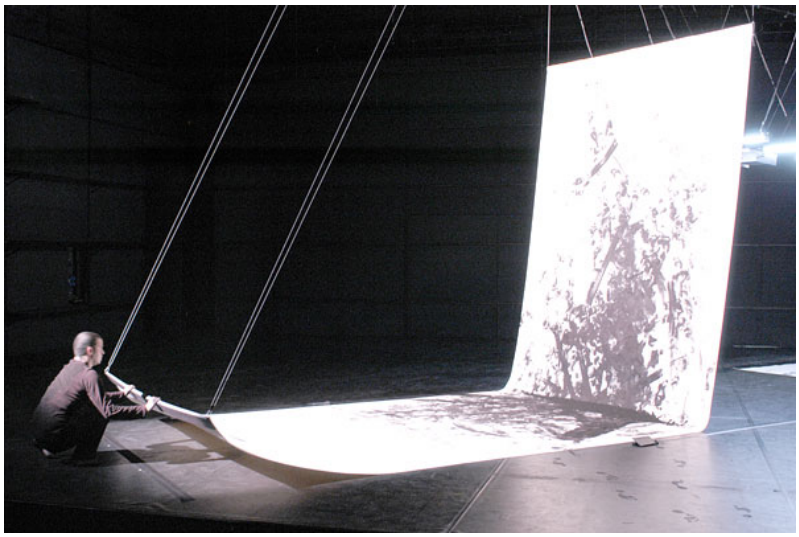
Returned to the position from which the shadow is drawn, Fiadeiro stands still again. Another black-out occurs, and again we hear staccato breathing and surfaces being rubbed against. The light goes up and this time Fiadeiro is standing up, still, in a new location on the cycloramic floor. His broken shadow is still there, now even more dispersed. On the vertical section of the cyclorama where his double had appeared remains only the black outline of that double. Now another still image of Fiadeiro performing a different movement is projected partly over the outline. He walks again to

this image, takes a pen and draws the projection's outline, thereby creating a second outline that overlaps and breaks the first one. We understand then that it is his movements, performed in darkness, which have broken the powdered shadow and been captured by an infrared camera connected to a projector that immediately casts a still moment onto the cycloramic screen.

He walks back to his initial position. Another black-out occurs and the same routine continues. The artificial shadow on the floor progressively loses all form while the reiteration of projected still images of Fiadeiro moving accumulates more and more outlines on the vertical cyclorama, making it less and less possible to determine bodily shapes out of the chiasmus of lines. Because the most dynamic physicality takes place during each black-out, this section of the performance can be understood as a process of kinetic habituation to darkness. On the other hand, juxtaposed with these moments where the body's mobility is affected by darkness, are moments where the body's activity, under light, disperses the dark matter on the floor and thus affects darkness. Darkness may thus be seen to function as a point of reciprocal interaction and affect between the body and space. Indeed, even in the black-outs, space can be felt as the sounds that allow us to decipher the body's dynamic movements also incorporate the sounds of the cyclorama's texture on the floor. However, these sounds alone make it impossible to know what body parts are coming into contact with the floor and how. Thus, the embodiment of darkness constitutes an 'opening […] out to possible encounters with the "outside"' (Braidotti 1994: 145) which are predominantly tactile and uncertain – where 'touching [then is] a way of actualizing or taking up a position without reference to any schema' (Vasseleu 1998: 115) – thereby 'necessarily [provoking] improvisational elements that are context-specific' (Hayles 1999: 200).

These uncertain encounters are paradoxically redoubled, both in the projected stills, seen as attempts to freeze and decipher, and in the disordering of the black powder. Whilst on one hand the absence of light and the dark powder evolve as a growing formlessness, Fiadeiro's physical relation to the projected stills, on the other hand, is not dynamic but predicated instead upon writing and outlining forms. In this way the body can be said to be at the starting point of the polyphonic process, split between its normative agency and new bodily potentials lying outside of such agency. The body discovers its otherness not only in the material imprecision of darkness but also within its normative agency as the outlines are multiplied towards becoming formless. Having established the tactility and formlessness of frictions both with the

cyclorama and with the edges of a body – which multiply, overlap and undo that body – Fiadeiro then moves on to cut the cyclorama loose at its bottom end. He leaves behind its vertical section saturated with the outlines of the projections suspended in the air. Then he turns to the horizontal, floor, section of the cyclorama and lifts up its newly cut side, raising it up vertically to bring all the black powder down to its middle. He folds the vertical half over the horizontal half, reducing the cycloramic floor surface by half. He stands up, still, in the middle of this folded section and the environmental lighting reduces to illuminate only the folded cycloramic floor (and Fiadiero within it). He breaks out of stillness to fold the cycloramic floor delicately in two, halving its surface again, and stands upright and still in the middle of it. The light again slowly reduces to cover the newly reduced surface of the cycloramic floor (and Fiadiero within it). As he continues to fold the cyclorama in halves, he slowly drifts stage left while the lighting reduces further and further to contain the light only within the space determined by the cycloramic floor and inhabited by Fiadeiro.



