Flavors of Physicality

Hollis Huston

A.

> La pièce ainsi reglée dans les détails et dans l'ensemble obéissant à un rhythme choisi se déroulera à la manière d'un rouleau de musique perforé dans un piano mécanique, sans jeu entre les répliques.[1] —Antonin Artaud

In the cruel ecstasy of Artaud, dancers try to be mannequins, and to execute the permutations of a mathematical design. Artaud, however, is neither the first nor the last theorist who, in order to restore the stage to its proper physicality, persecutes the body. Gordon Craig, for instance, finds the actor so polluted by emotion that there can be no health in him, and replaces acting with an art devoid of bodies. In Craig's pure art of objects, puppets bring the stage to life by deposing actors.

Both artists proclaim that things, not persons, are eloquent. One fills the stage with things, the other with persons that have been made like things; both model the animation of objects. "Animate," however, is a duplicitous verb. Animation, though it has godlike power "to give life," can on weaker days only "impart liveliness," and liveliness is not life, but only something that resembles it. Is the gift then a sham? To animate may mean merely "to *represent* as alive," or "give the appearance of life."[2] Appearances are often false, and even if the gift is genuine, it only supplies what was lacking before being given. A party must be animated when it is boring, a dummy because it is dead. The liveliness of animation can be bestowed only on that which is so dead as to need false life.

Shall machines replace bodies, or shall bodies pass for machines? The animations of Craig and Artaud seem to oppose each other, the one describing a theatre in which there is nobody, because body is banished, the other a theatre in which body is promoted out of its place, becoming the "animated mannekin" which executes a "reflexive mathematics," giving rise to an "animated material murmur."[3] Yet Artaud is no disciple of body, but aspires to be its master; and Craig cannot simply oppose Artaud, for the body cannot be expelled as Craig

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would wish, or rather, it can be expelled but, like banished Kent returning in the guise of a rude mechanical, the body comes again to serve us. The animated mannequin is only a prosthesis for the actor. Its precision and eloquence, its slurs and slips of the tongue, are those of the body that moves it: this is so whether that body is kept behind the scenes, as in Punch-and-Judy, or exposed to view, as in the Bunraku. Even the first protagonist revealed his flesh through the film of apparatus—*chiton*, *kothurni*, *persona*. Had Craig performed in mask, he would have learned what the mask performer knows and mere nostalgia cannot discern: that the mask, no shield against the moment, is more permeable than air, that it admits everything, discovers all, and gives to the breeze a local habitation. Even the puppet, that most distant mask, exposes its naked master.[4] And how strange that Artaud should find his "language of signs" only in the Balinese body! It would seem that body sings only in chains, when confined to a cell of mathematics, with no room for improvisation. Only in confinement of flesh is born the grandiloquent corporeality.

> Modernist puppets are often seen to channel a direct, nearly unmediated relation between author and audience, a transaction that avoids exchanging the commodified "personalities" of live performers.[5] —W. B. Worthen, "Of Actors and Automata"

Author's envy is the stage mother of puppets. The author fears that vagabond actors will make off with his word. The *auteur* (usurping the writer's false authority) fears that unchained bodies will challenge his instruction. To avoid mediation, they excise the medium, and where there might once have been three there is one now trying to divide himself in three and yet remain one, for there are still three roles, and the divided artist has lost what he shed so much blood to attain. The master, divorced from other bodies, must now answer to his own, and to the eyes who watch the stage and call its tune.

Craig and Artaud want us to hear a certain eloquence, in musical modes, and they will let nobody stand between their songs and our ears. Craig compares with prejudice the actor's unawakened body to a dead thing more eloquent. Artaud plans to torture the body till it sings. Both reject the body's "natural" speech. They hear, in its spontaneous utterances, mere explosions of wind. For Craig, body is enemy, and for Artaud, body is corrupted friend. Friend or enemy, body must be broken: there is no way around, but only through or over body, to find soul.

Once body has been pummelled and left in the dust, will the way to soul be open? Which way is it? Or is soul now behind us, breathing its last?

> Body am I entirely, and soul is only a word for something about the body.[6] —Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

I took my actor training in physical studios, and all I know about performance is what I have seen and heard there. I have never been able to discern auras, and I have never seen the inner space where, some say, the role is prepared. I have, however, seen bodies that, in congress with those who watch them, imply what no body can denote. Such bodies do not play on themselves so much as on the portion of space and time which they empty of its use, in order to fill it with illusion. That portion of space and time, designated in concert by someone acting on it and someone watching that action, is the stage. The knowledge of the stage is a knowledge of differences and their price. Difference visible, illusion never seen but exactly imagined, price paid in the moment's success or failure, life or death. Such knowledge, the knowledge of appearance divorced from the thing itself, is not common sense. It therefore is a strange craft that, when taught, cannot be taught without some pain, for the false consciousness of things themselves must be scourged.

Pain, however, is an incident not the goal of study, and the shock of knowledge is sufficient scourge for any studio. False consciousness is known by its failure to project illusions, and truer consciousness by its success. Soul is a particularly demanding illusion, though some performers have a particular talent for it; it belongs to a class that I once called "psychological illusions located in the actor's body."[7] It is a complex rather than a simple illusion. For as long as it lasts, it seems to have existed before the moment, and to extend beyond the moment into the future. Soul, in fact, is a meta-illusion, seeming to be the cause of a train of intentions, desires, reactions, and other incidents which seem to succeed each other, and to compose its apparent history. Soul appears by incarnation: I have seen it, but I have never seen it beside, or above, or within the flesh. I have only seen it projected on the flesh. Each new asceticism of training, therefore, ends by displaying bodies. Even haters of the body find themselves in its lover's embrace. And those who say they love the body, what do they love?

