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'The body', performance studies, Horner and a dinner party

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Drama study is beginning to discover 'the body'. Of course plays have always been acted by bodies, but bodies aren't necessarily 'the body'. Indeed the relationship between these two rather similar nouns has proved somewhat vexing.

### A missing body

For a long time the body has been seen as a metaphor for, say, the state of society. It is itself the site of struggle over meanings, and consequently, attitudes to it and definitions of it have changed historically. But, from here, some current thinking suggests that what changes is not simply images and attitudes but the biological stuff itself. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it:

Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence. It is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body. This history would include not only all the contingencies that befall a body, impinging on it from outside . . . such a history would also have to include the 'raw ingredients' out of which the body is produced – its internal conditions of possibility, the history of its particular tastes, predilections, movements, habits, postures, gait, and comportment.<sup>1</sup>

The conditions of possibility of the body are habitually challenged, and displayed, in such performing arts as opera, where counter-tenors now sing a greater range than they did fifty years ago, and athletics, where people run ever faster and jump higher.

Against this understanding of a developing biological entity, several modes of textual practice assume that, while concepts may change, the biological thing remains the same. As Michel Feher puts it in his introduction to the three-volume *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (1989):

the history of the human body is not so much the history of its representations as of its modes of construction. For the history of its representations always refers to a real body considered to be 'without history' . . . whereas the history of its modes of construction can . . . turn the body into a thoroughly historicized and completely problematic issue.<sup>2</sup>

The division between representation and construction is fairly deeply embedded in academic work. The editors of the 1993 collection, *Reading the Social Body*, make a virtue of it: 'These essays fall into two categories: some treat the social construction of bodies that have actually existed at some point in human history, and others discuss the representation of bodies in various artistic contexts.'<sup>3</sup> On the one hand there are those who deal with the 'actually' existing – sociologists who write about ageing, diet, sport; the development of theatre anthropology and so-called 'multicultural' performance training. On the other hand there are literary and cultural commentators who deal with representations in written, graphic, filmed texts – texts which use inscriptions to make reference to the body, but from which the actual body is absent.

Straddling – or more often failing to straddle – the disciplinary divisions are art-forms in which the actually existing is at the same time representation. These art-forms are, principally, dance, opera, drama (though it can be argued that rock gigs, fashion shows, most sports and much public speaking also deal in representations of the body). Recent work by dance and music historians has shown how the body is organized by choreography and score: for instance, in her essay on 'Technologies of the Body in Baroque Music' in the collection *From the Royal to the Republican Body*, Susan McClary argues that while French music favoured moving the physical body 'at the expense of inwardness', Italian music mapped interiority: 'each divides up and shapes human bodily experience in its own way.'<sup>4</sup> Missing from that rather good collection, however, is any essay on the body scripted by dramatic text. And, apart from an essay on – significantly enough – closet (i.e. de-bodied) drama, the same omission marks *Reading the Social Body*, and all three volumes of *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*. Where, in the histories of the body, is the body scripted by drama? Has this form, written expressly for bodies, nothing to say of 'the body'?

Like most academic questions, of course, these ones seem to have been already answered. Most specialists in the early modern would cite the meticulous critical energy visited upon cross-dressing in Renaissance culture. The phenomenon does indeed exert a fascination, in large part perhaps because it seems to embody in itself that wider, more nebulous sense of the Renaissance as a time of cultural and political tensions. Absorbed, more or less as metaphor, into discourses around sex and identity, the cross-dressed

body tends, however, to be abstracted from the drama script. Meanwhile a much more regular feature of such scripts is blank-verse exposition. But there are not many studies of the body produced by blank-verse exposition as it relates to the questions and pleasures of early-modern embodiment. Which reveals, I think, the presence here of a hidden factor: academic fashion with regard to bodies. We might note, for example, a current interest specifically in cross-dressed and cyborg bodies; or, in times past, connections made between the large bodily scale of Elizabethan amphitheatre or melodrama-house performances and an audience explicitly envisaged as working class. The literary discussion of dramatic bodies gets skewed, then, towards the discursive.

By contrast, deliberately focusing on the acting body, Stanton Garner's *Bodied Spaces* is a wonderfully suggestive application of phenomenology to the circumstances of performance.<sup>5</sup> He takes issue with deconstructionist work on Beckett's plays which disregards the drama; for him, the 'signifying (or representational) body is the construction of a theorizing act that brackets the living body and its phenomenal fields in an act of objectifying abstraction' (p. 45). He demonstrates how the texts of a dramatist such as Beckett put pressure on the body and our assumptions about it. Yet when he speaks of the living body on stage asserting a 'physiological irreducibility' (p. 44), the deconstructionist might argue that we are now at the opposite pole from the discursive or represented, faced by biology as essence. If drama is an art of living bodies, it doesn't just assume but contributes – as indeed Garner implies elsewhere – to constructing the biology.

