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Dancing with the Virtual Dervish Virtual Bodies

Diane Gromala and Yacov Sharir

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THE GROTESQUE AND THE TECHNO-GROTESQUE

Bernard SCHÜTZE

The hybridization of the body and the incorporation of new technologies into the body itself has given rise to situations that can be qualified as grotesque. There are two sides in the body/technology problematic, the immaterial, light and virtual side, with as its image the angel, and the material, heavy and mechanical side, with as its image the monster. The comparison between the art of the grotesque and the body/technology relationship, unlike the immaterial approach with its appeal to the disembodied virtual, is based on the materiality of the body in its prosthetic couplings with technology. The proposition here is to examine the monstrous and grotesque side of the prosthetic alliance between the body and technology, with all the impure mixtures and heteroclitic combinations that it may give rise to.

The grotesque is made manifest in the combination of heteroclitic elements that allow fundamentally disparate things to co-exist within the same image. In the art of the grotesque it is almost always the body which suffers all sorts of alterations, distortions and exaggerations, with the objective of going against the established rules and to reveal the dark side of humanity. The grotesque is amply present in the fantastic universe of Hieronymous BOSCH, with its strange hybrid creatures, the bizarre vegetable portraits of ARCIMBOLDO and in GOYA's depiction of human barbarity, to name but a few. In these works of the grotesque the body becomes the theatre of a wide gamut of distortions, grafts and mixtures resulting in a monstrous image. Besides the figure of the monster there are three characteristic aspects of the grotesque : *ars combinatoria*, the *membra disjecta* and the cave, *la grotta*, which forms the root of the word grotesque. The *ars combinatoria*, practically a synonym of the grotesque, consists of the combination of heteroclitic images in which elements of vegetable, mineral and animal kingdoms are randomly assembled and mixed. The *membra disjecta* refer to the body as an assembly of detached and detachable parts in a variety of possible, and usually unnatural, reconfigurations. The cave is the place where these deformations are most at home, it is a closed, dark and often artificial space with a strong symbolic charge.

The techno-grotesque resides in the relationship between the body and technology, in their combinations which blur any defining boundaries between the organic and the technological, the human and the machine. The term grotesque is not used in pejorative sense here, but rather as an aesthetic concept which best describes these multiple, excessive and anomalous characteristics that are the basis of monstrosity. The monster, by its very nature, represents the radically other, it is a being outside of an origin which cannot be categorized within an order of succession. With the techno-grotesque it is no longer the biological anomaly which creates the monstrous, but the introduction of the biological into the technological. It is the image of this new sphinx where the human and the machine merge, this undefined zone where prosthetic devices make the emergence of cyborgs possible. There where the body slips into the machine and is digitalized, amplified, endowed with new functions and another perception, and there where the machine is grafted onto the organic, to the pull of flesh, the flow of blood and all the interior sensations of a living body. The techno-grotesque appears in this transitional space where one form slips into another, opening new spaces of potential transformation, but it is also where the radical separation between the two categories, the breach between technos and bios is made glaringly evident. It is in the interstices of this encounter, where the sensors touch the skin, the implants the organs, the interface the gaze that the monstrous is born.

These techno-bodies, cyborgs and mutants are close to the grotesque representation of the body of the *ars combinatoria*, this hybrid body,

impure and multiple which mixes and recombines elements from incompatible categories. The monster forces one to confront that which cannot be categorized and delimited in an hierarchical order. The monstrous grotesque collapses the distinction between species, it transgresses the laws of rationality and the aesthetics of the beautiful with its ideal proportions.

If today we can speak of a technological grotesque it is because the body has become the locus of a vast gamut of techno-organic recombinations, some of which are straight from science fiction and the popular imagination, while others are from the fields of science (technological, medical, military, etc.) The grotesque body which is coupled, hooked up and permanently, or temporarily, plugged into the technological is indicative of the arrival of a new body which no longer fits into the category of what we know as human. Another aspect of the techno-grotesque is related to this growing desire to hook up with the machine, no matter what, without out any examination of the social, political or aesthetic factors that are necessarily expressed through technologies. This headlong jump into technological reconfigurations of the body in part constitutes that which we call the techno-grotesque. The techno-grotesque may just be an early symptom in an increasing fusion between the biological and the technological, a symptom characterized by the fact that this fusion is always interrupted by a profound incompatibility which stops the flow and calls attention to the rupture. In order for this fusion to proceed flawlessly the body must attain a higher degree of plasticity in the virtual world and the technological envelope must be able to provide a veritable sight for sensorial expression and experience.