Body has often been invoked to save the theatre, but from what? Is body royalist or anarchist? is it a pillar of community, or a hole in the sky? when it comes, will it restore the ancient standard, or reverse all the victories? is it in service to text, or to some better "language"? how is it trained? and when trained, restrained? whose interest does it serve? Is body ready to save us, its mere presence announcing the millennium? or is it debauched, and its present state our misery? Is body a foolish virgin or a wise whore?

> I have come to the conviction that the problem of the actor is, at base, a corporeal problem.[8] —Jacques Copeau

There is, in Western actor training, a suspicion of the body, and a constant attempt, in various ways, to get past it to something better. Listen to the endless speech of actor training, to its glossolalia. Let us scan the channels and sample some various brief moments in the struggle with body. We will hear isolated commands from studios divided by continents and decades. With an infinitesimal span of attention, and by a meticulously irresponsible method, you and I will concentrate our faculties only after the roll of dice, and then interrogate the spots. What kind of work, we ask, is demanded to prepare the way? What is hoped for that the body does not presently deliver? At what level of research, after what distress of flesh, does each artist accept spontaneity? for spontaneity is not authenticity. We may and do lie spontaneously.[9]

These fragments of written discourse were set down to represent speech, and I cast them here as oral traditions that live in our studios. I cite written sources to defend myself from the charge that I have made this up. It does not matter who wrote the texts: they are dead to their authors, both in the nature of things and in the nature of my capricious method. If you attend to the authors rather than to the texts, you will miss the action. Though endnotes follow this essay, I urge you not to consult them. Be careful how much knowledge you purchase, and do not blame me if you find unhelpful information on your hands. Repeat the texts to yourself; as you hear them, and if you have travelled through studios, you will know that you have heard them somewhere, perhaps in your own mouth. We pronounce not on doctrines of historic personages, but on fragments torn from context. Anonymous as koans, they drift in the theatre's babel like bottled messages. The historical author, catching one of these on her line by mistake, might throw it back, failing to know her own. They exhibit not minds but moods of actor training, the culinary arts by which the body is prepared for consumption, the flavors of physicality.

I

> **"This act of spiritual nakedness is all there is to performing."[10]**

It is hard to get our hands on spirits, but bodies are available to the touch. By sympathetic magic, therefore, we often try to shape the soul by sculpting a body that answers for it. If we want to see souls bared, we plan to induce such nakedness by baring bodies. "Someone goes into the center and

offers himself as the Meal." Other members of the studio are thereby cast as "Eaters." The "Meal" must close his eyes in order to "give himself over entirely to his fantasies concerning the Eaters," and to "enjoy absolutely the liberties of anonymity." The Eaters "may eat anywhere and anything on the Meal's body, . . . may nibble, suck, lick, and bite, . . . may undress the Meal and position him;" meanwhile "the Meal remains passive" and "utters whatever sounds are there."[11] Literally speaking, stripping is optional, but those who metaphorically eat me have already shredded my clothes. The exercise, though narrated without prescription, is engaged by premises as specific as an arpeggio, to deny any one of which is to cancel the work and defy the master: 1) the proper role for Eaters is to invade, and the proper role for Meal is to yield; 2) there is on the one part a spontaneous invasion, and on the other a spontaneous yielding; 3) invaded and yielding, the Meal will find in himself spontaneous utterances; 4) releasing these utterances is a truthful thing to do.

"Where," asks this director and trainer, "is essential truth to be found? On the surface, in the behavior men show everyday, or in the depths, behind all social masks?"[12] In my own mouth, this would be a hard question to decide, but in the mouth of this teacher, it is rhetorical, for his inflection makes the question answer itself. "Everyday" and "mask," in the discourse of high modernity, are dirty words. And what timely thinker in this age of disappointed romanticism would prefer a "surface" to a "depth"? In modern times, the "deep" and the "dark" are mother and father of the "true." And if, says the gloomy modernist as he looks into the searchlight, depth cannot be sounded, then truth cannot be heard.

And it makes him angry. We have all been carried away, Spengler would say, on the crest of a Western wave, surging over dikes, and *dike*'s, that other cultures would not even perceive as limits, crashing like cathedral arches the membranes of perception toward limitless space. Our heroes walk out of every club that will accept them as members, then wonder why they are alone.

> Valhalla is nowhere. Lost in the limitless, it appears with its inharmonious gods and heroes the supreme symbol of solitude. Siegfried, Parzeval, Tristan, Hamlet, Faust are the loneliest heroes in all the Cultures.[13] —Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*

What is in our hands is never enough for us. Truth, if it is to pass our standards, cannot be found "everyday," for then there would need no studios of acting to quest it out. Nor could the essence of mankind lurk amidst "social masks," for society, the immediate community of other persons, is only a surface which the

theatre must shred in order to reveal the real duty of man. Only in solitude, only in the wilderness of lonely search in arid distances, is Faustian truth revealed. If Hernani, the true heir, is to present his claim at court, he must first summon his powers from the mountains with a musical note, for his right is that of an outlaw who has "whetted my sword against the hills and tempered it in rushing streams."[14]