110 Joao Fiadeiro, *I am Here*, 2003

Again based on repetition, this section focuses on the cyclorama as a floor and a space. The surface it first demarcated becomes mobilized by way of its bodily inhabitation. It then reduces in size to the point where it solely demarcates the body. First constituting a *mise en abyme*, a space within a space, an interior within an interior, the cyclorama's spatial interiority shrinks down to a bodily exteriority. Importantly, therefore, as Fiadeiro's body moves in and out of the cycloramic floor, altering it every time, it is posited as a fold, or crease, of the unsettling relation between the brightness

of the cyclorama and the darkness of the black box. This tension of what could be regarded as *losing ground* culminates when the cycloramic floor has been folded to such a point that it can only accommodate Fiadeiro's feet. The lighting here is reduced to a narrow vertical corridor of light that can no longer cover Fiadeiro's entire body (since his peripheral bodily regions partly exceed the cycloramic surface). This cumulative process can be taken to refer to the unfolding of a polyphonic intentionality towards self-elusiveness. It becomes the embodiment of a

> disappeared aesthetics […] which cannot not visualize, and which persistently and defiantly approaches its potentiality to not visualize, to forget, to be rendered blind [as] an attenuation of the visual and, simultaneously, a persistence of the visual in the midst of imperceptibility [where] visuality is something other than merely the difference between the visible and the invisible […] turn[ing] away from everything visible and everything invisible, and […] in turning its back on the visible and the invisible [it organizes] a betrayal (Ricco 2002: 41)



111 Joao Fiadeiro, *I am Here*, 2003

To conclude with the polyphony of multiplicity, Fiadeiro unfolds the cyclorama entirely onto the floor. By this point, he has drifted to the stage left and light is diffused in that area. Once the cyclorama has been fully opened up, it becomes a bright rectangular island in the middle of darkness. At its centre is revealed the black powder, now piled-up. Fiadeiro sits down in the middle of the cyclorama and slowly spreads the black powder with his hands over its entire surface, rubbing its rectangular corners and frame. After covering the whole of the cyclorama with the black powder, Fiadeiro, still sitting in the centre of a now entirely dark floor, camouflages his body in darkness by covering his hands with black powder and bringing them to his face gently to blacken it. As he does so, he gazes for the first time at the audience, holding it until his face is completely black and only his eyes gazing at us are visible. He then closes his eyes as the lighting comes to a final black-out.

This last section of the performance takes place downstage, nearest to the audience, so that the subtle sounds of his hands rubbing the cyclorama are heard and the proximity refers us back to the initial section's black-outs. Fiadeiro thus moves from the isolation and remoteness of a cycloramic room through its dislocation and dissolution to a surface that is turned into the same dark periphery from which it originates, and thereby joins the audience's own shaded space. Although it is a scenic device that can be used to contain, when mobilized by corporeality the cyclorama is effectively exposed as a 'variable geometry, a Möbian skin with no inside or outside, on which it is impossible to assume *a position*' (Crary 2001: 218–19) both spatially and temporally. It has an effect like the temporal state described by Lacan:

> What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming (Lacan in Grosz 2001: 131).

The subsequent documentary dissemination of the work remains inhabited by a loop phenomenon that is a Möbian structure of time. Each photographic record is an altered version of a moment from the performance. In these images, Fiadeiro has found new ways of occupying the cycloramic floor. Photographed from above, he sits or lies on the cyclorama, producing new bodily positions and perspectives drawn from a different medium. The documentation simultaneously brings us back to the piece, performs new moments in the present and projects us into the future of other hybrid forms. It seems to continue 'diverg[ing and] proceed[ing] by way of division and disruption [to] forge […] new modes of actualization that will transform [the body] into others unforeseen by or contained within it' (Grosz 2001: 130). Thus,

> [w]e can invent the other people that we are already or may become as singular beings only if our being and being-together are indeterminate – not identifiable, given, recognizable in space and time – in other words, if our future remains unknown and our past indeterminate (Foucault in Ricco 2002: 5).

Conceived as an act of portraiture, the singularities of the being (*I*), its time (*Am*) and the space (*Here*) are all diffracted by a corporeal investment in the material world, a 'prosthetic pleasure-ground [of] fluent obliviousness' (Robertson 2003: 41). By developing the 'exposition [of the body as] a disruption of context' (Vasseleu 1998: 115) and of the 'outside [as] an interference in and displacement of the body' (Grosz 1995: 197), Fiadeiro turns the outside into a 'locus as a site [moving and moved]

beyond intentionality and identification [, towards] estrangement and deterritorialization' (Braidotti 1994: 261–2). In this highly exteriorizing and 'caressive mode' (Segal 2009: 228), subjective consciousness unfolds 'in excess of [any singular] design and intention' (Grosz 2001: 130). It has to be seen instead to assume an intimate drive, or, more precisely, extimacy, that is a 'voluptuous desire fragment[ing] and dissolv[ing] the unity and utility of the organic body and the stabilized body-image' (Grosz 1995: 195).