This future alliance between the technological and the human, this coming of the post-human, is being increasingly expressed in the popular imagination. The science fiction vocabulary, now having become current, where the body is jacked in, wired, etc. is itself indicative of a grotesque view of the body in its relation to technologies. In the sense that body is becoming but another part to be integrated into the technological, something to be adjusted, re-engineered and made to function within a larger whole. As in the *membra disjecta* of the grotesque iconography, the body becomes a machine which can be recombined in multiple ways, but this time, the *membra disjecta* are made out of metal and plastics as well of flesh and blood.

In the postmodern age where the multiple, heteroclitic mixes and diversities have become the rule, one can situate the techno-grotesque at the junction where the assemblies and juxtapositions of the body and technologies create monstrosities. The body then as a site for creating outrageous hybrids, a body wired to all sorts of machines with a relay of information between body and machine, whether it be in the increasingly sophisticated bio-medical application, in space exploration or in artistic experimentations. What is common to all these meeting grounds of body and technology is the implementation of prosthetic devices which link and bind the two domains. In those spaces where the body and machine are sewn together and plugged in, the spaces where the prosthetic devices bridge the organic and the inorganic is where the techno-grotesque is most apparent.

Prosthesis can be divided into two major groups : those which are directly implanted into or onto the body, the neuronc prosthesis from the bio-medical fields, and those that provide increased perceptual capacities, interface prosthetics, developed in the military, aeronautic and communicational fields. The neuronc prosthesis include among others, auditory, visual and neuromuscular devices as well as bionic limb implants. These prosthesis add or amplify the body's functions. The interface prosthetics include voice recognition, video conferences, virtual reality and telepresence to name but a few. They extend and amplify our perception through communication media.

In the first category it is the integrity of the organic body that is altered, either through im-

plants to the inside or additions on the outside of the body ; it is the order of the incorporation of the technological in the organic, the heavy material body, the techno-organic body. The second category is characterized by everything that allows one to increase the perceptual field beyond the immediate space of the body, it is the prosthetic envelope. In the first case something is added to the body, and in the second it is the body itself that is added to a larger entity. These two categories can of course be mixed or be combined in a single prosthesis, the gear of virtual reality is probably the closest approximation of a total prosthesis.

The cyborg is a being that integrates these two prosthetic categories, combining the amplification of physical functions with an extension of perceptual and cognitive functions through its connection into broader communicational entities, such as computer networks, which then function as environmental prosthesis. In this process the intelligent machine is acquiring somatic functions, while the body acquires computational functions in its integration into machine languages and codes.

The body of the techno-grotesque is this wired, amplified and reconstructed body, which finds itself projected into the virtual worlds via the environmental prosthesis. This body has simultaneously become a site of multiple transformations (increased motor capacities, perceptual and cognitive functions, etc.) and an abandoned, empty space (the body that is left behind while one is plugged into a virtual environment). The techno-grotesque body is this impure construction, not quite organic anymore, and not yet altogether technological. It is not entirely embodied in the virtual, nor entirely virtual in the disembodied. In its awkward array of wires and plugs, as of yet uncertain how to move within the virtual environments this techno-body is in the image of the grotesque. ●

Translated from French by Bernard SCHÜTZE

DANCING WITH THE VIRTUAL DERVISH : VIRTUAL BODIES

Diane GROMALA et Yacov SHARIR

Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies is a collaborative project in virtual reality (VR) by visual artist and designer Diane GROMALA and choreographer Yacov SHARIR. It was funded with a major grant from the Cultural Initiatives Program of the Department of Communications Canada through a two-year residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada.

Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies resulted in several dance performances where the dancer and audience members performed and interacted with a virtual environment in real-time. Large-scale video projections of what each interactor experienced created another level of VR in the performance space, and further encouraged participation. The opportunities and limitations of the technology were embraced and explored, resulting in new creative strategies and directions for further technological development. The following notes are derived from the journals of the artists.

Bodies

GROMALA : My first technologically-mediated virtual experience was with my own body when, awake during surgery, I watched my own viscera being altered and manipulated on a large screen in a research hospital's surgical - theatre. » Since then, I've insisted on my place in both the subject and object position of this medicinal discourse ; a voyeur of the instrumentality of medical imaging, I collect and personally finance, with

the help of my insurance companies, diverse types of « objective » and « scientific » visualizations of my body. What fascinates me are the crossroads of scientific and artistic uses of these technologies and images, as well as the creative, experiential, and performative potentials. The images of bone and viscera, fluid and sound, movement and depth, for example, are at once considered to be « objective » representations of my body, yet, at the same time, they bear a mesmerizing spectral and sensuous quality. Here my body, through their tools, is enhanced as a site through which social, political, economic, and technological forces meet, often with very real and tangible effect. Here I become a cyborg, both technically, and as the result of the way technology alters my material being.

Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies, a work in virtual environments, was my effort to reappropriate, reinhabit, reclaim, and reconstitute some of these fragmentary representations of my body. In turn, this reinscription and reconfiguration was offered as a virtual environment or stage for both dancer/choreographer Yacov Sharir, my collaborator, and audience interactors.

SHARIR : What are the worlds that open to us when we consider virtual environments ? What are the artistic, intellectual, visceral, and emotional issues which can be addressed using the opportunities of this technology ?

Virtual technologies allow us to manipulate, extend, and distort images of the body. They offer a way to extend and color work in different ways, some of which are not possible in the physical realm and or by traditional means. They offer a way to augment and extend possibilities creatively, experientially, spatially, interactively.

When I experience the entrance into a computerized simulated world, I am able to reference or « see » my digitized body within the simulation. Simultaneously, I sense my existence in the physical world. As I target my vision and move my hand forward, I am able to navigate through the simulation, birdlike. As my perception accommodates itself to a 3-D illusion, I experience a sense of being in another, additional skin — I feel « immersed. »

At the same time, I have this sense of heightened anxiety, caused by the doubling of my own body image. The sensation of disembodiment cannot be disconnected from the sensation of embodiment ; that is, I feel the physicality, the groundedness of gravity simultaneously with the sense of immersion and altered abilities, such as the ability to « fly » through the simulation.

GROMALA : My first intention dealt with exploring experiential issues as they relate to notions of the body, especially the gendered body, not only as a culturally constructed notion and text, but also as lived experience and material form. The aspect of materiality was especially important since discussions of the experiences attendant to virtual environments, such as disembodiment, tend to underscore an underlying subscription to the well-worn Cartesian mind/body split. As Sandy STONE, Elaine SCARRY and N. Katherine HAYLES remind us, there is a real body attached to so-called experiences of disembodiment.

Literally and figuratively a body of enormous scale, in the resultant virtual environment exists an incomplete torso. This body is programmed to remain in continuous motion, slowly undulating in sensuous movements toward decay and reformation. These are texture-mapped or wrapped with typography related to the dervish, as well as with x-rays and abbreviated MRI data of my body. These organs can be « entered » to reveal other-worldly chambers. The virtual body thus becomes an immersive, nonlinear book, a text to be read, an architecture to be inhabited.

Within the body stands another primary component, another body, videographs of Yacov, a dancer, transcribed onto a plane. Thus, Yacov exists both as representations within the virtual environment, and as performer in the physical performance space, connected to the virtual environment through the umbilicus of the head-mounted

display (HMD). During his performance, he navigates through and dances within the virtual body, blinded to the physical realm by the head-mounted display, experiencing two worlds simultaneously, disembodied. The virtual body he interacts with is made available to members of the audience as large video projections, in real-time. At other times during the performance, audience members directly interact with the immersive virtual body through the HMD.

SHARIR : *Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies* explores concepts and experiences of the body on many levels. Visually, sonically, and behaviourally, it was created to provoke reminiscences of the body, of skin, of materiality, growth, and decay. In the virtual — and cyberspaces, this metaphorical representation of an inner body houses all activities in the virtual space, engendering emotional and visceral content and response, which directly and indirectly correlate to, and are triggered by, the issue of and interaction with each veil.

As a dancer in two worlds — the simulation and the physical world — I experience my movements in a new way. But in addition, my dance, my actions, initiate cause-and-effect relationships in all worlds, affecting movement-by-movement what happens in the simulation and in the physical realm. Because I can also dance with videographs of myself in the simulation, I experience a kind of mirror effect. All of these aspects conjoin to create new opportunities for experiencing the artwork, and new ways to consider creating artworks.

Experimental aspects

GROMALA : The larger design problems which emerged during this project were experiential and behavioural — one does not create a linear, repeatable piece. Rather, one designs « worlds » of possibilities, a constellation of if-then scenarios based on the users' potential actions and interactions with the simulation and intelligent agents within it. No longer linear, each user will affect the piece in a particular way, probably unrepeatable. We asked : How does this affect the creative process ? How would the nature of creating and experiencing the book be altered ? What would it be like to inhabit a book ? What would it be like to fly within one's own body, a body in constant motion, a body which contains nested levels of other-worldly places which unfold, fractal-like ? What new role might a user play in this interactive, immersive piece ? Can the user's kinesthetic experience be considered dance ?