To whom, however, in wilderness, would truth be revealed? The revolution is only *guerilla* war until discovered at court, where falsehoods are sifted and found fitting. An actor's empty space is not the vacancy of nature, but a gap that he himself must open amidst a crowd. The theatre is no Forest of Arden but a candlelit *salon* that is societal *ipso facto*, meant to be seen, superficial by definition, *percipiendum* in essence. In the theatre, all is done for seeming, and even truth is the most cynical of tactics. This studio like a catacomb, Paradise incarnate in small groups who meet in rehearsal rooms whose walls are painted black, may deplore the corruption of the art for which it trains; but the dark Garden is already infested with seeming. This studio hopes to interrogate the normal intercourse of its students, to take off the mask before it can grow roots on the face, and by stripping bodies to find spirits; within the privileged circle souls will speak to each other, or rather (because souls don't travel very well) they will exchange bodies as envoys, whose diplomatic credential will be nakedness. Stripping in private, of course, doesn't count. There is no nakedness except in presence of other bodies. So there is nothing natural about nakedness; nakedness must be rehearsed in the studio, as preparation for the evil world that will offer clothes to the soul. To say, as Lafeu does of Parolles, that "the soul of this man is his clothes," is an insult.[15] Garments are a boundary and would mark out the limit of the eye's penetration, declaring what cannot be eaten by the viewer's gaze.

> The audience's experience of theater—whether by this we mean their experience of the performer, of the events performed, or of the performance situation itself—is of a displaced oral kind.[16]
> —David Cole, *Acting as Reading*

So here, performing for privileged eyes and mouths, the acolyte submits himself without boundary to his audience: or should we call them gustience? He will learn to protect nothing, withdraw nothing, alter nothing, even under the most invasive inspection. His "truth" will known by his ability to "*show himself as he is in the extreme situation of the action.*"[17]

Yet this "extreme situation" is nothing other than an intense consciousness of the general theatrical condition: one is being watched. The

invasive orality of these eyes does not make the theatre's exposure unusual in kind, but only greater in sensation. The extremity is only tautological: the "extreme situation" is nothing other than the act of "showing himself," and one cannot show oneself except in an extreme situation, for nakedness is not natural, and showing is a transgressive extreme. All actors are always in trouble until they give up acting. Does the "extreme situation" described by the master make it harder or easier to "show myself?" He would say harder, but I would say easier: for is it not precisely in a test that others, and we ourselves, learn who we are? I think that the true self is discovered in reflections on the eyes of others; but he thinks that the true self broods alone in Faustian heights and depths.

The extreme situation here described is that of an "action." One must be genuine while *doing something*, high C, shuffle off to Buffalo, iambic pentameter, hysterica passio. And it counts only when they're watching. Singing in the shower doesn't get you the job. The fish that got away is not mounted on the wall, nor swims in from the wings. One must "show oneself" and yet remain "as you are," a demand which is either tautological or nonsensical. Showing is an action that changes one's condition. Nature itself, say the physicists of quantum, adopts a pose to answer an inquiring gaze; and even if some later science gives that myth the lie, the theatre will be true to its display, for it is nothing but display, its very name defining that which, in a given substance, is its makeup. The master, philosophically examined, has a choice before him: he may let the phrase "as you are" describe the new condition of the Meal's action, in which case his command is a tautology that would accept all possible results; or he may apply the phrase "as you are" to the prior condition that existed before the action, in which case his command is nonsense for which there are no conditions of success. Or, as is perhaps more likely, the master may mean "as you are" to describe some essential condition of the person, a quality that is unchanged by accidents of conduct; but the paradox has already been planted in such an essence, for if "as you are" is constant, how is it related to the change that shows it? how can it be shown at all? and if "as you are" changes in the showing, how is it different from the showing? I could in ignorance *be shown* and remain as I am, for when Peeping Tom looks in the window, he hopes to see me do what I would not choose to do before his eyes. But it is difficult to imagine what *showing myself* while remaining what I am can mean, for acting is not passive: when one shows oneself, one invites attention, one asks to be seen, and the means of that demand is the very appearance one has chosen to show—and one fails if not seen. Even this exercise of ingested nakedness is an act, a peculiar decision to show oneself in the court of a studio; its power is its choice to show what can be shown to those who have no right to see; I cannot duplicate its effect by looking at myself in the mirror, or by showing myself to my lover. I must take the

unnatural choice, and that choice already projects me from the garden. I am no longer as I was. The master, having lived through fear to become what he is, passes on in love the experience of that fear, without which the acolyte cannot truly emulate him. *Undergo this terror or stay off the stage; no pansies need apply. Only a coward would cover himself. Do you have the balls to expose what you fear to show?* This is all for my own good. And when lips have been laid on me I will fondle my scars. There is much assumption of suffering in the training of actors, much proof by pain.

The Meal submits himself to invasion. No boundaries are to be drawn, no mysteries concealed, no secrets respected. The Meal is available not merely to be tasted but to be eaten: when the others are done, there will be nothing left. The true actor, this exercise asserts, will disappear; conversely, any actor who would protect himself is untrue. Any inhibition on the Meal's part is a spiritual impurity. Truth can only emerge if he is utterly passive. But how shall we know that truth emerged, and therefore certify that the Meal was passive? By what standard shall the master judge sincerity? Truth will emerge on the projection of the voice, for a good Meal will utter "whatever" sounds are "there." He shall, of course, not utter any sounds that are "not there," nor shall he fail to utter any sounds that are "there," and the master, knowing what sounds are "there" and what are not, will certify the accuracy of the Meal's vocalization. The Meal's act is true by passivity, except when he must act. To know when this must be, to recognize the body's truth, we listen to someone else's body.