In general theoretical terms, then, it can be suggested that in works of polyphonic self-divestiture, even the body-'organism [itself can] no [… longer be seen as] integrated sets of functions [but as an] anorganic body [: an] *orgasmic* body' (Lingis in Boundas and Olkowski 1994: 290). The embodied dimension of being discloses its 'erotogenic' drive. This is a desire that 'no longer functions according to an "intentional arc", according to the structures of signification, meaning, pattern or purpose' (Grosz 1995: 195). This 'eroticism' where 'carnality' is 'radically unsignifiable' (Vasseleu 1998: 114) is 'an erotics […] that dissolves considerations of content into those of form' (Sontag in Shusterman 1998: 118) and – since form is dissolving – 'all those in relationship with [it] may, according to the strength of their investments in a phantasmatic unity, be brought face to face with their own originary body "in bits and pieces"' (Shildrick & Price 2002: 72). It is as if 'appear[ing] to ourselves completely turned inside out under our own eyes' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 143)

Thus, theoretically expressed, in the scenographic relational domain of 'becoming-imperceptible' (Braidotti 1994: 260), we find the state of 'reciprocal self-recognition in which the very opposition between sameness and difference becomes irrelevant as a structuring category of being' (Bersani & Phillips 2008: 86). Instead 'intersubjective and intercorporeal relations' are based on 'the coming together in difference, and the overlapping without fusing' (Fielding 1999: 196). Here 'identity is nothing other than a remarking of interior alterity, of the extimacy of being […] in this redoubling a movement occurs, an affecting; a distinction emerges in which that which was redoubled is affected, or becomes affect' (Egginton 2006: 81). And 'in opposition to the sentimentality of emotions, linked to the preservation of one's ego as a stable entity, the affect points to an impersonal, or rather, a transpersonal flow of intensities' (Braidotti 1994: 181) which is 'the principle of not-One' (Braidotti 1994: 145). This scenographic relationality, this operation of the gloom, inaugurates a new and desingularized mode of being:

> To have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage. To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 218).

While this scenographic potency can be theoretically invoked and described, it remains perhaps at some distance from material realization. It was to this that my practical research addressed itself. The last phase of the practical research with the gloom focused on the work of affect. It sought to test the practical validity and potential of affect in relation to the lighting system that had been developed through my physical and adaptive interaction with it. To do so, the work was opened to other bodies, collaborators whom I hoped would find it possible to engage with and respond to this light. In that engagement I hoped they might discover a physical and aesthetic language similar to the one I found but also possibly different. In its difference it might potentially take the work forward with the result that I could return to it in a different capacity, as a different agent yet still congruent with the work's phenomenon and development. My own body was replaced by a dancer/performer (Laura Doehler), two new developers were invited (Daniel Felstead and Robin Beitra) and a sound designer (Donato Wharton), while I stepped out to observe by undertaking the video documentation and spatial provision (black boxes and white cubes) of these collaborations.

Various experiments were conducted, starting from the immersion of the performer and her adaptation to moving according to the projected light. As the performer became *fluent* in this respect, the sound designer was invited to attend to her physical exploration of the light, to capture sounds from it (including her vocal reactions) and thereby to compose a soundscape. Throughout, the digital programmers remained present because the discoveries the performer was making were in turn suggesting to us some additional developments to the lighting software.

From the onset, the performer instinctively used small gestures to discover the responsiveness of the light. As she started comprehending it she explored larger and more complex movements. Throughout, she would repeat the same gestures or movements incrementally to find an alignment with the lighting phenomena that was supportive enough to move on to other kinds of kinesis. As with my own experience of it, the performer came generally to slow down her motion and fragment her bodily

construction by way of isolating body parts in movement or stillness. Unsurprisingly, her ability to do so was much greater than mine and so more minute kinetic details were developed. These required, in turn, further diversification of the lighting phenomena and thus the software. For instance, the performer's range of slow-motion pace was more extensive than mine, with the effect that we enabled the software to highlight very slow movements with white noise (parasite-like white particles of light) that would thicken and become a field of light as kinetic speed increased. Being able to observe this highly iterative process by which a progression was nonetheless achieved, the sound designer went on to compose a soundscape that is accumulative yet looped.



Plate 6 *Wearable Shadows*, 2010 (also see DVD excerpt Wearable Shadows)

All of this work has been incorporated in the short film *Wearable Shadows* (provided here for reference). Using one sequence of the looped soundscape, various moments of the experiments were selected from the video documentation and edited chronologically to present the performer's journey from discovery to adaptation and, in response, the lighting's mutations. Towards the end of the film, I have included a moment where my hand is seen rapidly waving in the air and temporarily bringing light upon the otherwise shaded (because still) body of the performer. In real space and on film, this moment was most confounding spatially. The distance between the body and my hand was thoroughly incomprehensible. As when casting one's shadow on another could make this other seemingly shift in distance, the casting of the light here did not

help locate the body but somehow continued to dislocate it. Just as importantly, this moment revealed the potential of interaction between bodies under this light, a potential which may be said to be based on

> an exorbitance of proximity […] distinguished from a conjunction in cognition and intentionality in which subject and object enter [:] beyond the disclosure and exhibition of the known alternate, surprised and surprising, an enormous presence and the withdrawal of this presence. The withdrawal is not a negation of presence, nor its pure latency, recuperable in memory or actualization. It is alterity, without common measure with a present or a past assembling into a synthesis in the synchrony of the correlative. The relation of proximity is disparate (Levinas 1998: 90).