That hint of essentialism, even in work which is as brilliant as Garner's, shows how tough it is to retain a firm grasp on both discourse and biology. For the relationship between them is, properly, not separation but dialectical union. As Bryan Turner puts it, 'To reject Cartesianism, it is not necessary to deny the corporeal nature of human existence and consciousness. To accept the corporeality of human life, it is not necessary to deny the fact that the nature of the human body is also an effect of cultural, historical activity.'<sup>6</sup> But it's a very slippery dialectic: as Judith Butler notes, even the master-theorist of the interlockings of body and discursive regimes, Foucault, himself slips into an evocation of a sort of natural body which escapes the disciplines of power: 'he refers [in the *History of Sexuality*] to "bucolic" and "innocent" pleasures of intergenerational sexual exchange that exist prior to the imposition of various regulative strategies.'<sup>7</sup> And then Butler herself has been criticized for confusing person and role, for giving overmuch weight to interpellation and abstract structures. As Elizabeth Grosz says, 'It is not adequate to simply dismiss the category of nature outright, to completely retranscribe it without residue into the cultural: this in itself is the monist, or logocentric, gesture par excellence.' The dialectic has to be strategically preserved: 'In the face of social constructionism, the body's tangibility, its

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matter, its (quasi) nature may be invoked; but in opposition to essentialism, biologism, and naturalism, it is the body as cultural product that must be stressed.<sup>8</sup>

That dialectic should be most pressingly apparent where the study of the dramatic script or dance score is to contribute to histories of the body. This essay, which is part of a larger project on the staged and spectating body, is an attempt at a reading which attends to the relationship between body and script. Its second, related, aim is to enquire into the apparent disappearance of the scripted body as an object of knowledge. The attempt at a reading has a polemical edge to it, in that, much as a student of metrics would claim that rhythmic operation can be factually specified, so I insist on a body technology which is textually readable and, indeed, despite the more sentimental drama buffs, perhaps best known only through such close reading.

The text to be read could come from any genre or period. For the main contention is that there are different bodies assumed and shaped by different periods of dramatic production, so the example is merely illustrative. I have selected Restoration comedy. Had I selected mid-nineteenth-century melodrama we would find ourselves dealing with scripted bodies that repeatedly produce states of apprehension and recognition, where the musculature appears to open itself up – as contrasted with the bodies we are about to see. Those Restoration bodies are chosen for two reasons: the principal one is that I thought this genre would be resistant to what I wanted to do, given the extent of its apparent reliance on words to make its effects. The second is that the Restoration is a period of cultural history that is characterized in the general imagination by body images – which are (1) bawdy, fleshy, usually female; (2) ascetic, puritan, capitalist. So how do these images fit together, and what is their relationship to the body imagined and produced by dramatic script?

### A plethora of bodies

By way of leading into the script analysis, let's take a quick look at the range of bodies associated with the Restoration and its dramatic production.

First off we have images of acting bodies, from a theatre historian and then a historian of acting technique. In one of the most important books to have been written about Restoration comedy, Peter Holland suggests that in general the drama is exploring two concepts of what is 'natural' – on the one hand social ease, on the other a Hobbesian pre-social aggression. The acting style was, then, 'naturalistic' insofar as it conformed with the behaviours of social decorum.<sup>9</sup> Holland's Restoration is that of the wealthy audience, with

a cynicism developed in the aftermath of the Commonwealth. This contrasts with, but doesn't necessarily contradict, the story of the development of acting technique. Joseph Roach's Restoration is situated between the passion and emotion of the Elizabethan stage and the mechanized bodies of the mid-eighteenth century. The player of the seventeenth century sought to acquire inhibitions, and the end of the century established 'an elaborate network of inhibitions called theatrical decorum'.<sup>10</sup>

These views of the acting body can be set alongside the cultural historians' narrative of the shifts from fairground and popular culture of Renaissance London to the clean-living morality of the early eighteenth-century coffee-house. The achievement of bourgeois culture of the late seventeenth century was, in the words of Stallybrass and White, the 'creation of a sublimated public body, without smells, without coarse laughter, without organs, separate from the Court and the Church on the one hand and the market square, alehouse, street and fairground on the other'.<sup>11</sup> The link between the bourgeois and bodily sublimation takes us into an earlier story which tells of the close connection in early capitalism 'between discipline, asceticism, the body and capitalist production'.<sup>12</sup> This thesis was most famously propounded in Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, but as Turner shows, it was also assumed by Marxist thinkers, where it runs into problems around consumption. In Turner's opinion Weber failed to address the contradiction 'between hedonistic consumption and ascetic production'.<sup>13</sup>

The problem is to know whether bodies are hedonistic or ascetic, for an even older story of the Restoration tells us about the licentious culture of aristocrats and their stage, a culture that stood in the way of the achievements of the 'puritan revolution'.<sup>14</sup> It is this version of the Restoration which lives on in the posters and advertising copy for revivals of Restoration plays, with their leery smiles and prominent breasts and texts about rollicking fun and bawdy.

There is yet another idea in the popular imagination. On the improvisation show *Whose Line is it Anyway?* Josie Lawrence and Caroline Quentin were asked to do a dialogue in Restoration style. Instantly they were fluttering fans: chins held high, muscular tightness in the top half of the body, emphasis on the poise in shoulders and elbows while the head turned. The face was produced, through the positioning of the fan, as a place where the alternation between concealment and revelation became important. The whole activity, with its fluttering and head-turning, felt not 'significant' but busy.