Romantic Truth is deep. The metaphor of nakedness implies that "truth" is located beneath the clothes, so we take off clothes, like the savages do, because clothes are shallow. Like Parolles stripped of words, we hope that "Simply the thing I am shall make me live."[18] Yet beneath clothes there is only skin, too thin, and now revealed as equally superficial. By eating naked flesh we pursue the truth to a deeper, higher level, mine for it beneath the skin, *within* the actor's body, listening for sounds, the messengers of truth, to be exhaled on breath from deep recesses. But it is our very tunneling which shifts the flesh, and thereby forces out the sound. So by what trick of relation do we call this sound a true one? how can it present the Meal *as he is*? Truth, says the love song, is *under my skin*. To reach truth, we must tear the skin, get our teeth on the *meat* of the problem. I will know you are no longer lying when I take your heart in my mouth.

> Unaccommodated man is no more than such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.[19] —*King Lear*, III. iv.

In this Romantic studio the disciples strip not only the animal but the spine, pull the wishbone and split the fork. The body is a noble savage, and its utterance is awaited with loving faith; but because in this civilized land of clothes and masks we find no savage bodies, nor hear their speech, we must find a blessed isle where sweat shines on sunburnt skin. Even here, however, the natives disappoint us, and so we improve on paradise by chewing up the natives, and incise our dreams on mute, dark chops. The unaccommodated man is wise by nature, we think, we would have nothing to teach him. Too bad we cannot find him in this mess of guts and bones. We only came here to awaken with a kiss, soft as strange ice cream.

II

"He does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from resistance."[20]

"The actor is improvising," says a director who used this exercise to train a company, "but he is doing it within a very strict physical vocabulary."[21] The actor performs a sequence of motions, mobilizing in turn all the articulations of the body.[22] Photographs show that the exercise could for the most part be transcribed in the language of the mime's *étude*; there are translations, rotations, and inclinations, in isolation and in sequence; and yet something in the master's rhetoric tells me he would be offended if I told him of that resemblance. There is an attitude about the work he oversees and about his own description of it, and the attitude is not incidental. Movements are not sufficient. Something must be added to movements if they are to be validated.

The acolyte must learn "connection." He must connect the movements to each other in an eloquent sequence, and he must connect the sequence to imagery, so that they no longer look like calisthenics; and yet the task will not be performed, nor the truth revealed, until there are no longer any terms to connect. Connection is not enough. The terms of the problem must be burnt away to leave the answer standing. The exercise is meant not to express something but to be something. It is meant to *become* an *essence*, collapsing mediation into presence. As a mere figure, representing an event, it fails: only as an actual event in the soul of the actor is it justified. "The actor should not use his organism to illustrate a 'movement of the soul,' he should accomplish this movement within his organism."[23]

How is this physical act to induce a movement in the soul? The words do not imply that the body *is* a soul, rather that the soul which shall be moved is within the body, and perhaps unwillingly so placed. Incorporeal, yet chained to

corporeal mass, it sings only through paltry throats, in clumsy tongues. This master, like the first one, yearns to touch the soul; and in this studio, as in the first one, soul is known to be "within" body; and here again, because the soul speaks only through its ambassador the body (which so possessed becomes an "organism"), we must act upon flesh and see that action pass through flesh to body's other side. A certain fleshly ripple is the only message we shall receive in return. Body is important not for itself, but to manifest spirit.

Body is not respected here, because it is corrupted by affluence. If we were merely to kiss it awake, it would have nothing to say, or worse, it would tell lies of sweet reason and easy pleasure; it might preach the liberal gospel of salvation by increments of *brie* and sips of *chablis*, or it might promulgate, from a Crimean *dacha*, the politburo's latest reform. In this studio, we shall not awaken the body gently with a kiss, but startle it awake with harsh reveille, and drill it by a book indifferent to its nature. "In order for there to be freedom there must be discipline. . . . There are specific gestures, a wide variety of them, but very precise."[24] Nature is here false consciousness. The body is by nature enslaved in its comfort, and the love that will give it freedom must be tough; so the loving master will teach it a system of corporeal differences—this part not that, here not there, now not then—giving it scales and arpeggios to play which do not exist if it does not play them. It is these articulate differences that make the exercise look as precise as mime or Kathakali. When we care what the body does, it matters, and in the tender care of differences arises the theatrical sign. Differences in themselves, however, are not enough. A spiritual investment of body is required. And yet how are we to recognize such investment? what is the corporeal sign of incorporeal devotion?

Every proud studio strikes the shoal of verification. The disciple, by following, declares that he does not know how to lead, for his instincts are debauched. He asks to be taught new instincts, and he can only learn by suppressing his own, and modeling those of the master. When he is wise enough to judge again, he will leave or seize the studio; in the meantime, however, he would not know the truth if he fell over it, as he must often do. In this time the master is the judge. "Is this it?" asks the disciple, and the master says yea or nay, this is "it," or that is "not it."

Here the acolyte is counseled to seek distress. "You have to decide to *really* do them [the exercises]. Decide to hurt." No pain no gain. "You can do them mechanically. But then nothing happens."[25] It is taken for granted that "mechanical" movements do not "hurt," and that what does not "hurt" cannot be "real," that pain, on the other hand, cannot mislead, but is the sign of authenticity: acting is suffering, and nothing painless, or pleasurable, is worthy of the stage. The anesthesia of art is despised: a dancer who does not feel her

blisters in the dance is unworthy, for she has used art as narcotic. In this studio with its Kantian morality, good feeling is bad faith, and art is not to be used as an escape, from pains either of life or of the art itself.[26] Unlike Sophocles, who whistled as he wrote the lament of Oedipus, this kind of actor is required to hurt as he acts. Pain must be sought in space, by pushing the movements to extremes, and pain must be sought in time, by repeating movements to the point of collapse. "I am asking for an insupportable effort. One is obliged not to stop despite fatigue."[27] The master demands that his actors put their *selves* in jeopardy. The character's danger is not truly acted unless the actor is truly in danger.