In some circles, virtual environments can be considered to be multimedia, taken to one extreme : the text, sound, video, animation, and other components become an immersive experience, one that allows users to interact with the environment to an unprecedented degree. In addition to a nonlinear experience comprised of multiple media which can engage visual, auditory, and cognitive responses, an immersive environment may engage kinesthetic and haptic senses. For example, in later versions of *Virtual Bodies*, certain areas responded to motion detection, or touch. When users approached and « touched » a certain wall of text, for example, they might « fly » into an inner, otherworldly chamber. Depending on how they approached the text, however, they may also find that it began to swarm in a kind of typographic storm, three-dimensionally giving one the physical sensation of being caught in a vortex, signalling entry into quite a different space. Could the transcendent state of a dervish be at all expressed or alluded to ? Was the experience of so-called disembodiment in any way related to other transcendent states ?

SHARIR : Could a dancer exceed the boundaries of what is defined as dance in this way : by programming or choreographing the environment and puppets in certain ways that force the VR users to move their bodies in certain ways ? Could anyone then be defined as a dancer ? Would it be possible to design a highly artificially-intelligent puppet which would be indistinguishable from a human dancer ?

Dance

SHARIR : *Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies* is among the first VR projects to synthesize immersive and interactive digitized new dance in a performance environment that includes a head-mounted display, data glove, and interactive video projections, which enable the audience/participants to interact with the environments and in essence, become co-creators.

Although the dance is often seen as distinct and direct, the coupling of dance and computer technology provides for rich exploration in the development of digitized dance in a virtual environment. As the dancer/choreographer both in the physical/performance space as well as in the simulated virtual/cyberspace, I have experienced physically and spiritually intertwined senses of embodiment and disembodiment, senses that profoundly affect my experience of dance. Additionally, the limitations of performance in restrictive VR gear affected and became creative forces in my choreography, as did the very nature of the technology itself.

In dance, chance operation, as it is generally understood, originates in chance decisions, which ultimately are « frozen » into a linear sequence or performance which can be repeated. However, in an interactive simulation, this notion can be taken further, as the chance is dependent upon the dancers' interaction with the computer simulation itself — resulting in not one but a number of possible actions and consequences, with significant degrees of unpredictability.

The VR technology tends to blur disciplinary boundaries by changing the nature of what and how artwork is created, realized, and performed. Because one must create a « world » open to user interactions, the piece necessitates a non-linear, open-ended, almost fragmented composition. In addition, we collaborated for two years with a team of three computer scientists and a highly computer-literate art assistant.

The nature and the beast

GROMALA : Like GUTENBERG's invention of the printing press, virtual technologies enable us to extend our will and ability to act upon the world through textual means. What is different about the more recent technologies, however, is the reach and scope of these tools, their instrumentality — their ability to allow us to « see » both inward into our own bodies and outward to the universe ; to diffuse and consolidate power and distribute it globally, near the speed of light ; its ability to construct a context that enables us to alter our relationship with ourselves and others to an unprecedented degree. Or is it ?

Creating *Dancing with the Virtual Dervish : Virtual Bodies* pointed toward the strange character of this emerging technology. The grant itself was a significant investment by the Canadian government, which seemed to view the artistic projects in virtual environments as Research and Development, an otherwise quite expensive endeavour in the corporate realm. The grant, of necessity, went well beyond a lifetime of (US) National Endowment of the Arts grants, as equipment and personnel costs went far beyond the abilities of most art institutions to acquire or maintain. While many of the artists faced the grim reality of the limitations of this emerging medium, most seemed happy to have an opportunity to have access to it at all. The supposed liberatory possibilities of the medium were superseded by actual performances and demos, many of which consisted of individuals' fifteen-minute explorations, aided and steered by technical staff, in the head-mounted displays. My subsequent projects necessitate writing for grants from the Department of Defence, among other military sources eager to reconfigure technology for consumer purposes. How do I consider this — am I merely a tool of post-industrial military complex ? Better bombs through better design ? Disarmament through virtual art ?