With a bit of juggling, these various notions of the Restoration body might be made to connect with one another. But there would still be problems connecting the big overview to the particular text. For in the individual play you bump into this sort of thing:

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'Now, if you would speak contemptibly of any man, or thing, do thus with your hand – so – and shrug up your shoulders till they hide your ears.' Thus the instruction of a little black boy to the fool Monsieur de Paris, who is having to learn how to be Spanish in Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1671–72).<sup>15</sup> It is part of a whole series of instructions as to bearing, bowing, greeting, laughing that are attempted by Monsieur as he is walked about the stage by the boy. Meanwhile Prue stands to one side of the stage and complains about the lot of the chambermaid, 'who sits knocking her heels in the cold' while her mistress has sex. Against the artificiality of the body Monsieur is trying to acquire Prue seems to be natural. But as soon as she speaks about the 'carking and caring, the watching and sitting up', we see that her body too is produced, by her class and her sex. Furthermore it is difficult to keep her, in her apparent 'naturalness', separate from the artificial Monsieur, because he, as she tells us, is her only hope of getting some sex.

This little scene sits usefully alongside the modern commentators because it insists on placing bodies in relation to one another. When the object of enquiry is described as *the* body (singular) we perhaps lose sight of the key function of interrelationship in the work of defining bodies. Drama so often draws us into its bodily values by having us learn, and then take pleasure in, the schemes of interrelating differences. To these we now turn.

### A balancing act

In Act 3 Scene 2 of Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1672) the notorious womanizer Horner, now supposedly impotent, is telling his friends Harcourt and Dorilant that he is going to forgo the company of women. Just before he leaves them Harcourt asks his advice, because he is in love with Sparkish's mistress. Before Horner can give it, Sparkish enters, 'looking about'.<sup>16</sup> But Horner and Harcourt continue discussing the situation for about ten lines until Sparkish joins them in conversation.

For the fifty or so lines that precede Sparkish's entry, what is the action? Three men talk. Their conversation maps them against other people (women, old leery men, rich fools) and other activities (drinking, eating, gambling). Those activities are elsewhere – nowhere – while what is *staged* is 'non-activity', talk; the men are those who refer to themselves as 'us'. Up to Sparkish's entry this is 'us' on display, working at leisure; making non-activity into spectacle, giving it – as it were – distinction. This image is reinforced by Sparkish's ten-line entry to the conversation. The performer must sustain the activity of 'looking about'. That activity, drawing on its roots perhaps in commedia clowning, shows the power of this persona's desire to locate and bask in the attention of others. While the pantomime goes on, the speech between Horner and Harcourt seems to become more stylish than before:

- Horner:* Why, here comes one will help you to her.  
*Harcourt:* He! He, I tell you, is my rival, and will hinder my love.  
*Horner:* No, a foolish rival and a jealous husband assist their rival's designs . . .  
*Harcourt:* But I cannot come near his mistress but in his company.  
*Horner:* Still the better for you, for fools are most easily cheated when they themselves are accessories.

(lines 53–60)

The rhetorical antitheses in each line become more emphatic, recalling the shape of the formal set at wit, and behind that the stichomythia. These verbal features stress balance and organize conspicuous turn-taking. At a very basic level they trace out the rhythm of breathing necessary to deal with the lines.<sup>17</sup> The physical work involved combines with the perception of the rhetorical shapes to produce bodies that are themselves governed by balance. The Horner–Harcourt dialogue thus has about it the sense of stasis and containment, working within limit, as opposed to Sparkish who is driven by his desire. The corporeal balance is not, however, merely individual; it also sets up relation to another. The shape of the exchange ensures that the body *waiting* to reply is as important as the speaker. The waiting body is defined by its predilection to participate in the balancing act, and in that way sets up a sort of repetition of another body. That repetition could be slavish, or a forced dependency; here it is a balance like mirroring, where indeed there is a form of dependency but always masked as narcissistic affirmation. This is very different from Monsieur de Paris' foregrounded tuition in solemnity. Here the bodily repetition appears to be the natural product of – while in fact it produces – the dialogue between chums. Being naturalized does not, however, deprive it of value, and its value, together with its shape and its degree of naturalization (as contrasted with, say, those framed 'sets at wit'), are specific to the historical mode. So the appearance of waiting to reply here produces a feeling of harmony between the bodies that in turn makes the containment feel pleasurable. That demonstrated mutuality itself contrasts with Sparkish's solo entry.

There are, too, hierarchies at work. One differentiates Horner and Harcourt, through the contrast between Horner's habitual production of epigrams and Harcourt's more intensive use of personal pronouns. Harcourt speaks as it were from himself to himself, while Horner addresses a generality. To them both Dorilant is audience. These differences will have their effects both on the gesture and address of the body and on the real audience's perception of the body as similar or different. Such discriminations are, however, but half-realized alongside the larger differentiation between these two and Sparkish. He uses the pronoun 'I' more than anyone else. This is a verbal symptom of how much he is solipsistically governed by his desire.