Conceptually driven by such a confusing yet enticing domain of co-presence, *Wearable Shadows* encapsulates the findings made during the last and most collaborative phase of practice. It is also a springboard for further conceptual developments as well as actual applications. Indeed by the end of this stage, the software had grown to a point where multiple applications were conceivable, not only as a lighting system for performance, architecture and urbanism but also as an immersive installation for audiences (with or without performers). Each of these would require some minor adaptation of the software to the physical requirements of the context but, simultaneously, each could be predicated upon the software, thereby evolving a performance or a building out of this body-light interaction. In particular, the conception of a theatre house that would be profoundly reliant upon this lighting software suggested new forms for the black box (see *Greenhouse as Black Box* sketches). But these practical implications for theatre spaces are simply one outcome of the engagement with the gloom. Alongside them emerged the need to summon up a range of theoretical discourses in order to understand more fully the human potency of the scenographic gloom.

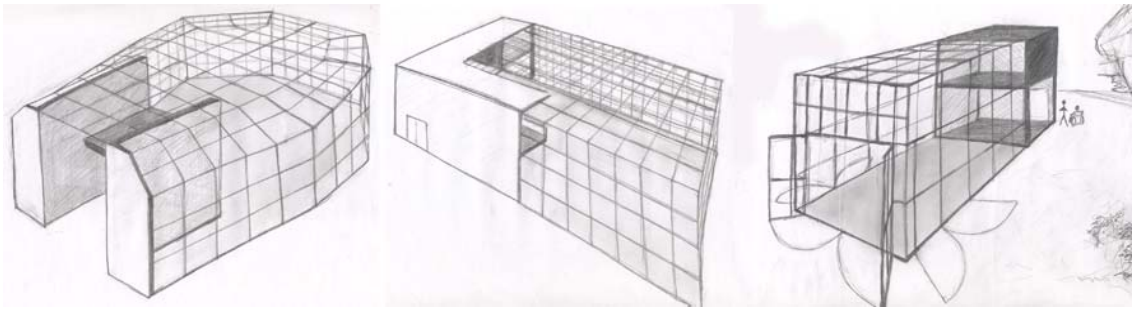


Fig. 12 *Greenhouse as Black Box Series*, 2007

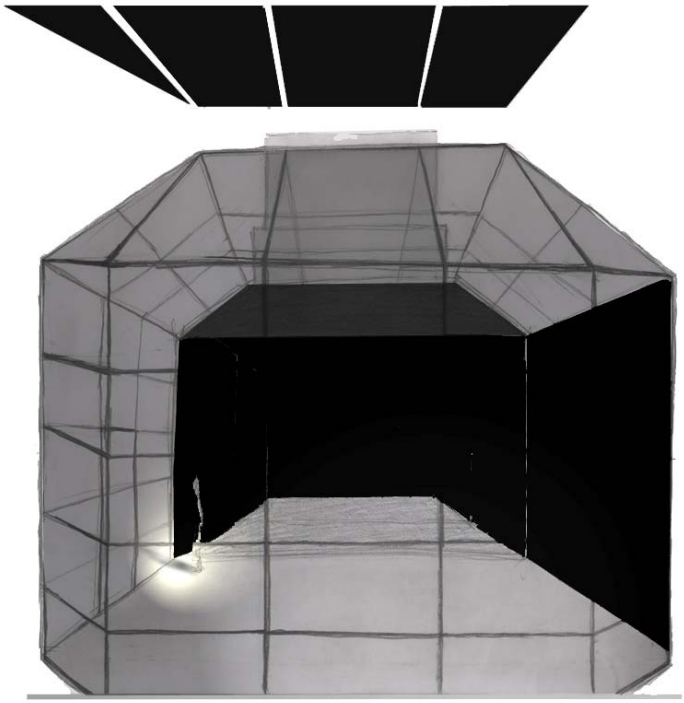


Fig. 13 *Greenhouse as Black Box* detail, 2007

The final stages of the practice, both actual and speculative, which bring the research journey to its end are likewise principally concerned with the affective alterity of 'the outside [becoming] the inside [and] the spacing of the dis-position of the world […] our disposition and our co-appearance' (Nancy in Egginton 2006: 79). The last chapter will therefore describe more fully, and in more depth, the conceptual ramifications, and possible impact, of the gloom. To do that we shall follow the shape of the experimental practice and allow a range of other voices to enter the text, staging, at the theoretical level, a collaborative invocation that, again, moves on from authorial singularity.

To philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy, corporeal and subjective porosities between inside and outside hint at an ethical domain of alterity. They conceive of human relations as 'the-one-for-the-other [that is] outside of any correlation and any finality' (Levinas 1998: 96–7) and which initiates the affect of a '*self-touching-you*' (Nancy in Derrida 2005: 291), 'where the self is as indispensable as you' (Derrida 2005: 291). Seen thus '[t]o be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in the other' (Levinas 1998: 86), but 'being [is] primordially exterior to itself and hence always other than itself […] other for one another' (Nancy in Egginton 2006: 78). As Levinas puts it,

> [T]he self is on the hither side of rest […] on the hither side of the limits of identity [,] hold[ing] on to oneself while gnawing away at oneself [to] exist through the other and for the other […] emptied even of the quasi-formal identity of being someone […] disturbed in oneself to the point of no longer having any intention, exposed over and beyond the act of exposing oneself, answering for this very exposedness […] without this being alienation (Levinas 1998: 92–114).