And pain is the kingdom this master's work proclaims. I see the acting better for knowing not a word of its language, and I see that the pedal-point of this corpus, the simple sentence conjoined to every gesture, is "And I am hurting." These actors signal to me through the flames, and the meaning of their signal is, the flames are burning them. This act can never get around the body's egotism, never even tries to do so. The master throws blood on the window to prove that the glass is there; but through bloody windows we can see only red.

This studio despises the body and enjoys its pain. The Romantic may expect the naked body to babble speech of the soul as it slides down his gullet, but this anxious abbot strips only to flagellate himself better, suspecting every lapse of agony. There can be no repose here, no moment of balance, no full inspiration that would dissolve the spasm of expression. "If something is symmetrical it is not organic."[28] Any claim of the body to wisdom, any effort to assert that it might know how to act, is by definition false. Body must be racked for its arrogance, punished for its knowledge, until it gives up what it knows and assents to what it knows is false. *Credo quia absurdum, ut intelligam.* An Inquisition, torturing the body's flesh to save its soul. A taste of ashes.

III

"A performance, scored, is like reading the score, or graffiti, on the body of a ghost."[29]

The page in your hands now might bear the notes left by previous readers, but if it did, by erasing or whiting out the marks you could view the page as it once lay before in someone's hands: you might, at least, without recovering a former belief, recover the former lie once told, in spite of later interpretation. But performance, prompted by a page, may not be so recovered. The notes that fall back upon that page are either too gross to catch its filaments or too fine to adhere to paper. The text, and even those notes intended to mark down a "concept" of that text, are incomplete (or there would have been no act of

theatre), and performance, their completion, is doubly absent: absent *from* the moment of inscription, which looks away from now toward a past or future when word is flesh; and absent *in* the moment of inscription, for the tattooed flesh looks toward the requirement of eyes which the scribe cannot command, and the action, even with an actor's best intentions, is never what it's meant to be, but only half a dance with those who are not on the stage, whose gaze has called up spirits. The *Oresteia* begins before the first word or step, as theatron shows the public to itself, eyes reflecting back and back before diverting toward the orkestra.

> If one watches those who are watching, they appear to be the real centers of energy, from which those performing are only projections.[30]

And so the act is never what it was before, never what the stage manager requires, what the director ordered, what the author's ghost seems to (but never did) envisage. Least of all can it be what the actor himself remembers of those scriptures, for performance shares all the ontological mysteries of text and adds the one that text cannot contain, namely that it never was text, never had a substance, is not now nor never was in the place you left it, will never appear again quite when you wish, nor speak on last night's cue, nor find the mark you taped so diligently to the floor, but will write again over the notes so professionally kept, pretending to follow what it only erases and repeats. Its essence is not to be, never to have been. You can't be sure it will appear at all, and you must trust those wretched scratches in the promptbook, knowing that the ghost will show only when you give it up, offset and peripheral. It will not live with you, but neither can you live without it, so you blow the silent whistle, hoping that somewhere the beast is hearing and will come. Fix your eyes upon Emmaus and someone walks with you, but ask his name and no one knows.

The body, it should now be clear, is its own series of problems; hardly a blank slate, it is in fact a history, and its wisdom is a record of its commerce. To call that nature essence, to accept even what now, after initiation to a studio's fabricated archeology, tickles the body's conscience, is bad faith. Performance, by nature, cannot stabilize, and has no substance. Can, however, the body be turned toward a false memory of truth so vigilant that its becoming might find a true suspension? The effort to precipitate something insubstantial may have substantial effects. In this studio, there is relentless awareness of the conundrum of verification. The body and its obstinacies are given stage; but no method of training it, no matter how rigorous, is allowed to certify itself. What, the master asks, does the rigor look to? Why isolate body parts? why cause the body pain? or listen to its comfort? why expose it? risk it? stroke it? What would happen if

the body pursued its own asepsis, if it strove to *do* only, without investing a diversion into codes of *feeling*? The exercise begins "*now*, doing nothing but breathing," but soon it must "stop," and you must "*show*," but not by doing anything. To show by doing "*nothing* but breathing:" it sounds like showing *as you are*, the same old Romantic windmill tilt; but there is a difference.[31] In the Romantic studio, we pretend not to have done anything, but here we *do* nothing. Nothing has become a task, palpable, a nil taking time and effort, blood and toil, like Beckett's nothing to be done in two acts. At the end of rigor, the mortified body asks what for, and the master answers, for nothing. Here *nothing* matters.

> What we have to purge is the compulsive egocentricity of the actor-in-love-with-truth.[32]

Bodies want to indulge themselves in emotion. Spontaneously they overlay the dilemma with action, movement, intonation, gesture, doing *something* on the spur of the moment. It's automatic (or is it autonomic?), but it's too easy. Hard it is to turn back, question the impulse, and impossible not eventually to relax our vigilance, but the intention here is to chase the ghost rather than carry out his program; the ghost will eventually fade in sunlight, but by that time a necessary exhaustion will fall which, though claiming no immanence in truth, is practically inevitable.