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While he seems not to notice them, the other two take their time with a dialogue that intimately concerns him. While he does his pantomime of looking around, their bodies are observing, maintaining an alertness to the boundary between what can and cannot be overheard. Against his busy doing, they are commenting. Within the hierarchies here Sparkish's physical activity is always less important than Horner's cynical observation. Inaction is power.

## Privatized lives

The second scene I am concerned with is more complex. In Act 4 Scene 3, the famous 'china' scene, Horner has sex with Lady Fidget (or at least we are to *imagine* him doing so) while her husband is in the next room. Horner's pretext is that he is showing her his china collection. When other women arrive they too want to be shown his china.

The scene opens with Horner describing his sexual triumphs (under pretext of impotence) to the doctor, Quack. After thirty or so lines, Lady Fidget enters, 'looking about her'. While she does the pantomime of looking (this time the persona is driven by a desire to keep herself secret from, unattended by, the world), Horner sets up Quack behind the screen specifically to observe his prowess. Note the attitude to the stage here. Quack, on stage but not on display, has a safe and authoritative position; the fools don't know they're on display; Horner knows he is on display but is still taking a risk with regard to the outcome. The thrill is to go through with the adventure without ever appearing to be foolish. The common assumption through all this is that we are not only always observed but always vulnerable to the observer. (This might connect with Bryan Turner's narrative about the development of an increasingly 'closed' body and propriety around private space, but it contrasts with the Stallybrass and White narrative about the development of a public body and ethical coffee-house society.) The stage is not a space for play but for calculated risk. The body that will make most use of it, and thus most fun for the audience, has to produce itself as vigilant.<sup>18</sup>

Lady Fidget intensifies the binary between being observed and taking a risk. The observers she is concerned about are the social 'world'. She doesn't know she is already observed by Quack, and us. What we see is her movement from a refusal to 'withdraw' with Horner up to an embrace of him. This movement is physically inscribed as a set of alternations between refusal and curiosity: 'let us not be smutty. But you talk of mysteries and bewitching to me' (lines 48–9). On that full stop the performer's body must shift its attitude to Horner: there's a breath that breaks the two sentences; but there's a half-rhyme (smutty/But you) that rejoins them. It's a momentary glimpse of the tug between nature and culture. The effect is to make it an un-smooth

transition; the muscular organization of Lady Fidget's desire is very much on display. It becomes even more pronounced when she actually starts to speak about Horner's 'secret'. For at this point of intensified intimacy her fear about the 'world' likewise gets bigger: 'for my acquaintance are so censorious, – oh 'tis a wicked world, Mr Horner! – I say, are so censorious and detracting' (lines 59–61). The repetition of 'censorious' is cumbersome enough, but into the syntax is placed a parenthesis – and no mere parenthesis but a form of apostrophe. The need for quite a lot of breath to manage the hurdles means that she almost pants, which makes her chest move – producing, perhaps, the bawdy breast. In conjunction with this, there is an uncertainty of control over her focus: she apparently looks outward to the censorious world and inward to Horner's 'secret', but her apostrophe about the world is directed to Horner. What we see is woman produced as that which cannot control its own performance; and what is foregrounded as the cause of this lack of control is a desiring body. The syntax may cue the actress' performance, but the image is of a character whose desire breaks through her speech. The logical climax is that it is she, not Horner, who initiates the embrace.

At this point her husband enters. The next fifty lines are a combination of asides and dialogue: she panics, and then says she is seeing if Horner is ticklish; her husband's reply gives Horner his excuse – that he is sick of squiring other men's wives about town; which makes Sir Jaspas Fidget laugh mockingly in an aside. When Lady Fidget accuses Horner of being ill-bred, her husband asks what he has done. She laughs to give herself time, and then comes up with the idea that he has got china that he won't let her see, and she rushes into the next room. Horner, apparently trying to stop her, says:

Lock the door, madam. – So, she has got into my chamber and locked me out. Oh, the impertinency of womankind! Well, Sir Jaspas, plain dealing is a jewel. If ever you suffer your wife to trouble me again here, she shall carry you home a pair of horns, by my Lord Mayor she shall! Though I can't furnish you myself, you are sure, yet I'll find a way.  
(lines 110–15)

Sir Jaspas has an aside in which he finds this hugely amusing. Horner then has an aside: 'Nay, though you laugh now, 'twill be my turn ere long' (line 119). Shortly after, he leaves to join Lady Fidget.

The initial interruption sets up a sequence of obstacles for the characters to overcome. They do this with different degrees of efficiency – Lady Fidget panics for longer than Horner, and the person who has increasingly less grasp on what is going on is Sir Jaspas. The differentiation between them is marked by the space assumed by the different *asides*. Hers worries about being found out, speaks incomplete sentences, addresses herself: it makes her turn inward, showing loss of control on public utterance, privatizing her domain. Horner is brisk: 'That's my cue, I must take it' (line 84). He still has an eye on the

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mechanisms of performance; his subjectivity hydraulically moves into the space others create for it. There is no sense of an extensive inner personal space; if the lines are addressed to an audience they do not share very much with them. Sir Jaspar's first aside is at the other extreme from his wife: he is completely unreflexive, and he talks much more than he need do (and when he does reflect on himself later, he is wholly misguided); if he is sharing a joke with the audience, the words feel simultaneously wasted. Sir Jaspar is relaxed; that's his idiocy.

