Theorising the Individual Body on Stage and Screen; or, the Jizz of Martin Guerre

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> jizz (dziz) [Etym. unknown.] The characteristic impression given by an animal or plant . . . A single character may supply it, or it may be the combination of many . . . D. McClintock *Compan. Flowers* ix 117, I know only too well the problem of trying to express what there is in a plant that enables me, or you, to tell it from another at sight. The word I use for these intangible characteristics, that defy being put into words, is jizz.
> — Oxford English Dictionary

> A world comprised of permanent objects constitutes not only a spatial universe but also a world obeying the principle of causality in the form of the relationship between things, and regulated in time, without continuous annihilations or resurrections.
> — Jean Piaget[1]

> I never forget a face, but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception.
> — Groucho Marx

One of the fundamental problems of theatrical communication, including narrated and/or enacted stories in film and television, is that of recognising actors and characters as they appear, disappear, and reappear. Semiotics has usually attempted a taxonomic solution: identifying the different channels sign systems involved, exhaustive elaboration of the consequent polysemic weave of information encoded, and only then moving on to consider the audience's ability to interpret it. It always has been a cumbersome set of theories, terminologically challenging and tending to postpone overall interpretative strategies while the wealth of detail accumulates. Interestingly Keir Elam, whose 1980 volume *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* popularised the approach, has now described the entire "semiotic enterprise" as, at best, "stubbornly unextinct", with its key terms and insights dispersed into other areas of interpretative activity, "putting an end to the dream of unification."[2]

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The term "jizz" (*OED*, also "jiz"), recently borrowed by several Shakespearean scholars from the study of plants and animals and which refers to some indefinable quality which enables the recognition of one species or individual from another, offers a rather different relational approach to the problem—either we recognise or we don't. It is interesting that in disciplines such as ornithology and botany, with their far longer and more relentless commitment to empirical, taxonomic classification systems of identification and distinction, a notion of an indefinable "uniqueness" survives, not based on essence but on difference. Although the *OED* doesn't recognise it, the etymology of jizz is almost certainly as a comic slang abbreviation; the ultimate phenomenological joke at the limits to taxonomy and in the face of relativising and reifying abstractions: "How do you know?" "Jizz." ["just is"]. (We should also note in passing that New Zealanders and some gay communities use "jiz" to refer to ejaculated semen, an interesting slippage given the use of DNA testing of semen to identify rapists.)

The term (spelt with one "z") entered Shakespeare studies in 1991 when David Mann in *The Elizabethan Player: Contemporary Stage Representation* borrowed it—as he thought, directly and only from ornithology—in order to try to account for the effect achieved by comic disguise on the renaissance stage. "The Elizabethan player", he writes, "could not, as in a proscenium arch theatre, begin his business without establishing an accommodation with the spectators"[3]:

> The establishment of rapport by poking the head through the curtain seems to have been widely used by stage clowns. Many entrances, if not frankly comic, were potentially risible, especially where players were assuming parts obviously different in age, sex, or status from their own ... Each actor ... has his "jiz"; the combination of his outline, bearing, and voice. A brief moment of being deceived, face on, as the actor enters in disguise, is likely to have been succeeded by the shared amusement of recognition, whatever the dramatic context.[4]

Mann however goes on to warn against the automatic assumption that the effect could only be burlesque: "imaginative involvement" by audiences was still possible, admiration for the impersonation might predominate, and a change in status, as in *King Lear*, might still evoke sympathy. "Disparity" [between actor and role], writes Mann, "was an element in the total response to the plays, as a bond between audience and performer, but to be called into prominence when it was required".[5]

In an extension of this idea, Peter Thomson has applied the concept of jizz to the pre-Shakespearean clown Richard Tarlton. Thomson notes that the biographical legend of Tarlton, written down in *Tarlton's Jests* after his death, includes his physiognomy (hunched back, distorted features), his strutting about the stage,

and his explosive temper. In one story Tarlton half-fills a urine bottle with wine and takes it to a quack doctor for analysis, ending his exposure of the fraudulent diagnosis by drinking the wine and throwing the empty bottle at the quack's head. Thomson suggests that all these idiosyncrasies—body shape, walk, violent anarchic personality—are mimicked by Shakespeare in the character of Richard III, an insolent and dangerous clown elevated to the throne by playing roles, that the actor playing Richard deliberately set out to echo Tarlton's "jiz", and that audiences recognised the reference.[6]