Like 'the tenderness of skin [that is] the very gap between approach and approached, a disparity, a non-intentionality' (Levinas 1998: 90), alterity is a 'caress [that] consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form (Levinas 1969: 257), a 'relation without relation' (Levinas 1969: 79) 'discover[ed as] a continuum formed by the contiguity of other extended bodies' (Condillac in Bruno 2002: 252). The alterity of 'becoming-rhizomatic' (Braidotti 1994: 68) fractures borders between individuals and refocuses our attention on ever-changing 'points of contact [:] how [they] indicate, demarcate, and circumvent our sense of the shifting extremities between and within things' (Smith 2001). This constitutes the ethical injunction, noted above, which is at play in alterity. It is a call to take 'responsibility for another' (Levinas 1998: 43) according to an 'understanding of the self's others' (Shusterman 1998: 107) drawn from 'the body's vulnerability to the impingement of the world' (Vasseleu 1998: 114–15). This is the 'good violence' of a vertiginous 'exposure of being' (Levinas 1998: 80) that is

> the ground zero of subject-formation [where] the recognition of alterity in the sense of incommensurable loss and an unpayable outstanding debt to others entails the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of (Braidotti 1994: 269).

Based on a 'defecting or defeat of the ego's identity' (Levinas 1998: 15), alterity suggests a 'body [that is] an image [reliant upon] other bodies, a whole corpus of images stretched from body to body' (Nancy in Derrida 2005: 288–9) whereby 'proximity [,] as though it were an abyss [, is] the skin caressed […] not the protection of an organism [but] the divergency between the visible and the invisible […] the alternating of sense, the ambiguity of a phenomenon and its defect, poverty exposed in the formless, and withdrawn from this absolute exposure' (Levinas 1998: 90). In other words,

> neither 'presence' nor 'truth' […] rather a way of binding the world and attaching oneself to it […] nature communicating itself to man […] does not need to be interpreted […] it is beyond the dialectic element […] and

> the given […] the logos […] a logic, a language, any kind of structure [,] it is […] emotive like an infant, before it is a fixed narrative [, an] *incantation* […] that gives rise to a world in the advent of a language [:] neither dialogue nor monologue [but] the unique speech of the many […] of nature as humanity and of humanity as nature (Nancy 1991: 49–50, 54).

'Nature' here should not, however, be understood as a finite scheme. Rather, following the 'huge vibratory currents swathing the earth' (Robertson 2003: 164) 'nature' is cognate with 'the terrifying soul of our surroundings' (Proust in Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 592) that 'accommodates us in a shivering' (Robertson 2003: 162). From this sort of basis, we can propose that the gloom allows us to recover an intrinsic relation to such a dominating natural environment because it makes us 'fall […] out of step with the march of surrounding things [in order to find new] unison[s] with it[s]' (Dewey in Johnson 2007: 153) ever-changing directions. In this way, the affective alterity of relations and interactions -which is so crucial to the gloom – 'prepare[s] us to act upon, to sense as best we can, the solidity and non-solidity of indeterminate boundaries on earth itself' (Harris in Mercer 2006: 26). Here the embodied subject is

> neither 'signifier' nor 'signified' [but] exposing/exposed [, an] extension of the break that is existence [: a] mobile extension, spacing [made of the] drifts, sutures and fractures […] of the immemorial tectonic plates stirring up under our feet (Nancy 2006: 24–5).

Now, since any enactment of the gloom would necessarily be located within societal constructs (social, cultural and political contexts) where the autonomy of self-presence is heavily emphasized, we may think of the gloom as a partial eclipse of these very constructs. As such the gloom reminds us that 'via the aesthetics of our bodily senses, the environment enters into the very shape of our thought, sculpting our most abstract reasoning out of our embodied interactions with the world' (Johnson 2007: 154). It allows us, crucially, to apprehend a 'culture not only flow[ing] from the environment into the body but also emanat[ing] from the body into the environment' (Hayles 1999: 200). Society is thus reconceived through the 'full body of the Earth' (Lambert 2005: 229).

In the 'pleasurable torment' (Lingis in Grosz 1995: 195) of such 'intercourse with the world' through which 'non-interpretational experiences' constitute its very 'intelligen[ce] and meaningful[ness] (Shusterman 1998: 117), being's every 'gesture [is] prolonging its incompletion' (Vasseleu 1998: 114). The scenographic gloom bestows a mode of being in the world – 'habituation' – as an 'operation which we must

always start afresh' (Proust in Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 592). In this way, it does not merely require the reconstruction of our understanding of the human but also, at the same time, bestows the human being with multiple, disparate and ever-changing forms and conceptions. It enables us to restore and evolve, in co-presence, ways to be constructively 'imperfect, mechanical, in relations of dependence, originarily disabled or incomplete' (Wills in Smith 2001). It is this which formulates the productive vertigo that characterizes any praxis of the gloom. Such a praxis, it now has to be acknowledged, is not merely aesthetic but also, importantly and inevitably, ethical. As such, like

> any alternative ethic of relationality, of mutuality, that did not rely on the strictly autonomous agency of the singular, detached self would go at least some way towards forestalling the anxiety, and even hostility, evoked by proximity. It means taking seriously the notion of becoming-in-the-world-with-others (Shildrick & Price 2002: 72).

Conclusion
Or: how to give non-human form to that which has human form?

> Desert. Dazzling Light. The man is flung backwards from right wing. He falls (Beckett 1971: 25).