### The charisma of constraint

In a mode of playing that uses the aside, it is the differentiation between asides which is crucial. They establish different body spaces and different degrees of physical control. A related display of precision, which is denied to the other characters here, is when Horner gets Lady Fidget to lock the door even while he is expressing outrage. In an instant a space that had seemed whole is broken up, secret areas are created (the instruction to Lady F); even as Horner addresses Sir Jaspar about plain dealing he plays to the audience. And – who knows – the lines about finding a way could also be for Quack. That speech, building the technique of the asides into a bravura display, depends for its delivery on the precision with which lines are directed: the angle of the head moving from generality to individual address, possibly a sharply changed intensity and focus of look. We watch the physical work that completes the isolation of Sir Jaspar, and, being addressed ourselves, are complicit with it. For the competent character, speech is management.

The asides are composed from micro-elements of technique. So too is the laughter. Lady Fidget's laugh is designed as cover. Sir Jaspar's laugh is a form of self-indulgence. As such it contrasts with the precision of Horner's managerial speech. Rather than articulate the space into sectors, the laugh fills it indiscriminately. It is redundant sound, vacuous, non-directed. Thus, left alone on the stage, Sir Jaspar is not centred in the space. He 'calls through the door to his wife; she answers within'. While he talks *off-stage*, Quack from behind his screen has a rare line directed at the audience. Quack, on-stage but concealed, has more dignity – because he has more understanding of what's happening – than Sir Jaspar who, with the whole stage to himself, is the most ineffectual character here. Authority comes from being withheld from the stage, withheld from being exposed. And, if Quack's position behind a screen gives him force, even more fascination is exerted by those behind the closed door. Between those two there is another distinction. We hear Lady Fidget: 'Let him come, and welcome, which way he will' (line 130). Horner is neither seen nor heard. But he has become embedded – so to speak – in

our imagination. If his body has become 'sublimated' it has also become even more phallic, even dirtier.

At this point the play has invented a *mise-en-scène* where a closed door is more interesting than an open one. Part of the pleasure is that the door stands as a witty and knowing denial of what is supposed to be happening behind it, where openings are found. But within the hierarchy of characters here the more securely closed the door, the more sexy it is. It is the hidden bodies which exert the most power on our minds. We can see all of Sir Jasper, and he is contemptible. While he shouts nervously, ignorantly, from the on-stage side of the door – where we in the audience are too – our minds are dissociating themselves from him because we know what is 'really' going on behind that door. The larger Sir Jasper's physical performance becomes, the more fascinating become the unseen bodies behind the door. It is not just that they are supposedly having sex which makes them sexy; it is that they escape the indignity of being staged. And, because they are not staged, we don't know precisely what is going on – which way he is coming in. Which makes them yet more desirable. As we watch Sir Jasper, then, we learn to look at the performing body with minds that desire the hidden body, looking at the staged as a sort of failure to be unstaged.

The dramaturgy suggests that a physically active comic body is an embarrassment. The more a body is foreclosed from display, the more fascinating and powerful it becomes. In both scenes we have looked at, Horner's stage power derives from emotional management and poise: very self-disciplined, very polished. The more closed off he is, the more authority he has. Being silent behind a closed door he is fascinating. In Horner we get the charisma of constraint.

### **Text, practice and the disappearing body**

When *The Country Wife* puts its sexiest body off-stage, into a zone which is perforce unscripted, what is left exposed on-stage in all its silliness is a scripted body. With that in mind we will turn to my second question: the impropriety of the scripted body as an object of enquiry.

That body, I have suggested, tends to slide between disciplinary boundaries: literary criticism will busy itself with text, but steers clear of the acting body which it regards as the domain of theatre studies. Theatre studies will tell us that, whatever the text establishes, the play can be practically performed in a multiplicity of ways. This disciplinary split between the effete relativism of 'practice' and the abstracting rigours of 'text' emerges at a theoretical level in a series of versions of the opposition of discourse and biology, representation and construction, or indeed fiction and reality.

Through one such version it slips into the very work which has the potential to demolish these binaries. Histories of acting technique are concerned with a real acting body, but in order to write their history they have to be seriously concerned with text. One of the most scholarly and unusual of such histories is Joseph Roach's *The Player's Passion* which has a breadth of reference far beyond the usual trot between Stanislavsky and Grotowski. The book's focus on the 'inner workings' of the actor's body intends to bring to light a hitherto ignored connection between physiological concepts and modes of expressiveness in cultures ranging from early modern to modernist. In reviewing previous historians of acting, Roach pauses over the achievements of B.L. Joseph, who nevertheless did not 'distinguish sharply between the physiology of character as written by the dramatist and the actor's physiology'.<sup>19</sup> Now it might seem that the dramatist would share a concept of physiology with the actor since such beliefs, having to do with what is natural, are deeply embedded and widespread. By separating the character and actor bodies Roach is separating the fictional from the real, driving a wedge between two elements which in performance customarily interact and blur. This separation works to privilege the real, the natural body, which is not only the topic of scientists and acting theorists but also the topic of Roach's book.