Two aspects of this analysis are particularly useful. First, the idea that jizz is not limited to one set of codes, but may extend across and select from many. We identify an individual by a different selection of sign elements when we see them from behind, or in a darkened room, or hear them on the telephone. We choose, from the units of meaning available, those which we know from experience are the most reliable in terms of their distinctiveness and permanence. Further, while we may suggest possible components of various sign systems that enable us to recognise the individual person by their body and voice in a particular real-life situation, when we move from reality into representation it is in mimicry that recognition is tested: either we recognise the reference or we don't. The other interesting feature of Thomson's analysis is that the phenomenon is already detached from its true referent—Tarlton died in 1588; performances of *Richard III* date at earliest from some years after that. But, in an age before the mechanical reproduction of images, movement, or sound, the referent quickly became lost; Shakespeare's Richard III in turn becomes an object of mimicry. This I suggest isn't jizz; the term loses its useful specific meaning, the unique difference of a living individual body defined by recognisability rather than essence, if it slips into being just another intertextual concept. The Elizabethan actor playing Richard III, Richard Burbage or whoever it was, had his own non-Tarlton, his non-Richard III, his individual body presence, his jizz.

Thus while bodies are similar to other bodies, and can be mimicked by other bodies, they are also the visible index of an individual person. Within a Saussurean sign system of difference, A as different from B, C, etc, jizz insists on the sign of A as being more than that which it is not. We cannot simply import another unique shape—say a letter from the Cyrillic alphabet—and make it stand in the place of A. We have changed the jizz of the sign, we have placed a new body in an existing vacancy, we have recast the dramatic role. But we do not mistake one for the other, and it is both dangerous in interpersonal terms, potentially offensive in social terms ("they all look the same to me"), and interpretatively naive in theatrical terms, if we do so.

It is in relation to unique, non-replaceable bodies that theatrical communication offers us a rich field of experimental situations. Auditions and the use of understudies are both commutation tests where the different individual qualities of different

bodies can be explored by seeing body A or body B performing a role, while the performance practice of doubling roles and the narrative strategy of disguise are limit cases for recognising actor and role(s). Even in an act of close realistic impersonation of a single role, arguably an awareness remains both that this is actor A in the role, not actor B, and that A's unchangeable physical shape and vocal peculiarities provide boundaries of interpretation of the figure in the text. Further, and paradoxically, it is when acting virtuosity is most obviously demonstrated, in disguise or doubled roles, that the attempt to conceal the actor's jizz most draws attention to its phantom presence, as well as to the artistic flexibility required to produce multiple representations with the same vocal and physical equipment.

Such an indexical function of actor and character is absolutely essential in making sense of a storyline, which in its pattern of entrances and exits, disguises, revealings, and doubling (or halving[7]) of roles, recalls the old conundrum of cognitive psychology: if the mother leaves the room, and comes back, how does the child know it's the same mother? To which we might add, if the mother leaves the room and comes back as the father, how does the child know the mother isn't a transsexual quick-change artist? As the child psychologist Jean Piaget noted many years ago, to be able to function within our community we have to learn what is changeable and what is stable both in the physical world (what Piaget called "object concept") and in other individuals (physically, intellectually, emotionally), hence perhaps our anxious fascination with stories in which our trust in such stability is undermined by characters or behaviour we consider "schizophrenic" (in the popular misuse of that term).

On the live stage, however, such shifts occur more obviously as an interpretative game, and it is largely through recognising the individual actors' bodies that we make sense of their reappearances as the same character in spite of costume changes, aging, and disguising, and why we have to establish conventions to distinguish disguise from doubled roles. We draw on experiential and cultural knowledge to assist us in deciding what can be changed and what cannot, and what is unlikely to be altered to a significant degree without explanation. Thus a significant change of posture, or changed facial appearance (by muscle alteration or make-up) is likely to be read as a new role unless we are told that the actor's first character has aged or been involved in an accident. It is of course possible to play consciously with this fundamental of dramatic narrative, but such special cases usually foreground their violations of the norm, and quickly establish their own interpretative game, whether it be a Jeckyll and Hyde situation, or a meditation on the gap between subjective perceptions and desires and the unknowability of the other that provokes those reactions, as in Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), where the eponymous woman is played by two different female actors.