> I am in a no man's land, in the wandering and inaccurate condition of someone in search of something of which, in reality, *one knows nothing*: neither the name nor the entity, but only (if one is very lucky) the enchanting light of its form (Castellucci 2001: 183; present author's translation).

> Narcissism would then find in the granite of things but a surface that would refer to men the echoes and reflections of their humanity (Levinas 1998: 81).

> [T]he generative vitality of non- or pre-human or animal life (Braidotti 1994: 37).

To bring to its end this account of the mode and operations of the scenographic gloom, we shall stage a conclusion which will both present a summative ending to the research and yet disrupt itself as a finite terminus by way of departing from it. It is a conclusion but not a closure: a kind of Envoi. Furthermore, as part of the formal protocol of synthesizing implied by the act of concluding, the previous and sporadic management of the present author's partial obscuring, off-staging, and becoming multiple will here find its climax. In this conclusion which does not conclude, a discursive patchwork of voices will suggest a radical and ethical departure of the author from the text and the reader.

The research journey described here was initiated by asking the question as to what the scenographic production of visual imprecision and disturbances – the gloom – might reveal about the *graphic* domain of the practice. The particular issue has to do with the fact that the scenographic writing of space is historically ramified within an architectural tradition that monologically (in the form of linear perspective) insisted on and enhanced the clarity of spatial delineation and cognitive understanding. In exploring, by contrast, visual disturbance, the abjuration of clarity, this research sought

to uncover and comprehend the historical, practical and theoretical convergences and divergences between scenography and its tradition. These divergences were found to relate to and increasingly cultivate the paradigm of a speculative threshold, or void, in perception and cognition which was consolidated in the invention of the multiperspectival and haptic space of the black box.

In locating and describing the breaks that occurred within scenography's own codes, broader schisms and correspondences were revealed between scenographic practice and other aesthetic domains of spatial construction such as architecture and the visual arts. Historical analysis showed, however, that by the time the scenographic gloom came to evolve into the black box, visual arts and architecture had formulated their own approaches to the speculative threshold of the visual field and its discursive legibility. Indeed the cycloramic dissolution of linear perspective, the deregulation of surface/volume and figure/ground agencies, and the substitution of the visual field for a haptic one can all be detected in the development both of tensegrity in architecture and of installation and live arts in galleries and museums.

Researching the gloom in various spatial arts disclosed a conceptual thread between them. This pertained to the alignment and activation of spatial phenomena with corporeal phenomena. This spatio-corporeal domain is caused by an intensification of material frictions through which 'space [is re-] oriented in terms of a body that exists […] as its originating site, its zero point' (Garner 1994: 4). In phenomenological terms it is a 'space […] starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it' (Merleau-Ponty in Iles 2001: 72). Critically, this 'bodily space [–] the product of the double investment of the body by space […] and the investment of space by the body' (Gil in Hansen 2002: 9) – is prompted by an approach to phenomena that is uncertain, interrogative and destabilizing. Thus, at the very core of the spatio-corporeal gloom lies what I have called vertigo. The operation of this is to question what the body and the built can be through speculating about – disorienting – their positionality.

Spatio-corporeal positions and relations that have not yet been fixed can be inscribed neither in representation and language nor in intentionality. Relations between one's body and the outside (a building or other bodies) are subverted in such a way that one's contact with the outside cannot be solely pre-determined by one's self or by any other external agency. Instead they are predicated upon one's attempts to

relinquish agency through environmental phenomena and engage with the consequent venture into the alterity of an *othered*, affective and, as such, ever-changing subjectivity. This is simultaneously exacted and enacted by how the bodily or

> wearable space [discloses] the body's infralinguistic capacity to convert force into affect [thereby] explain[ing] how spacing can be understood as a dynamic operation of framing that manages to avoid grounding: an on-going embodied framing of space not as given in this or that form, but as processural (Hansen 2002: 368).



112 Socìetas Raffaello Sandio, *Hey Girl!*, 2007

The movement away from that which is spatially fixed has led to the remodelling of ontological and epistemological assumptions about cognitive and perceptual experiences:

> Our primary concern was to destroy what existed, not due to a need for an empty space, but to satisfy the need to break the representation of the world that was handed on to us. We needed to start something else from zero (Castellucci 2001: 23; present author's translation).

> The best we can do in designing and lighting a set turns out to be: nothing at all … It's not a process of building, but of destroying obstacles that stand in the way of the latent form (Brook in Baugh 2005: 197).

> A world is perceived and unfolded without the assumption or presupposition of perception in general. One has not troubled oneself or given man the responsibility for the genesis of space from his own time; one has not yet seen each perceiver as the effect or sign of a perception in general (Colebrook 2005: 201).