The tactics of Roach's argument make sense when viewed in the context of a world dominated by literary criticism.<sup>20</sup> He insists on the biological presence of the acting body, where technique is brought to the text by the actor – and grounded in a scientific discourse outside that of fiction and literature. It is the combination of physiological knowledge of the body and a technique based on this which – rather than the author's text – produces the actor's body on stage. By contrast with the author's imaginings, the actor's body is that which is really natural. This step then takes us to Roach's commentary on Aaron Hill's versified Diderot, 'The art of acting' (1746): 'the embodiment of an emotion flows effortlessly from "ideal" to physical manifestation; as Hill notes simply, "the *mov'd* actor *Moves*"' (p. 81). The formula may be elegant but it does not tell us *how* the actor moves – within what range of gesture, with what disposition of body weight. Bryan Turner, summarizing Mauss, says, 'although the human body has the potential for walking, the particular form of walking which is produced within a given society or group is the outcome of training and practice.'<sup>21</sup> In a rehearsal room, if a performer is asked to walk across the stage, she might do so in a variety of ways – as a melodrama villain, as Max Wall, as a catwalk model, as a priest, as a butoh performer. Then again, does the performer imitate Max Wall or quote him, look to the audience or not, walk slow or fast, in curved or straight lines? When the performer moves, she is confronted by choices which will lead to different sorts of effects and meanings. Caught up into a play of differences and repetitions, these choices are textual.

The body on stage may then be said to be a product not only of contemporary ideas about physiology and the technique of acting but also of a third element which – bringing back something occluded by Roach – is the script. For a script may distinguish bodies in one show from those in another, tragic bodies from pastiche tragic bodies; and it may discriminate between bodies in the same show, the easeful body from the frustrated one. A generalized notion of a culture's performing technique needs also to be alert to the particular moments at which that technique's relationship to its audience is affirmed, challenged, negotiated – the particular scripting of the body.

While the script's relationship to the body may be irrelevant to the acting historian's thesis it needs to be foregrounded by the performance theorist, since it helps to define the terms of her analysis. Within that analysis a key role is played by another binary variant. The oppositions between technique and script, biology and discourse, reality and fiction reassemble themselves as embodiment versus representation. Let's follow the operation of this binary in the work of another very astute and cautious analyst: in her essay on Aphra Behn, Elin Diamond argues that '[t]he gestic inference of Behn's abundant use of women-in-breeches parts is not that disguise hides a truth that will ultimately emerge . . . but rather that representation is pressured by embodiment'.<sup>22</sup> That embodiment is, she insists, the 'experience' of a woman's body in the 1680s.

Diamond is correct to insist that the 'phenomenological experience' of embodiment may be in tension with representation. To ignore that point is to write the partial history produced by concentrating merely on semiotics or representation, to make the body '*purely* a social, cultural, and signifying effect lacking its own weighty materiality'.<sup>23</sup> But when we met representation before as part of a binary, it was set against construction; here it is set against embodiment. The occluding of construction suggests that, although there is a very proper insistence on biology, it is, again, irreducible. This inflection to the binary is especially problematic within drama study, where it comes into contact with institutional pressures particular to the discipline. We can see what happens if we move to Elin Diamond's essay on Caryl Churchill. Here she attempts to distinguish the pleasures and processes of theatre from those of performance: theatre is 'governed by the logos of the playwright's text; actors represent fictional entities of that text' while performance 'dismantles textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favor of the "polymorphous thinking body" of the performer'. Having set up that binary, she then warns us off its simplicity. Her work instead is to understand 'the ideological nature of representation', and she repeats: 'In theater the sexual and historical specificity of the actor's body is absorbed into a representation of the body of a character, as defined and delimited by the author's text.'<sup>24</sup>

Although Diamond is sharp enough to know that it's misleading, this binary won't go away. It has all the attraction and force of what used to be called an epistemological break, as if drama studies only properly entered the (post)modern world when it learned to disavow theatre and embrace performance. That break is made more forceful by its institutional underpinning: it is performance which interests funding bodies and publishers, and performance studies which situate themselves at the cutting edge of higher education's crusade. The distorting effect of this binary on Diamond's argument here is that it has led her to forget the point made in her essay on Behn, where she describes how representation (presumably the domain of the author's text) is always under pressure from embodiment (specifically the performer's body) – even in the 1680s. That point is surely right, for, as we've seen in Wycherley's text, through the control of breath patterns and balance the verbal text *is* the physical experience.