The recognition of individual identity by jizz is one of the standard plot devices in film and television, a medium with a particular ability to close in on physical

detail, and to use such details to provide consistent traces of a character through a visual narrative. In the feature film *Sliding Doors* (1998), for example, two storylines involving Gwyneth Paltrow as the same character, Helen, alternate after the initial exposition shows her either catching an early train home, or just failing to do so. The Helen who fails to do so is mugged and wears a plaster on her head for several scenes. At the precise moment when she recovers and is seen without the plaster, the other Helen gets her hair cut and blonded. With this body marking, in spite of the complex interweaving of two different stories, we are never in doubt as to which Helen's narrative we are in.

Such markers and key moments can carry major ideological meanings. In Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) Kim Novak's ability to totally transform herself from Madeline to Judy by changing her hair colour and style, make up and voice, places women closer than men to a troubling, shape-changing unknowability that informs our reading of the sex/gender system activated in that text. So indistinct is the trace of Novak's individual body that we are unsure when James Stewart approaches Judy for the first time whether this is just another example of his obsession with the dead Madeline that has already led him to approach a series of other women who in some way reminded him of her. Within this understanding of the unknowable, betraying object of desire, it is predictable that after he and Judy have just made love for the first time that she makes the mistake that provides proof of identity: not marked on her body—which might produce reassurance—but from a talismanic object, the piece of jewelry which Madeline had worn. In terms of the plot, the crass Judy is real and the ethereal Madeline a deception, but as Molly Haskell pointed out many years ago, in another sense dividing representations of women into utopian/dystopian extremes is itself a misogynistic strategy designed to distract attention from the possibility of a relationship with realistic "fusion" characters (in *Vertigo* the role of Midge played by Barbara Bel Geddes).[8]

Such interpretations, however, see only figures in the text, manipulated by screen writers, directors, and cinematographers to produce dominant patriarchal beliefs about women. What gets commented on far less often is the way in which an actor such as Kim Novak displays the ability to transform herself, and the way in which the two roles make us aware of the actor as individual artist, as performer. At the moment Stewart realises he has been tricked, we share his perspective but are able, if we retain an awareness of *performance*, to add our own admiration for Novak's ability to conceal her biological and cultural jizz (body, posture, voice) within each role. Absence of non-performing self, rather than allowing complex fantasy reactions, can foreground the presence of previously undetected artistry.

However, it is here that mainstream film parts company with the theatre, in at least two ways. Firstly, film analysis lacks a precise focus on performance as something *produced* by a living extra-textual individual. Stephen Heath, for example, elaborates at length different ways of approaching the image of the actor on the

screen: as agent (presence in narrative), as character (an agent individualised by "qualities"), as person (actor), as image (the "luminous body" on the screen, the star), and "figure" (a totalising term, within which the above concepts circulate and interact).[9] Useful as these categories are, none precisely explains the sense of *difference* between actor and role which is produced by unmistakable evidence within a text of a non-self, crafted performance: evidence which is most visible in doubling and disguise, or in a role played by a star actor known for other very different character types. Film producers and critics are often uncomfortable with the lack of fusion between actor and role which such performativity implies; in the classic Hollywood system, performance should be as anonymous as the cinematic apparatus. Much live theatre however sees demonstrated acting virtuosity as the height of artistry.

Second, there is evidence that some of the markers of jizz, unmistakable individuality, can become lost in the process of transference of live performance to two dimensional screen representation. On the simplest level, in terms of the amount of perceptual information provided, this was a particular problem with attempts at providing narrative continuity in early film. An example is the 1908 Biograph *Ostler Joe*, directed by D.W. Griffith, where genre expectations alone allow us to make sense of the narrative. A wife is seen leaving her lower-class husband (the humble Joe) and enjoying the high life with her wealthy seducer. Shortly afterwards we see Joe hurrying to the death bed of a woman who pantomimically begs his forgiveness. There is nothing to link this figure visually with the wife—clothing, hair, posture, appearance, and mise en scene are all changed, and the poor quality of the print and the camera's distance from the subject deny us a sufficiently clear image of her face–but the stable moral imperatives of domestic melodrama frame our interpretation. This must be the wife figure, abandoned by her lover, radically changed in appearance and clothing and dying in despair, or the episode makes no sense within an integrated narrative. Closer to theatre, a recent controversial example in the late Richard Ellman's biography of Oscar Wilde was the identification (not by Ellman) of a photograph of an actor dressed as Salomé as Wilde himself; an idea which initiated several reinterpretations of that play. However it was later discovered that the photograph was not of Wilde nor of any other cross-dressed male but was of the Hungarian soprano Alice Guszalewicz performing in Strauss's opera.[10] Such errors are possibly widespread; ecological psychology, concerned with information exchanges between individuals, has been examining this phenomenon at some length as a problem of research method where two-dimensional photographs are used for studies of the recognition of faces and the qualities attributed to them.[11]