> I have wanted to develop a way of working, an acting method, in which there would be no delusions about getting a performance out of an actor, for the actor would, in the very nature of the conception, decipher his own; . . . the mistakes, the vanity, the blindness, even the criticism . . . would be withered away, and what is there would be, in the structure, all that could be there, *for that is what it is*.[33]

Beyond beauty, disillusioned of eloquence, such acting, should it appear, could ignore the easy questions, inarguable.[34] "Whatever we did would be . . . so determined by its own nature that it would throw judgment off balance."[35] Not what we choose to do, but what "must be done" by *these* actors, in *these* times and in *this* place, for *these* eyes, and burdened with *this* disbelief, answering not to taste or preference but to necessity gone blind in watchfulness. Body at the last draws breath, indeed does "*nothing* but breathing," but that breath is drawn on nothing but "the radiance of inner conviction." Body then surrenders to its fate, letting be what "*must* be seen," the knowledge of which would speak the word, "make the word come even if there were no breath."[36]

This mountain is a high one. The air is thin, insubstantial. No breath, no words, we might think; and no showing, of course, except by doing something that you would not do if you were not showing. The body is the matter here, and interrogated till it gives out; it cannot speak of what it does not know, but its ignorance reaches a limit where it gives up its supper. The *nothing* of this studio will not, therefore, be brought home. Yet flesh spent in the quest, returning home in its litter, is not the same as rested flesh; and wounds, though silent as to truth, attest necessity. I'd know the difference anywhere. There is nothing else; this is what it is. Pursuit of the impossible may leave the inarguable in its wake, though behind the hedgerow, of course, Sartre waits in ambush, ready to cry bad faith while actors retch.

B.

> A good painter has two chief objects, to paint man and the intention of his soul; the former is easy, the latter is hard, because he has to represent it by the attitudes and movements of the limbs.[37] —Leonardo da Vinci

An imitator whose medium is words may not know what Nietzsche saw through words, and other mimics know: namely that "the soul is only a word for something about the body." If you wish to paint a body, you must paint flesh. If you wish to paint a soul, you must paint flesh. And if you wish to paint a disembodied soul, you must paint defective flesh. The soul is a tune that lies well on that instrument called literature, and so the modern poet, bursting through the page toward the soul's vanishing point, is tempted to reify it. Declared a thing, the soul must then be located, though Descartes carefully denied it space;[38] and since the soul of a thing is its essence,[39] it is difficult to locate the thing that is its essence at a distance from the thing of which it is the essence.[40] It goes against the mind's grain to say that flesh is *here* but its soul is *there*, since the word "soul" implies its own centrality.[41] In a quick survey of the thing, we cannot see its soul; and so, because its soul *belongs* to it, is *at its centre*, and yet we cannot see it "on the outside," we imagine there is a *within*, where it hides from shallow observation.

A novelist may write as easily, and some would say more so, of an inner space where movements of the soul extend, as he can of the reach of limbs. It's all words, all looks the same on the page, where soul may be as present as anything else, and explained by its material causes. But the theatre has only time to write on space, and the soul, if it is anything at all, is neither time nor space.

The soul's appearance here is disappearance, traduction of ether into bloody neurons, tunes into syllogisms.

> The notion of the spiritual has come into being as the inverse and *negative of the notion of the world.*[42] —Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*

Dividing the manifold into what is and what is not, we manipulate negative signs with no positive content, manufacturing the "inner" against the "outer," the "higher" against the "lower," faulty metaphors that would contain apples and economies, bricks and universities. But "*Every psychology is only a counter-physics.*"[43] Apples, bricks, and bodies have dimension; economies, universities, and souls do not. Souls, like other mythic entities, become visible when we watch extended actions in a certain way. And the surest way for me to lose my own soul, not to mention Hamlet's, is to find it. I, like Hamlet, cannot be myself; I and he can only do what we would do, or nothing's done, not anything. An actor is to act, not be.

> Performing a task keenly is not performing two tasks.[44] —Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*

Take thought: the category-mistake continues where it has least foundation. Leonardo was wrong. He did not have to do two things, for there are no brush strokes that represent soul. But as his canvas, straining for depth, grasped at the thing-in-itself, he helped to start us on a long road home.

In that flask of nonexistence that confines the theatre like a virus, a vial of singing things, souls have no chords. You might claim (and who am I to argue?) that you have seen the very soul of Lear; but I find no soul on any prop-list. Nor on the cue-sheet, costume plot, nor in the notes to actors. Actors and directors as they work say here not there, now not then, higher, lower, louder, softer, faster, slower, funnier—and if a word like "soul" is ever spoken under breath, it is only because they who hear it know how to decipher such complexes. Like an author who has nothing to give me but his words, I can only show you my body, poor and embarrassing as it is; and stripped of my action on a space to make a time, I will disappoint you.

The question of how to join a body to a soul has a long modern history. It underlies the false debates of acting schools, debates in which both sides speak the same verse in differing accents. One party thinks soul will wreak its will on body, the other that body, suitably informed, will obey the soul.

> The literal speech and action of a character become secondary, important only as points of access to the *real* substance of the figure: the unique psyche.[45] —Charles R. Lyons and James C. Lyons, "Anna Deavere Smith"

It is a Faustian question, a question of perspective, an imposition of depth on the flat plaster of phenomena. The problem has no more validity on stage—nay less—than it does in philosophy. Leonardo thought perhaps that he could make his canvas deep enough to rip the veil and reach the soul—a Faustian ambition, and yet the one least fit for artists, who must humbly daub paint in place. Soul is our secret, the illusion that seduces patrons. Let the banker speak of soul as he signs the check: we shall not contradict him. Like all mysteries, soul should be revealed only to initiates. What the initiate knows is that there is no mystery.