But more importantly, and reaching far beyond Diamond's essay, there are the assumptions which that binary endlessly recycles. The actor's body is placed in opposition to the character body. That body, being invented by an author, is textual and artificial. By implication, and following the simple mechanism of the binary, the actor's body is thus produced as 'natural'. When that happens a whole history of acculturation is occluded. Second, where the body of 'performance' is placed in opposition against theatre it can be presented as something different from theatre, a 'polymorphous thinking body', a 'semiotic bundle of drives'. But on what grounds can we explain historically why bodies that performed prior to, say, 1920 might not have been polymorphous and thinking? It may be too abstract and formalist simply to suggest that the change was caused by some sort of freedom from text; we would come unstuck dealing with *commedia dell'arte*, if not with several other modes. Furthermore, the rather grand narrative which contrasts all of theatre with the 'polymorphous thinking body' tends, as a rhetorical effect, to give that polymorphous, etc. a special aura. How far is it itself an illusion that works to inhibit our inspection of it as, alongside all others, a culturally learned behaviour? The body of performance is, of course, always also acculturated. And in the moment at which someone takes up a position within an installation, or simply becomes lit in a bare space, in that moment they are textually positioned, not perhaps within an author's script but within planned visual parameters, within lighting design, within the institutional discourse which is 'performance'. Nevertheless, it is the verbally scripted body which in the 'performance' discourse has, symptomatically perhaps, to be silenced.

The sense of that epistemological break between theatre and performance is strengthened by its reiteration in other disciplinary discourses. In his 1991 review essay on the body, Arthur Frank offers as an example of the 'communicative body' – one of his four basic body types – the body of

the performance artist.<sup>25</sup> Performance art pieces 'seem to have a common theme of the body seeking to break out of codes in which it cannot express itself and find self-expression in a code of its own invention' (p. 85). This observation is silent about the possibility that other dramatic text – besides that of 'performance' – might stage a body having difficulty with codes (like the boy actor playing Cleopatra complaining about being imitated by squeaking boys). It is also silent about the extent to which 'performance' is itself a genre, with learned generic shapes. More importantly, it envisages the body as itself an author, committed to expression, as distinct from the artificial codes of others. An expressive body, speaking without mediation for itself – the moved body just moving – seems again to be an image of biology freeing itself from discourse, nature from culture. Withdrawing behind a closed door, as it were: to do the real business.

### Performance theory and table manners

While Horner is off-stage, imagined to be finding self-expression, perhaps, in a code of his own invention, the audience contemplates Sir Jasper in all his loud staginess. He is stupid because he doesn't know what is going on. Not just cuckolded, he is the one who is staged where the power lies with the unstaged. He has been set up by the others. While Sir Jasper is caught into a fiction, Horner is imagined to be busy beyond the fictional space, behind that door. In the same way, while Sparkish does his pantomime of looking about, what's felt to be the real insight comes from the men who comment on him.

The rather hack distinction between fiction and reality here is sharpened by its relationship with other binaries which the script produces: physical restraint and directedness versus size and mess; vocal measure versus noise and exuberance. These readily generate evaluative categories: management versus clowning, planning versus theatricality. Whatever our pleasure in the clowning, the value system which runs through the binaries designates that management is sexy and charismatic and clowning is not. Now that value system, produced as it is by our Restoration text, has about it a strange persistence, and if we start to pick over some of the other binaries we have encountered we can detect it shimmering in the distance. For instance, if we share the belief that performance art dismantles illusionism in favour of the polymorphous 'thinking' body of the performer – and that this is useful work – we are not only looking at a familiar binary (thinking/illusion, planning/theatricality), but we are sharing the same preferences as Horner's audience.

There's another pair of terms which subsumes most of the others: the 'real body' versus the body scripted by others. For Roach and Diamond,

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fiction, in the form of that which is ‘written by the dramatist’ or ‘the playwright’s text’, is conceived as an imposition on the actor, much as Sir Jaspas may be said to be imposed on, set up by, scripted by Horner. Alongside and against the deliberately illusionistic world invented by dramatists, the actor, we are told, brings a technique founded on science, a biologically real body, that which is sexually and historically specific. Let’s take these thoughts back with us to that moment in 1672 when an audience watches three men, dressed very like themselves, standing on the forestage and sharing their light, as they comment on the activities – the large, clownish activities – of a fourth man: around those three men the aura of the biologically real, the sexually and historically specific, is not wholly absent. The audience, watching and commenting on the show, see Horner and his chums – ‘us’ – watching and commenting on Sparkish. And in that audience those in the least fashionable seats watch the pit commenting on the show. In this arrangement it’s not simply that divisions between theatre and reality may feel a bit slippery, but that, more importantly, the presence of ‘theatre’ is no guarantee of the absence of sexual and historical specificity.

But that is not how *The Country Wife* has us see it. Sparkish and Sir Jaspas, those who are trapped in fictions and scripted by others, they are ridiculous. And so too, in the work of modern commentators, the theatrical text – with its body scripted by others – is an imposition on, a delimiting of, the biologically real, trained – and yet polymorphous – body of the performer.

In these strange echoes between the Restoration text and the modern performance analysis we start to see that there might be a larger story unravelling around the impropriety of the scripted body. In here somewhere there seems to be an ancient distrust of fiction and theatre. Yet it is not an opposition to all forms of illusion. Some people who feel theatre is delimiting find performance fully expressive. In the same way the nineteenth-century historian who roundly condemns Restoration comedy finds Shakespearean drama noble. There is a process of discrimination going on, and we need to get hold of its mechanisms.