While in modern film and television movement offers perceptual clues to individual bodies additional to those provided by the still photograph, and image quality is far superior to that of early cinema, the problem remains in any reductive representation of the temporally real. This is not contradictory to the point made

earlier about film's ability to use the recognition of jizz in plotting since filmmakers, working within the mainsteam tradition of clear story lines and knowing that the limitations of their medium invite confusion, work hard to foreground the unique body detail or the distinctive costume. Conversely, withholding jizz for the purposes of narrative retardation (e.g. the shadow in the doorway) is also part of this recognition of the power of the game of recognition. Where confusion occurs is where stable singularity of a body is *assumed*, not asserted, in long shot and subdued lighting, in different clothing and *mise en scene*.

On the live stage, however, there exists the much more common reverse problem of the insistently present and individually different actors' bodies. Again, casting actor A in one season and actor B in another, and doubling and disguise within the performance text, are the experimental situations most likely to expose this gap between the real and the representational. The presence of twin characters is another pertinent example: we either find conventional (usually comic) ways to suspend disbelief, rely on doubling (most perfectly, in Goldoni's *The Venetian Twins*, where the twins never meet and so can be played by the one actor), or play against the convention (Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny De Vito in *Twins*, 1988).

Concern about the lack of "realism" which twin roles and impersonation plotting cause an audience is not a modern problem of post-Stanislavsky/realist staging. In 1619, Ben Jonson told William Drummond of Hawthornden:

> he had ane jntention to have made a play like Plaut' Amphitrio,
> but left it of, for that he could never find two fo like others that he
> could perfuade the fpectators they were one[12]

In that play the God Jupiter impersonates the Theban commander Amphitryo in his wife's bed, while the god's messenger Mercury impersonates Amphitryo's slave. What is easy for Gods and the reading imagination becomes difficult on the stage, and one wonders what Jonson thought of Shakespeare's reworking of this and another Plautine comedy, *Menaechmi*, to produce *The Comedy of Errors*, that early work in which twin masters and twin servants appear in a convoluted plot sequence which until the last scene prevents any of the characters ever seeing identical twins together at the same time.

The Comedy of Errors is also a useful text to use in beginning to consider the ways in which writing about performance texts, and writing about performing in them, has been dispersed into different areas, most of which do not consider this phenomenological condition of staging. Since about 1980, but most significantly in Barbara Freedman's 1991 volume *Staging the Gaze*,[13] a line of critical analysis has proposed that the situation in *The Comedy of Errors*, though realised in the genre of farce, was nightmarish for all the participants: for each twin a seeming loss of

individual identity, for them and everyone else an inexplicable shift in the common understandings on which interpersonal communication is based. To my knowledge this darker theme has never been explored in performance; further, in performances of this play, even when the roles are doubled (with the consequent awkwardness of the theatrical sleight of hand required to realise the denouement), in order to maintain the comedic tone, the audience is always told which twin is which, by subtle (or obvious) costume, make-up, or acted behavioural differences. What, we might ask, would happen if this omniscience were denied an audience, and if the actors played the situations with all the increasing serious desperation such theoretical analysis has proposed? Conversely, if such a performance outcome is unrealisable, what use, if any, might performance studies make of interpretative strategies such as those Freedman and others have promulgated?

Such critics are not concerned with performance problems or solutions, yet it is not only in such interpretations that the individual performing body has been undertheorised. In much writing about stage performance, although the individual actor is recognised, named, foregrounded, what is really being analysed is the culture, age and gender typing of that body, not its uniqueness. But before proceeding to examine such discourse, we need to note a deep division in the approaches taken, and the methods of analysis applied, between performing arts training regimes and textual analysis within liberal arts education.