IV

"If the Neutral Mask looks at the sea, it becomes the sea."[46]

Here no search for soul. Or rather, the mask's soul, if it appears, is the mere reciprocal of what it sees, presenting the absent content of its gaze. The body here has no inner truth. We do not torture flesh. We do not exhaust it. Introspection, pain, fatigue, and other such distractions, might cloud the eyes, which then would miss their motivation on the horizon. We dismiss exhaustion. We look down on pain. Action and perception are the same.

You and I see the same cloud. The differences between your seeing of it and mine can be read on our masks. The two acts are subject to critique. Truth is neither private paradise nor twisted secret, but is out there to be seen, if only in the mirror of the mask which gives it local habitation. The test of your mirror is whether it makes me see. I cannot see you, but only what you see. Emotions, at some future time, may appear, but the illusion must precede it. "This is what the sea makes me feel" is irrelevant. "This is what I remember about the sea" is false. "The sea" is true. Effects not affects, substance not qualities, perception not memory, engagement not history.

There is learning here but no ordeal. The body errs but does not sin. It errs because it has always been written on. Its histories are here retraced. In the *via negativa*, we note and then unwrite programmed behaviors: "What would *this* be like, if I did not behave as if it were *that*?" Disillusion, but no intentional pain; for pain is no part of the truth but rather an indulgence of emotion, a symptom of the actor's obsessive love affair with the wraith of his true self. The training empties the mind and attaches it to phenomena: when the performer is

seeing, those who buy tickets will see something on him, but when his vision falters, the stage flickers and goes out.

> The mime does not win the battle until the inexpressive assumes a thousand faces.[47] —Patrice Pavis, "The Discourse of (the) Mime"

The eye is trained outward: the question is not what am I? but what is there? Within, there is as much darkness and inertia as one wants, but how much of that can the stage afford, while the patron drums his fingers? Here *esse* is *percipi*. We train the dyad of eye and it to a learned reflection.

The stage, to which all acolytes aspire, is the space that plays. Constituted by being seen, it is already changed by sight, already adjusting to its new exposure; the stage manager's job is to maintain the show, and yet even if she succeeds she fails, for there is a certain play between this act and its exact reenactment. Actors know the law of three: to see it twice is to know that you never saw it once, and will not see it again. History, of course, can never be eradicated; but the cure of history is in the reading and the lifting of its traces, in its talking which never stops and which is never the same even when it says the same thing again. We give the body a good cleaning, a precise cleaning, in which each scar is discovered, read, and then specifically removed, to grow a tender white spot beneath.

C.

> The problem of the actor is, at base, a corporeal problem: the actor is standing on a stage.[48] —Jacques Copeau

Acting is corporeal, but that does not mean that it is a problem *of the body*. It is, rather, a problem that the body encounters. The solution is not within, because that is not where the problem is. The problem, clown, is out there *in the room*. And of the room. If there were more rehearsal rooms that gave us distance to look into, instead of flat black walls, the theatre would now be a different art. No wonder that, stifling in grimy closets of play, we try to find the inner stage.

The real calling is beyond ourselves. We work on the body, but body is not the purpose of that work. Body is not its actor's instrument. If the body were an instrument, we would not exercise it. Does one exercise a piano? The actor's instrument is the stage. The pianist exercises his fingers, but he does not play them. The fingers play the instrument. The fingers, their fitness and their

form, will not be judged, except by their effect on the instrument. The instrument, if well played, will swell with an illusion, a phrase or a place, a song or a soul. As a pianist may exercise his body to play the piano, so an actor may exercise his body to play the stage. His body, at the day's end, will not be judged for its fitness or form, its beauty or its truth, but for its effect on the instrument to which it is called.

> Man is before himself in the world.[49] —Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What Is Phenomenology?"

What the actor projects, those other eyes see. We make what is not there seem to be: that is our art, and our business is to make them pay to seem to see. What they feel about what they seem to see, and what they say about it later, still self-deceived, is their own business and none of ours. No wonder no one knows this truth! why would we betray our secrets, even if we had the words? There is no mystery. The mask has no inner face. Only in that moment when, on its face, it sees—only then can those others see the sea that is not there, and take their fill of loaves and fishes.

Notes

1. Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complétes* (Gallimard, 1961), I 47.

2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Compact Edition (Oxford UP, 1971), q. v. "animate" I 84.

3. Antonin Artaud, "On the Balinese Theatre," *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, Inc.; 1958) 54, 58, 67.

4. The "*portage*" of the mask was brought into, if not the mainstream, at least a channel, of Western actor training by Jacques Copeau. See Sears A. Eldredge, "Masks: Their Use and Effectiveness in Actor Training Programs," diss. Michigan State University, 1975; also Barbara Kusler Leigh, "Jacques Copeau's School for Actors," *Mime Journal*, nos. 9 & 10 (1979).

5. W. B. Worthen, "Of Actors and Automata: Hieroglyphics of Modernism," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 9, No. 1 (Fall, 1994) 4.

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 34.

7. Hollis Huston, "Dimensions of Mime Space," *Educational Theatre Journal* 30 (1978) 72.

8. Jacques Copeau, in Jacques Prénat, "Visite à Copeau," *Latinité* (December, 1930), quoted in Leigh, "Copeau's School" 63.