Restoration comedy was condemned largely because it was ‘bawdy’. As we have seen, if ‘bawdy’ has to do with looseness, with exhibiting the body, with loss of individuality and dignity, this is not a wholly correct description. But the term was necessary as a shorthand way of bracketing off the Restoration. For within the overview of Whig history Restoration culture was a deviant blip in the continuity between the English Revolution and the eighteenth-century consolidation of the rule of men of property – that alliance of Protestantism and capital that forges English national identity. The biological form of this identity is the ‘ascetic body’ which supposedly lives according to the values of moderation and restraint a life that is well cushioned. In the process whereby puritan rigour modulates into eighteenth-

century ease, the Restoration stage, despite the smokescreen of Whig historiography, can be seen to produce a helpful aestheticizing of that ascetic body. And, if Bourdieu is to be believed, something like that body was still with us in the 1970s: 'it is a way of denying the meaning and primary function of consumption, which are essentially common, by making the meal a social ceremony, an affirmation of ethical tone and aesthetic refinement.' He is describing the middle-class as distinct from the working-class meal, and goes on to note among its features 'the etiquette governing posture and gesture, ways of serving oneself and others . . . the censorship of all bodily manifestations of the act or pleasure of eating'.<sup>26</sup>

Note here Bourdieu's insistence not so much on restraint but on the work that makes a spectacle of restraint.<sup>27</sup> There is something familiar about this. It seems to echo back to 1672, to the play text which, by my account, makes a charisma of constraint. Here the conspicuously governed, measured bodies are the aesthetically pleasing – even sexy – ones.

With its suspicion of fiction, theatricality, illusion, all gathered up into the distaste for the scripted body – a body imposed upon – modern performance analysis may be said to fall into place within a long tradition of bourgeois asceticism. For a technique which steers clear of the fictional, expression which eschews theatricality and a body free of impositions by others, are all central to dinner parties among professional people.

## Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 142.
- 2 Michel Feher, with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (eds) *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part One* (New York: Zone, 1989), p. 11.
- 3 Catherine B. Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich (eds) *Reading the Social Body* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), p. 5.
- 4 Susan McClary, 'Unruly passions and courtly dances: technologies of the body in Baroque music', in Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (eds) *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 97.
- 5 Stanton B. Garner Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).
- 6 Bryan S. Turner, *The Body & Society* (2nd edn) (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 74.
- 7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 97. See also the discussion by Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 217–19. Bryan Turner had made a similar point about Foucault in the first edition of *The Body & Society* (1984).
- 8 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 21, 23–4.

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- 9 Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- 10 Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 54.
- 11 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 93–4. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978, 1982) (2 vols) might seem an obvious addition in here; but it doesn't offer as precisely focused an image of 'Restoration body'. (Elias' remarks about late seventeenth-century manners are largely drawn from Courtin, *Nouveau traité de civilité 1672*.) Nevertheless, the analysis I develop fits within the general terms of Elias' account of 'civilizing' as the emergence of structures of individual self-control (see esp. vol. 1, pp. 101, 121, on shame, and on hiding the distasteful behind the scenes; vol. 2, p. 281, on 'courtly rationality' – self-control and forethought).
- 12 Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 3.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 14 See Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, *English Drama: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), Chapter 6.
- 15 William Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, in W.C. Ward (ed.) *William Wycherley* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1949), pp. 199–200.
- 16 William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London and Tonbridge: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1973), p. 53.
- 17 I am trying not to assume a culturally non-specific performance technique. We don't know much about Restoration modes of performing, but in addition to Roach's point (quoted earlier) about inhibition and decorum we can assume a certain quality of formality. My guess is that this might make a performer rather more sensitive to the offered possibilities for formally organized embodiment.
- 18 Compare this summary of the French political philosopher Bossuet writing in the 1670s: 'The paternalistic monarch, whose mastery of the realm depended on his mastery of the self . . . did not allow whims, resentments, or desires to confound his intelligence or weaken his resolve.' Jeffrey Merrick, 'The body politics of French absolutism', in Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (eds) *From the Royal to the Republican Body*, p. 23. See also Robert Muchembled, 'The order of gestures: a social history of sensibilities under the Ancien Régime in France': 'The "modernisation" of gestures manifests itself in a repudiation of everything that is too animal in man. As in Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664), it involves a minimum of hiding, not only "that breast I would not know how to look upon" but also the exercise of one's natural functions.' In Jan Bremner and Herman Roodenburg (eds) *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, intro. Sir Keith Thomas (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 137.
- 19 Roach, *Player's Passion*, p. 30.
- 20 Coming at it from another angle, Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that 'Acting teachers . . . seldom know (or are prepared to teach) cultural history', but her essay on 'Theatre and the civilizing process: an approach to the history of acting' in its own turn deliberately ignores detailed descriptions or pictures of performances in favour of handbooks and theories of acting. In Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (eds) *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), pp. 21, 23.

- 21 Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 34.
- 22 Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 23 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 21.
- 24 Diamond, *Mimesis*, pp. 84–5.
- 25 Arthur W. Frank, 'For a sociology of the body: an analytical review', in Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner (eds) *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 36–102.
- 26 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 196.
- 27 The idea of restraint as spectacle, restraint staged, qualifies, without contradicting, Elias' point about internalized self-control.