Such a binary often can be discerned by what we might call the Laban/Lacan test: the alphabetical coincidence that in a book's index places the pioneering taxonomist of human movement, Rudolf Laban, immediately before the psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan, can be a guide to that work's interpretative frames of reference. So a glance at the index to Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) shows it to be conceptualised mainly within French psychoanalytic/feminist terms (Lacan, Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa"),[14] while Elin Diamond's edited volume *Performance and Cultural Politics* (1996) has a similar bias, though a single reference to Kristin Linklater's *Freeing the Natural Voice* shows that at least one of its authors comes from a training background,[15] while Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing* (1986), though by no means a theoretically naive or unsophisticated volume (Levi-Strauss is there as is Lacan, albeit in a single footnote), reverses the emphasis, drawing more extensively on Laban.[16]

To some extent this distinction simply replicates the education/training binary, yet interestingly *both* seem to express an impatience with or an indifference to the *individual* body, albeit from different frames of reference. For the acting or dance teacher the body is a "neutral" object, in need of strict discipline if maximum flexibility and expressive ability are to be achieved. This is ideological acquiescence by silence: it allows the selection into acting and dance academies of bodies which are categorised and selected on untheorised and undeclared principles. It is only once

inside the academy's doors that the body adopts neutral position; here a second, reverse set of unacknowledged assumptions are mobilised; what is trained is the so-called "neutral" body, not the individual subject.

Some performance theorists, working within critical discourse rather than developing training systems, also see the individual performing body as undesirably lacking in subversive potential. Elin Diamond for example argues that "the intensity of the phenomenological spotlight" destroys "the materialist subject in its historical contradiction,"[17] and, in conversation with the playwright Joan Schenkar discusses the frustration for the feminist director when the actor's body "will not re-form, de-form, follow the subversions of [the playwright's] language." [18] Yet such assumptions are based on the actor as anonymous or self-effacing sign system, lacking presence as individual and identified only as "woman" or "man", or at best representing a particular cultural or gendered group. Unlike language terms however, the particular body in performance cannot be erased, the signifier does not float, or does so within corporeal limits that are marked by individuality and temporality as well as by culture and gender.

Some recent writing in the area has begun to notice this difficulty. Susan Melrose argues in "My Body, Your Body, Her-His Body: Is/Does Some-Body (Live) There?", that what occurs in much textual analysis is a reification of the term "the body" in a "fixed, categorised, reduced, generalised" process of "nominalisation"; a dangerous process "as soon as we attempt to account in writing for live performance."[19] She proposes a useful distinction, that rather than thinking of "the body in performance," which she dismisses as "a wholly meaningless term," we should recognise that ". . . any specific (and named and signed) performing body, at any given instant, is simultaneously *'my body'* (to the performer), *'your body'* (to [the] director and other performers) and *'her-his body'* (to the spectator)", what she calls a "perceptual and proprietorial grid."[20] However Melrose is approaching the problem solely from the actor's (the encoder's) point of view, without going on to address the perception by the audience of the body as individually marked and available for decoding as unique.

Writing on live theatre that links the body to a notion of unique individual presence instead of the rather more usual categories of gender/race/class and culture (with the exception of studies of 'stars') is surprisingly hard to find. Again, some writing in film theory offers useful if partial analogies. In a long introductory chapter to the 1995 volume *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," the early film historian Tom Gunning considers ways in which the invention of photography not only altered the mobility and reproduceability of individual identity, but how it immediately became part of the apparatus of panoptic surveillance, in Foucauldean terms.[21] In fact the chapter works very much as an application and extension of the themes of *Discipline and Punish* into the age of the mechanical reproduction of what Walter

Benjamin called "permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being."[22] Gunning draws extensively on a 1985 French study by Christian Phéline, *L'Image accusatrice*, and argues that the "detachable" image, "with a mobility its referent never possessed", was able to circulate freely, making it possible for governments to regain control over travelling bodies.[23] He cites Phéline for the idea that the photographic image—first on passports, now on drivers' licences, credit cards, etc—not merely identifies but produces the individual within mass society; a body which can move through the crowd, across land and sea and national boundaries, with a "traceable accountability" reassuring to the authorities. The reproducible uniqueness of the individual makes possible "the exercise of political power on the individual's body and image."[24]