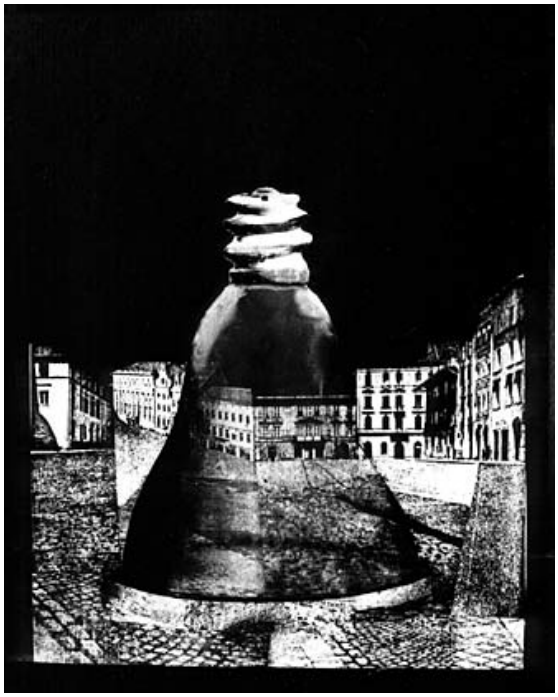
Since the *sceno-graphic* here constitutes a practice of writing that seeks to counter (visual) legibility, it may be described as a praxis of scribbling: an 'undoing of writing in writing […] in turn undone by the touch of the Outside' (Ricco 2002: 58).

Thus if, as 'Lecoq insists [,] the actor writes with his body […] just as the author writes with black lines on paper' (Bradby 2006: xiii), then the scenographer's writing is one of generating spatial phenomena that disrupt the actor's body from its work of inscribing the author's writing. This produces material pressures on models of representation, cognition, intelligibility and language. These epistemological models, and what they promise, are not eradicated, however, but are instead pushed to the periphery, up to 'the moment before the[ir] fall' (Decroux 1985: 23). So in the case of the black box, its own internal visual crisis remains wrapped in and surrounded by architectural legibility. As a consequence the architectural *mise en abyme* that is the scenographic space becomes a *mise en abyss* where 'two edges [are collided:] an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge […] and *another* edge, mobile, blank, ready to assume any contours […] the place where the death of language is glimpsed (Barthes in Brooks 2007: 45).

By positing 'architecture with its flaw, the rule with its transgression, the discourse with its slips of the tongue, the function with its dysfunction … and the fabric with its rend' (Didi-Huberman in Brooks 2007: 45), the scenographic space seems to take on 'the deceptive semblance of a theatre of representation' (Crary 2001: 220). Yet the act of focusing on the transgressive flaw upon which it is reliant allows us to discern a 'concept of experience surpassing the experience of meaning' (Vasseleu 1998: 93). This suggests a spatiality and a corporeality 'devoid of reference to any locatable origin' (Vasseleu 1998: 115): 'where things have not taken their places but remain possible' (Irigaray in Vasseleu 1998: 114). The situational (architectural) paradox of the scenographic space formulates a 'non-place where the "no longer" and the "not yet"

reverse into each other [to] mark his or her assent to the loss of identity' (Braidotti 1994: 262):

> a 'REVERSED' space [that] evokes a world, objects […] not in their 'positive aspect' […] but similarly to a pocket or a glove turned inside out with exposed stitches, threads and shreds (Kantor 1961: 213).



113 Tadeusz Kantor, *Electric Bulb (From the series Impossible Architecture Projects*), 1970



114 Günter Brus, *Selbstbemalung*, 1964

When applied to being, this reversed space promotes 'dismembering' and 'juggling with' corporeality and subjectivity (Kantor in Giesekam 2007: 118):

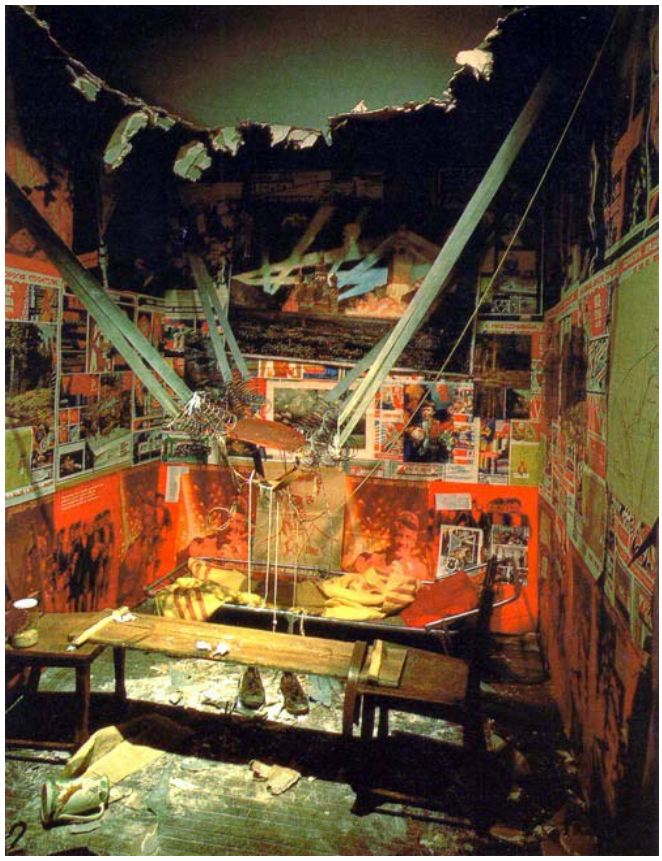
> the slowing of pace, loss of rhythm, repetition, elimination through noise, stupidity, clichés, automatic action, terror; by disinformation, withholding of information, […] acting poorly, acting 'on the sly', acting 'non-acting' (Kantor in Giesekam 2007: 118).