9. The chief contemporary meaning of "spontaneous" is "voluntary and of one's own accord" (*OED*, II, 2977), which carries for us the connotation *free* or *undetermined*. But an older and now secondary meaning was "arising purely from, entirely determined by, the internal operative or directive force of the organism," and this meaning implies that anything spontaneous will be predictable. Joseph Roach has noticed an important difference between modern and pre-modern acting theory: that for the physiologists and performance theorists of the eighteenth century, the second definition prevailed. "In his *Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals*

(1751), [Robert] Whytt grouped 'under the general denomination of SPONTANEOUS' only those 'involuntary motions' that are 'performed by several organs as it were of their own accord, and without any attention of the mind, or consciousness of an exertion of active power; . . . which have also been distinguished by the name of AUTOMATIC'" (*The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: U of Michigan P, 1992] 150-151). The common element of both definitions is that the "spontaneous" is accomplished without ratiocination. In modern times, we have come to believe that creativity contradicts ratiocination, while the eighteenth century believed that creativity required it.

10. Richard Schechner, "Aspects of Actor Training at the Performance Group," *Actor Training I*, ed. Richard P. Brown (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1982) 6.

11. 21.

12. 7.

13. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols., trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), I 186.

14. Victor Hugo, *Hernani*, trans. Linda Asher, *The Romantic Influence*, ed. Norris Houghton (New York: Dell, 1963) 293, 360.

15. William Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well*, II. v. 43-44, *William Shakespeare: the Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 868.

16. "At theater, as in reading, we sit immobilized—itself an encouragement to fantasizing—before a stage that, no less than the printed page (or movie screen or picture tube), constitutes a 'dream screen,' which, as the latest site of fantasy experiences neither clearly 'in us' nor 'out there,' reinstates the original site of all such boundary-blurring oral encounters: the breast" (David Cole, *Acting as Reading: The Place of the Reading Precoess in the Actor's Work* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: U of Michigan P, 1992) 203.

17. Schechner, "Aspects of Actor Training" 6.

18. Shakespeare, *All's Well*, IV. iii. 334-335, *Complete Works* 877.

19. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, III. iv. 100-102, *Complete Works* 961.

20. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) 34.

21. André Gregory, in Ruth Ansel, Doon Arbus, and Richard Avedon, *Alice in Wonderland: the Forming of a Company and the Making of a Play* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973) 12.

22. Twenty-eight photographs of Gerry Bammann performing the Plastiques are printed in *Alice in Wonderland* 167-175.

23. Grotowski, *Poor Theatre* 123.

24. Gregory, in *Alice in Wonderland* 12.

25. Jerry Mayer, in *Alice in Wonderland* 12.

26. "If the proper object of nature for a being with reason and a will was its *preservation*, its *welfare*, in a word its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement when it selected the reason of the creature to carry out this function" (Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical Foundations of Morals," *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich [New York: Modern Library, 1949] 142). Since for Kant ethics was the rational science of discovering one's duty, it had to be separated from any rewards or pleasures which a good action might bring about, even the pleasures of a good conscience. "An action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination," so that it is conditioned only by "*pure respect*" for a universal maxim "even to the thwarting of all my inclinations" (Kant, "Metaphysical Foundations" 148). This studio, similarly, separates the actor's duty from any pleasure which he might feel at the moment.

27. Grotowski, *Poor Theatre* 248.

28. 194.

29. Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana, Illinois: U of Illinois P, 1982) 95.

30. Blau, *Bodies* 117.

31. 86.

32. 61.

33. 56-57.

34. "A work becomes inarguable when it creates the terms by which it is perceived, when it becomes its own system of value, when there is nothing *behind* what it is saying, when it certifies and substantiates itself as the sole species of its own genre" (Blau, *Blooded Thought* xii).

35. Blau, *Bodies* 50.

36. 86.

37. Leonardo da Vinci, in G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: 1919) 15. An interesting alternative translation appears in *Artists on Art: From the XIV to the XX Century*, ed. Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945) 52 : "A good painter is to paint two things, namely, man and the working of man's mind. the first is easy, the second difficult, for it is to be represented through the gestures and movements of the limbs."

38. "I am only a thinking and not an extended being" (René Descartes, "The Meditations Concerning First Philosophy," *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur [New York: Macmillan, 1960] 132).

39. Aristotle's plot, or "the structuring of the incidents," is the "heart and soul" of the drama, for instance, because it is the "goal" of the drama, or final cause of it, or its essence struggling to realize itself through matter (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Gerald F. Else [Ann Arbor, Mich.: U of Michigan P, 1970] 27-28).

40. "I am not only residing in my body, as a pilot in his ship, but . . . I am intimately connected with it" (Descartes, "Meditations" 134). Descartes located the point of interaction between soul and body (we might call it, in an operational sense, the *seat* of the soul within the body) in the pineal gland. Notice his precise words for this location: "The part of the body in which the soul exercises its functions is in no way the heart, nor the whole of the brain, but merely the most inward of all its parts," (Descartes, in Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. IV [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1963] 131).

41. "A central or integral part of something" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. William Morris [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968] q. v. "soul").

42. Spengler, *Decline* I, 301.

43. I, 301.

44. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1949) 18.

45. Charles R. Lyons and James C. Lyons, "Anna Deavere Smith: Perspectives on her Performance within the Context of Critical Theory," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 9, No. 1 (Fall, 1994) 47.

46. Jacques Lecoq, in Sears A. Eldredge, *Masks: Their Use and Effectiveness in Actor Training Programs*, diss. Michigan State Univ. 1975, 390.

47. Patrice Pavis, "The Discourse of (the) Mime," trans. Susan Melrose and Barbara Behar, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982) 59.

48. Jacques Copeau, "Visite à Copeau" 63.

49. "Truth does not 'dwell' only in the interior man, for there is no interior man" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What Is Phenomenology?," *Philosophy Today*, No. 3 [London: Macmillan, 1970] 21.)