Gunning goes on to consider the effect this and other technological changes had on storytelling. Obviously enough he concentrates on crime/detective stories: on the shift in both real life and narrative from accusations and the hearing of witnesses to the examination of material evidence. As beliefs faded that there was a criminal "type" identifiable by physiological difference, and as the practice of branding the bodies of convicted criminals fell into disfavour, complicated procedures for identifying individual suspects emerged.[25] In the late 1880s the French police statistician Alphonse Bertillon established consistent physical postures and camera distances and in other ways standardised the photographing of criminals, introduced the now standard "mug" shots (full frontal and profile), and devised examples of similar facial types to train detectives in visual discrimination, while the problem of indexing the semiotic complexity of a photographic image was solved by sorting and filing photographs according to simpler, quantifiable categories. All criminals were measured firstly according to the length of their heads, then the width, then the length of their middle finger and on many other presumed unchanging/unchangeable physical characteristics. The corresponding photographs were sorted accordingly for future reference in case the individual took on an assumed name. Storytelling began to change:

> Bertillon himself recognised the congruence between his method
> and the plot mechanism of nineteenth-century melodrama. "Is it
> not a problem of this sort," he asked, "which forms the basis of
> the everlasting popular melodrama about lost, exchanged, and
> recovered children?"[26]

But, as Gunning points out, when science found new answers to such problems which reduced social anxieties about them, they became less interesting questions to ask.

If Walter Benjamin and Christian Phéline are right, that image reproduction profoundly altered our understanding of what individuals are, and if Gunning is

right in pointing to the way in which this transformed (rather than merely added new solutions to) the obsessions of dominant genres of storytelling, then it seems that the end of the twentieth century has been a key moment in which Western society began to see further radical shifts in both. In these years two major scientific advances directly confronted one another in the popular imagination. On the one hand DNA analysis claimed to have produced absolute certainty in being able to identify an individual body; on the other the cloning of sheep, calves, and perhaps soon humans has thrown radical doubt over that biological individuality. While real-life and fictional stories about stolen identity continue to circulate, particularly in relation to personal privacy and access to computerised information, what in fact is being referred to here is the theft of those portable official markers of identity: no longer just photographs, passports or credit card numbers but passwords, credit ratings, and personality profiles. This is an old genre in new technological guises, and a declining one. In fact what we have seen since the invention of photography is the reverse: a far greater degree of certainty about individual identity, a tendency which has now reached an absolute faith in the accuracy of scientific DNA tests. In a Paris cemetery the remains of Yves Montand are dug up by court order to determine whether or not he fathered a woman claiming to be his daughter; in Washington DC the Tomb of the Unknown Vietnam Soldier is exhumed to see if his identity can in fact be determined; in Brisbane, Australia, a man is convicted of rape and murder because the rapist's semen was preserved and, ten years later, its DNA was found to have a "one chance in 6 billion" exact match with blood taken from the suspect—jizz indeed.[27]

As DNA has emerged as the ultimate marker of individuality, the photograph has declined. Popular magazines now abound in stories of how images can be easily manipulated by anyone with Paint Shop software on their computer, and how dead actors can complete their last movies. No one trusts photography any more. But it is not just DNA technology which provides new reassurance of our uniqueness: computers, we are told, will soon be able to greet us cheerily, having identified our approach by smell, voice, facial characteristics and smile, checking a variety of signals to guarantee certain identification even if we have a cold, a split lip or a different perfume on. Conversely scientific success in cloning animals has led to concern at this perceived threat to individuality; opposition, it is interesting to note, sometimes symbolised by wearing theatrical "neutral" masks, such as those worn by members of the green parties in the European Parliament in January 1998.[28]

In situations of less extreme polarities, the popular media repeatedly play with notions of jizz: for example on the minimum information required for recognising an individual (such as quiz games based on printing photographs of only the eyes of prominent people). Conversely news stories (e.g. about suspects in criminal investigations) test how much they can expose of a human figure while claiming to

conceal the identity of the person represented: most obviously, covering over the eyes in an image by a small black rectangle. Obviously, in legal proceedings, such token concealment does not conceal jizz from precisely that community which has more than superficial or photographic knowledge of the person accused and within which the suspect has a right not to be identified prior to the court case. The same is true of the various techniques used to "make anonymous" individual humans who are imaged on television: faces square-tiled and blurred, darkened rooms, over the shoulder camera shots, mechanically-distorted voices. In spite of this apparent concern in media coverage of court cases for the question of identification of witnesses or the presumption of innocence of the accused, those other great markers of cultural difference and individual jizz: body shape, hair and skin colour, and clothing type, are revealed.

Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly after Andy Warhol, human image cloning is mobilised in the media for games of surface and style, apparently without activating anxiety about identity. A recent trend in clothing advertisements, for example, is to show garments worn by different models as absolutely identical—in colour as well as fabric, design and cut. Models themselves are often shown as cloned doubles: by photographic manipulation or by using people with similar body and hair types and wearing dark glasses. Framed by the self-knowledge that they are mobile clothes horses for the purposes of foregrounding dress, the beautiful people in such photographs combine an exuding self-confidence with complete loss of jizz. This is *The Comedy of Errors* as neither farce nor nightmare, nor even as story. The visual repetition disables coded narrative; by foregrounding the constructed nature of its own mise en scene, the self-sufficiency of each image is assured; storytelling is itself a decontextualised quotation.

However, one of the major differences in dramatic narratives of the twentieth century is that they no longer are able to use misrecognition of a disguised figure as a convention. If such a trope is required, then it must be explained plausibly, or repositioned in appropriate non-realistic genres. This may be less true of European farce traditions—one thinks of Almodóvar's 1991 movie *High Heels*, in which a judge who uses disguise for surveillance and sex is exposed by the fact that he has a mole on his penis (comparisons with evidence in the Bill Clinton/Paula Jones harassment case are inevitable)—but within English-speaking theatre such dramaturgical conventions seem to have declined around the time Oscar Wilde launched them into absurdity in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. If they are used, then they are handled differently.

A much reworked legend which illustrates recent unease with a traditional narrative of mistaken identity is that of Martin Guerre. The original sixteenth-century story has been reinvigorated by two movies (*The Return of Martin Guerre* 1982, and *Sommersby* 1993) and a 1996 West End musical *Martin Guerre* by the authors of *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon*, Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg.

The pre-photographic period setting for the original story makes more plausible the failure by a wife to recognise the husband she hadn't seen for nine years, and in both films the question of identity remains central to the plotting—is the suddenly—returned Martin Guerre an imposter or isn't he, and why and when does his wife begin to suspect something is wrong? What is intriguing, however, about the recent musical of *Martin Guerre*, is that it has fundamentally shifted the entire narrative presumption on which the legend is based: it is not a story about mistaken identity at all, but a tale of religious persecution.

The original story of Martin Guerre is perfect in its resonances and dramatic structure as a tale of successful imposture and morally-complex unmasking, which presumably is a major reason why it achieved legendary status. In 1540 the poor peasant Martin Guerre married the wealthier Bertrande de Rols in the small French village of Artigat, but he was at first impotent and only after eight years of marriage did they produce a child. Shortly afterwards Guerre, a violent and unpleasant man in all accounts, abandoned his wife and son and the considerable land and wealth he had inherited from the de Rols family, and disappeared. His uncle Pierre Guerre took control of the property. Nine years later, Martin Guerre seemingly returned and was greeted with joy by his sisters, by others in the village with whom he exchanged stories about things they had done together years ago and, after some hesitation, was accepted back by Bertrande, who was astonished by his new-found gentleness and affection. However three years later, while still showing great tenderness towards her mate, she revealed that he was an imposter, Arnaud du Thil, a man from another village sixty kilometres away. The matter went to trial in 1560 in Toulouse. At first the judges accepted the claim of the defendant that this was a squabble over the valuable de Rols land initiated by the uncle Pierre Guerre, and they were about to order that the wife go back to her "husband" when the real Martin Guerre suddenly appeared, having been a soldier of fortune in Spain, where the now exposed Arnaud du Thil had also served, and where he may have learnt enough of Martin's life to begin his successful impersonation. Arnaud was burnt so that his memory would be "effaced forever," and Bertrande and her real husband went home to Artigat. Rather than obliterating the story, Arnaud's immolation was the last recorded real-life episode in what has become a four hundred year old legend, initiated by one of the judges in the case who wrote a best selling book about it.[29]

The recent shift in the interpretation of this story began with the historian Natalie Zemon Davis, who acted as a consultant on the 1982 *Return of Martin Guerre* film, and the next year published under the same title her detailed historical study of the incident. For Zemon Davis this was not a story of mistaken identity, at least as far as the wife Bertrande was concerned, but a case of complicity in a deception from the start, or at least from the time she and Arnaud became intimate.[30] One of the more titillating aspects of the story always has been the impostor's apparent ability to deceive Martin Guerre's wife even in the sexual act, but a line of

feminist rethinking of the legend has begun to see Bertrande not as a simple peasant woman and innocent dupe but as someone who set out, within the constraints of the customs and traditions of her time, to achieve greater control over her situation: in particular companionship, mutual affection, a more sexually satisfactory relationship, and revived influence if not control over the land which had been her dowry. Zemon Davis suggests that this rethinking of the relationship of husband and wife—Arnaud and Bertrande are supposed to have taken joy "in conversing day and night"—was consistent with the teachings of the new Protestant Huguenot reformers who had been active in the area for more than twenty years. The Wars of Religion broke out only two years after the burning of Arnaud, and in 1568 in Artigat, considered by some a Protestant stronghold, iconoclasts smashed the altar in the church and destroyed its idols.[31]