SHARIR and GROMALA : The project and process of creating a piece in VR led us to far more questions, and to a great deal of artistic possibilities. In such interactive environments, for instance, which are contingent upon the interaction of others, the notions of creator and audience blur. Is the very nature of art and dance altered by this potential ? Just where does the performance occur — within VR itself, in distributed sites, in cyberspace ? Are some participants relegated to being passive audience members and others performers ? How does one determine who gets represented in the VR environment ? How can this technology be accessible to larger audiences capable of interacting directly with the simulation ? When does the multiple cause-and-effects of user participation become mere chaos ?

How are we to understand the artwork ? Are these virtual environments, these simulations to be understood in terms of the Platonic idea of mimesis, or a problematized instance of BAUDRILLARD's simulacra, a place where Deleuzian fragmented and schizophrenic identities can further shatter themselves into ever smaller pieces ? Is a collective identity of interactors from distributed sites possible in such a modality-rich environment ?

Diane Gromala directs the New Media Research Lab at the University of Washington in Seattle, where she teaches interdisciplinary courses related to emergent technologies. Yacov Sharir is the artistic director of the Sharir Dance Company, and is on the Dance faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. •

THE PERFORMANCE OF AN ENCOUNTER : THE BODY, VIDEO

Christine ROSS

The installation in question is made up of only a single element : a giant screen installed in the back of a dark room. Video images of floating blocks of light are projected on a black background, progressively replaced by electronic snow which scans the screen from bottom to top and then from top to bottom. The audio track emits a continuous pulsation resembling the constant but rapid beating of a human heart. The crucial element of the installation is the placement and dimension of the screen : it is installed close to the ground, and conceived within human dimensions. The screen solicits the body of the viewer in its entirety. In front of this electronic ROTHKO the viewer's eyes will attempt to link the pixels and draw a landscape or a human figure in order to shield oneself from the void that one is confronted with. It is at this point that s/he will realize how much one's vision oscillates between hallucination and the phantasmal projection. What's more, the screen rapidly becomes a skin in a process of formation, a border which consolidates the limit of the spectator's body who moves in front of it, but which also destabilizes this border because the screen is all vibration, pulsation and electronic scanning.

These *Interférences mnémoniques* (*Mnemonic interferences*), created by Ariane THÉZÉ in 1992, are an image production machine, images which cancel each other out, like a fleeting memory. They plunge us into the universe of what we now call the new images, defining them as frames which one doesn't know exactly how to view and which ceaselessly disturb the gaze (through the insertion of hallucinations and phantasmal imagery) and the body (whose limits are becoming increasingly hybridized with the electronic). As such they are like questions thrown out at the spectator : What is it to see ? What is the body ? To whom does the beating heart belong ?

An installation such as this makes it evident to what degree the notion of the representation of the body in video is inappropriate. It would, indeed, be more accurate to speak of a performance of the body instead, since the image no longer serves the function of reproducing or referring to a body that exists prior to its representation. The videographic performance of the body is the movement made by the body as biological unit, it is that which does not cease to call into question the body as an organism defined by a skin, or skin-self, whose normative function (based on which one distinguishes the so-called sick body from the so-called healthy body) is to ensure a coherence, a distinction and distance between the self and the other.

The destabilization of the body in video may take on different forms, but mostly it takes on the form of two simultaneous operations : on the one hand, a putting into question of the body's limits, and on the other, an always failed attempt to reconstruct its borders. It is as though it were no longer possible to fully and permanently ensure the impenetrability of the body, its impermeability, its distinctiveness, its difference. The destabilization is, therefore, and this is my hypothesis, that which triggers an uncertainty as to its limit, it is an image which raises these questions : Where does the body end and where does technology begin ? How does one distinguish identity from alterity ? These are questions which *Mnemonic Interferences*, and video in general, try to answer and which inevitably end in a failure of sorts, but a failure which I would nonetheless qualify as productive.

This question of the limit also brings with it the question of the visible. The destabilization is not just developed on the level of content, it does not only make visible a different body, it must also put into play a difference which modifies the status of the visible. In video the visible, as the field of that which is seen, which can be seen, that which can be perceived, or is made perceivable to the senses, is that which is constituted precisely where the body fails to maintain itself as a unit. In other words, the video destabilization of the body does not only consist of a « different » body (those bodies which the norm excludes from subjectivity — women, gays to name but two groups), but also of a « body » called into question by the vacillation of the visible, that is a body, which although it appears as actualized in an image, fails to be stabilized by this actualization. The key question, within the context of this inquiry into the destabilization of the body in video, is therefore the following : what is it to represent a different body ? Or to put yet another way, and here I paraphrase and reformulate the Italian philosopher Giorgio AGAMBEN : How can one confer upon the visible not a « morality » (according to which the image would be thought in the light of what must exist as potentiality) but an « ethics » ? It is in the end run a matter of thinking the image in the light of subjective experience of potentiality, through a laying bare of the inactuality which is proper to being¹.