The scenographic gloom is the 'site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject' (Barthes in Brooks 2007: 45). It forces us to

> remain suspended in the live thing, in the gap of the non-representable, rather than falling back into the production of dead, representable, and materialized action […] because the minute that anything is concretized, and is given a form, it becomes part of the fallen world (Foreman 1992: 316).

> Desert. Dazzling Light. The man is flung backwards from right wing. He falls […] Whistle from right wing. He reflects, goes out right. Immediately flung back on stage he falls […] A little tree descends from flies, lands

> […] Whistle from above. He does not move. The tree is pulled up and disappears in flies (Beckett 1971: 25, 29).



115 Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *The man who flew into space from his apartment*, 1988

Though the gloom has been coded with discursive qualities of a negative kind, ones often threatening the very existence of human life, in this research it has been linked to the 'generative powers of doubt and uncertainty' (Phelan 1993: 171): a productive and 'lively […] vertigo' (Robertson 2003: 163). Not the absence of visual content but its attenuation, the gloom requires us to reconsider 'disappearance', and especially the disappearance of a subject, not as 'a disaster or death' but as a 'sudden topological change' (Bey 2003: 130), a 'movement […] stak[ing] out the path of escape in all its positivity' (Deleuze and Guattari in Nechvatal 1999: 153–4) towards an irreducibly 'complex positionality' (Garner 1994: 4). It is 'a non-dialectical double refusal [of] "no-longer-being" and "not-yet-being" at once' (Ricco 2002: 41).

A praxis of the gloom, then, is a 'think[ing of] space or life in general […] beyond its human territory […] in its infinite divergence' (Colebrook in Buchanan & Lambert 2005: 204) which becomes a procedure of 'reconstitut[ion of] our very way of

being human' (Foreman 1992: 31). By postulating that which is not yet human – 'strik[ing] a new relationship to the non-human' (Braidotti 1994: 37) – the gloom encourages

> a process that, while bringing forth a new humanity, does not yet know what humanity it is going to produce and, likewise, cannot possibly know exactly what humanity 'does' that producing (Carlson 2008: 137).

We thus

> find our being less in the category of the human […] and more in the on going process that [Michel] Serres calls 'hominescence' [where the subject is] always under construction […] fundamentally relational, interactive, and evolving […] irreducibly inceptive [while enacting] its continual departure from any fixed place [and thus] the resistance of the human to placement or belonging [, to] any belonging that defines property and place, and any property or place that depends on belonging (Carlson 2008: 137).

> Desert. Dazzling Light. The man is flung backwards from right wing. He falls […] Whistle from right wing. He reflects, goes out right. Immediately flung back on stage he falls […] A little tree descends from flies, lands […] Whistle from above. He turns, sees tree, reflects, goes to it, sit down in its shadow, looks at his hands […] the shadow returns. Whistle from above. He does not move. The tree is pulled up and disappears in flies. He looks at his hands (Beckett 1971: 25, 29).

This thesis has argued that the relational domain disclosed in the gloom can be understood according to an innovative reciprocity between the body and the environment. This has ethical implications in that the relational domain of the gloom has been underpinned by intersubjective and intercorporeal propositions. Within these the agency of an author-figure becomes intersubjective and fades from view. For the propositions shift human relations away from fixed hierarchical structures and towards unfixed and affective interpenetrations. These formulate what the thesis has called alterity, a notion that

> requires us to see the emergence of a world, and of a humanity in and through that world, that can no longer be (if it ever was) understood adequately according to the old divisions of subject and object, activity and passivity, or, correlatively, according to the character and conditions of solely human intelligence and agency – all of whose localities and delimitations may once have served a project of mastery and possession that now grows untenable (Carlson 2008: 136).

Since 'we shall never return to the mythic humanity of the primal scene, no more than we shall ever recover what was signified by the word "humanity" before the fire of the Aryan myth' (Nancy 1991: 46), the hominescent dissolve of the ontological

foundations of the human – of 'origination' (Nancy in Carlson 2008: 135) itself – requires an engagement with the 'interruption of myth [, of] the stage upon which we represent everything to ourselves [:] the passing of time […] a consciousness, a people, a narrative' (Nancy 1991: 44–5). '[T]o think our world in terms of [a mythological] "lack"' (Nancy 1991: 47) would lead to a 'touch[ing]' of the 'ghosts' of the 'myths' of 'Man' (Serres in Carlson 2008: 136) as a resistance to any 'new metanarrative based on the story of the universe [, any new] mythic […] world view' (Jencks in Nechvatal 1999: 123). The aim is to dislodge any certainty from selves, even dissolving them, turning them into partial beings made of, and hungry for, 'the unmarked, unspoken and unseen' (Phelan 1993: 7).

The scenographic gloom's rendition and exploration of how to give non-human form to that which has human form present the productive possibility of 'human incompletion and indetermination as both ground and consequence of the human capacity for technological creation that is also inevitably self-creation' (Carlson 2008: 136). It is to turn the determinant notion of being on its head by refusing to know what will be:

> [E]ntering the body [by] turn[ing] into matter […] to act [by] renouncing the fruits of action […] effort without finality […] finality without an end (Weil 2008: 180–81).
>
> [T]urning to life in the gesture of giving way (Vasseleu 1998: 128).
>
> We leave, and give leave to our productions; we produce, and we produce ourselves, through this incessant movement of leaving (Serres in Carlson 2008: 137).
>
> [A]n insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 130)

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