The Boublil and Schönberg musical, the programme for which features a brief essay by Zemon Davis, takes this new interpretation of the legend of Bertrande Guerre to its extreme. It moves the events forward to the time of the Wars of Religion, when clandestine meetings and assumed and hidden identities were motivated by religion and fear of persecution rather than material avarice and sexual desire. Believing Martin to be dead, Bertrande persuades Arnaud to impersonate her husband rather than be remarried to a Catholic, and many of the other villagers are given a religious motive for acquiescing in the deception. No attempt was made to cast, costume or make up the actors playing Martin and Arnaud to make them in any way similar (indeed, in the London staging in 1997 one actor was a much larger man than the other).

While this may have produced a new and more plausible narrative, or at least one more in keeping with current understandings of female agency and desire, it destroyed the basis of the legend. Its revisions are significant however in that they offer a limit case for the general tendency in the modern and postmodern periods to discard stories of uncertainty about the identity of individual bodies. The triumph of science in gradually pinning down the individual—photograph, fingerprint, DNA—has made plots of long-term mistaken identity part of antiquity; only the continued popularity of stories of identical twins has survived unchallenged to link us to the new uncertainties which may in the future constitute stories of cloning, presumably about to enter popular narrative with renewed impact. One wonders what effect this will have on the understandings we will draw from doubling and disguised actors in those renaissance dramas which constitute major examples of the plotting of earlier times; perhaps *The Comedy of Errors* needs to wait for a new generation of cloned actors to appear, to be staged truly as a nightmare.

Notes

1. Jean Piaget, *The Construction of Reality in the Child*, trans. Margaret Cook (New York: Basic, 1954) 3.

2. Keir Elam, " 'In What Chapter of His Bosom?': Reading Shakespeare's Bodies," *Alternative Shakespeares* 2, ed. Terence Hawkes, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1996) 140-42.

3. David Mann, *The Elizabethan Player: Contemporary Stage Representation* (London: Routledge, 1991) 26.

4. 27.

5. 27.

6. Peter Thomson, "'The True Physiognomy of a Man': Richard Tarlton and His Legend," *Parergon*, ns, 14.2 (1997): 29-50.

7. Where two actors share a role, as in the original staging of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. In order for the play to be performed by the regulation three actors, the role of Theseus has to be played in different scenes by at least two of them.

8. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies* (London: New English Library, 1973) 351-52.

9. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 178-82.

10. Merlin Holland, "Wilde as Salomé," *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 July 1994: 14.

11. Thomas R. Alley, "Social and Applied Aspects of Face Perception: An Introduction," *Social and Applied Aspects of Perceiving Faces* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1988) 3-4.

12. C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), I. 144.

13. Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1991).

14. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (St Leonard's: Allen & Unwin, 1994) 248.

15. Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 288.

16. Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 297.

17. Elin Diamond, "The Violence of 'We': Politicising Identification, "*Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 394-95.

18. Elin Diamond, " 'Crossing the Corpus Callosum': An Interview with Joan Schenkar," *TDR* 35.2 (1991): 115.

19. Susan Melrose, "My Body, Your Body, Her-His Body: Is/Does Some-Body (Live) There," *New Theatre Quarterly* 54.2 (1998): 119.

20. Melrose 120.

21. Tom Gunning, "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 15-45.

22. qtd. Gunning 21.

23. 17.

24. Phéline, trans. by and cited in Gunning 23, 27.

25. 23.

26. 32.

27. Allison White and Sara Bradford, "Murderer Convicted on DNA Evidence," *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 9 May 1998: 3.

28. John Kerin and Carolyn Collins, "Double Take," *Weekend Australian* 24-25 January 1998: 26.

29. Natalie Zemon Davis, untitled essay, *Martin Guerre* programme (London, 1996).

30. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse, *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800): Essays in Honour of Natalie Zemon Davis* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993) 6-7.

31. Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) 44-48.