A second video, *La desserte blanche* (1980) (*The white sideboard*) by Thierry KUNTZEL, is crucial in this regard, because here we are dealing with a representation of the body which is being formed directly out of the tension of the visible and the invisible, in a process of materialization and dematerialization. Here, the images' workings cause the represented body to disappear all the while maintaining it on a white screen, as a trace or an imperceptible mnemonic expansion of the body. These workings of the image do not confer a visibility as much as a potentiality, which is rendered by the body's failure to stabilize the visible. If this failure is what allows for the body's future actualizations, it is because it corresponds to the body's incapacity to ensure its limit : the « skin » does not cease to be confused with the grain of the image and the electronic scanning. Through this electronicization of the body, the visible does not only bring the body into view, it also shows dissolution, which is, moreover, never irreversible.

So what do we mean by « different body » ? One must first specify that the body of *La desserte* is not just any body, since it is the body of woman (in an iconography borrowed from MATISSE). This means that the dematerialization of the image is operating on a body that is already dematerialized by Western philosophy. A priori, therefore, it seems that this video only consolidates the metaphysical dematerialization of « woman », since it uses it as the support for his dematerialization of the image. In her essay *Veiling Over Desire : Close-ups of the Woman* (1989), Mary Anne DOANE² argues that the images that perturb the readability of the feminine body in this way (the veiled Marlene DIETRICH, framed in close-up by Joseph von STERNBERG, for example), do in fact nothing more than reinstate woman as non-subjectivity³. This is certainly true. *La desserte*, however, goes further. On the contrary the feminine body is also that which endlessly seeks to affirm itself in the image, because the disappearance of the body, and here I draw on an idea formulated by Laurence LOUPPE, is always « reversible »⁴. A body dissolves, but only to better reaffirm itself, to spread itself, change, gain in momentum ; a bodily virtuality is established precisely through the materialization-dematerialization process. Such is the body of *La desserte* : not a body of woman reproduced in its difference (re-excluding that which is already excluded) but a body that affects the visible of representation.

Two feminist publications (especially if they are read in parallel) are, in my view, crucial for an examination of the possibilities of this re-signification of the body : *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (1993) by Peggy PHELAN⁵ and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) by Judith BUTLER. The keyword to be remembered here is « performance ».

For Peggy PHELAN, if the image is a performance it is because it is always more than it mediates ; it is, moreover, never an absolute reproduction of the real, and that is why it must account for the lack of equivalence between the real and its representation. The « body » must be therefore represented as this element which can never be fully resolved. In other words, and this is the ethics of the visible which PHELAN develops in *Unmarked*, the representation of the body must integrate the incompleteness, loss, disappearance, and also the invisible. Here we are at the confines of *Mnemonic Interferences* and *La desserte*. Nonetheless KUNTZEL's *La desserte* still permits us to push PHELAN's proposition a little bit further. In elaborating a reversible disappearance of the body, this monoframe integrates a sense of loss which would become problematic if it corresponded to the pure and simple loss of a feminine body.

In fact, would not such an interpretation end up affirming the status quo of loss ? Would it not assure that this lost something (for example the feminine body) must remain irremediably lost ? If we pay close attention to what is written in PHELAN's *Unmarked* this lost something is in fact the name of « woman », the excluded category of the Symbolic, which haunts (like a ghost) the confines of the representational visible. The lost is a Real whose absence one must accept, because, as she says, that which is lost cannot and must not be seen or named, it is that which threatens the subject with absorption or annihilation⁶.

Thus, even though this ethics of integration of disappearance, proper to performance, is crucial for a critique of the dominant images of the body, it ends up reproducing the historically constituted abjection of the subject, the one which works through the social order, where access to the symbolic is made through an identification with the heterosexual law that forecloses a category of beings from the field of subjectivity based on gender, sexual orientation and race. That is why the dialectic of difference-via-abjection/difference-through-connection put forward by Judith BUTLER in *Bodies that Matter*⁷ is useful (despite the insufficient critique of the visible) to the extent that there one finds a definition of performance which avoids the pure and simple reinstallation of the impossibility of a certain category of beings to be actualized.