

# Reflections

## Editors' Note:

*In this section each author in turn makes general observations and expresses insights gained in relation to the common themes among the chapters in this volume. The discussion addresses how presence is constituted in performance as well as what absence evokes in performance. A number of concepts and questions were suggested to generate interaction and dialogue between the authors of this volume on the following themes: which visual aspects of the body become available for meaning making in performance; what is the nature of absence in performance; how is the visual prioritised in establishing presence in performance; and finally, how important and necessary is visibility in establishing presence. The chapter concludes with a brief epilogue.*

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## 1. Kate Burnett:

Questions presented by the editors have prompted further consideration of points raised in other contributors' chapters. In the light of these I return to my own subject matter – that is, a consideration of drawing for, in, and from performance.

Essentially, presence is constituted in performance in the observation and attention of 'audience', in passage of time (it is a time based discipline), in the performers' evidencing intention while responding in the moment, in the marks made on the pages of the audiences' minds, and as captured in time based media. All aspects of the body may become available for the making of meaning, but it is in the interplay of intention and reception that multiple, layered meanings may be made and filtered through the variables of culture, context, time, space and light. The *absence* of a key component of performance – the figure in space – sets off an instinctive search for clues as to scale, culture, context, human connection. As Pantouvaki discusses, the garment or costume – without a body, in exhibition or sometimes in performance – achieves significance in the very anticipation it arouses as to how it might be animated, displayed, or completed by being worn.

We measure and note through our experience and understanding of human scale and behaviour, so that on their own, related objects and garments achieve both a degree of abstraction and possible significance. They may become signifiers, standing in for a character, registering their absence. In her examination of Loie Fuller's attempts to disappear her own body in the enveloping manipulation of fabric, Malka Yellin discusses the paradox of the body's apparent absence, but evident (concealed) presence.

In responding in particular to the priority of the visual in establishing *presence* in performance, I have drawing in mind – so to speak. Returning to my earlier comments, the crux of performance is that it is witnessed either at the time and / or as recorded. This may take the form of an auditory, kinaesthetic or visual

experience. The ‘witnessing’ fixes the moment, succession of moments, or some part of them in the mind, just as paper becomes witness to thought, emotion, and the imperative that is expressed through the pen, pencil, brush, etc. What may be particular to the visual *is* that it takes only an instant to register (though longer to look) and that the artwork regarded is likely – in most situations – to exist for further looking (in the case of drawings, certainly). In the case of performance this is variable, but in almost all cases the visual is likely to be experienced for longer than completely time-based forms such as words and music. Cohen takes the visual ‘evidence’ of her performative making process to the extreme of creating a legacy; growing new plants from, or in the ‘in-between’ shape that visually renders the absent (space between) into present – and future substance – life.

My own question relating to the other chapters is this: why do theatre makers, scenographers, designers, continue to draw? Although drawing is a part of my colleagues’ process, they do not mention it. So, yes they draw, but when is it significant, when is it the equivalent of Jocelyn Herbert’s shopping list or memo,<sup>1</sup> (just) a part of everyday life, and does this matter?

Writing as an artist-designer, drawing is often a ‘short-hand’ addressed to myself, to colleagues, and even to students. Why not write? I think the image is often quicker, yet holds more possibilities than several pages of writing could carry. If I did write them, they might become firm or fixed, while the drawing can be re-read, re-interpreted, both present and yet ambiguous, able to be re-discovered or re-worked as my own thinking develops. As a two dimensional form, the drawing is not yet committed to three dimensions, nor to materiality and the decision making of cut shapes, seams, ‘finish’, and treatments. The ideas contained therefore still exist in creative limbo, allowing further encounters with text, music, theme, collaborators, etc. The vital tension then between presence and absence is in their inter-dependence and simultaneity in both drawing (for performance) and in performance.

Another question that probably needs addressing further is, At what point does a drawing become a character, or when is (a) character ‘present’ in a drawing? This may just as easily be asked of a performer on stage. There are so many assumptions made about what we think we are seeing, or drawing, related to context, narrative, culture and many other variables. Lynne Truss, writing in the *Guardian Review* of the 28/07/2012, discusses Virginia Woolf’s essay about actress Ellen Terry and how Woolf describes her difficulty in ‘defining the marvellous machine of her genius.’<sup>2</sup> She goes on to say that ‘The problem of capturing a manner of theatrical performance appears intractable: It is the fate of actors to leave only picture postcards behind them. Every night, when the curtain goes down, the beautiful coloured canvas is rubbed out.’<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Jessica Bugg:**

In this volume performance theory and practice have been interrogated from an interdisciplinary perspective, enabling a reassessment of both the terms and methodologies of performance. It is argued by several writers that scenography and the visual aspects of performance have the potential to be reconsidered in the hierarchy of production and ultimately to become an active agent in the making of performance, as opposed to being applied to it. Interestingly, all of the writers place as much focus on production as they do on reception and this has enabled a joined up discussion of the significance of the visual in the making and viewing of performance. This elevates the visual and scenographic aspects of performance to a serious level of debate as a metaphor for the body, as central to the creation of performance as an instigator of performance, or as performance in its own right.

Importantly, the conversations developed between chapters in this volume contribute to a broader understanding of the presence and significance of the living and experiencing body in the creation and making of performance. Not only is performing and viewing of performance discussed but this bodily focus is extended to include the presence of the designer or artist in the making of performance. This suggests new approaches to making or discussing performance where the embodied understanding of the artist/designer, the wearer and the viewer enables a shared collaborative approach to the production and reception of performance.

Clearly presence and absence are integral to performance and are the means through which it is read and experienced. Presence is not easily explained in performance, particularly when embodied processes come into play, as what is present may not actually be physically present and may be remembered, experienced, or understood through the intertextuality of the different elements and participants. It could be argued that it is the presence of the body and the performative dynamic between bodies that constitutes performance itself.

However as Burnett suggests, gaps and absences are an enabler of invention and imagination. It is this relationship between what is real or present and that which is absent or suggested that leaves space for shared interpretation and collaborative generation and reading of performance through the body.

Absences or gaps leave not only space for reading and re-embodiment of experiences but also for performance makers to move beyond representation, away from dictated narratives, towards a more experiential and bodily focused understanding and development of performance. The potential of absences in performance arguably opens up the reading and development of performance for all participants; in other words, the presence of the responding body fills the gaps and absences.

The idea of abstracted and fragmented visual messages that leave space for interpretation and meaning making are recurrent in many of the chapters. Sharifi's Bioscenography illustrates how character and the body can be read where there is no actual visual or physical representation of a character. It follows that sensations

and experiences can be shared, developed, and communicated through a dialogue in the moment of performance between participants. It is in this relationship and through a process of assemblage and subsequent reading where visual elements, fragmented narratives, memories and emotions are reconstructed and explored between the scenography, the performers, and in the reception and perception of the viewer.

Many of the authors here place importance on the experiential elements of performance that are not necessarily seen but that are understood and experienced through scenography and the lived body in performance. The specific potential of costume to contribute to a more experiential engagement with performance is discussed by several writers and points towards an extended focus on the agency of costume in performance. It is argued that due to its intimate relationship to the body costume can be both visually and physically experienced through embodied knowledge.

Clothing retains its embodied history and this affords costume designers and performance makers an extended opportunity to communicate between the different participants in performance through materiality, form, visuality and embodied memory and understanding of dress.

The opportunity to fully exploit this live and lived experience is often negated in the production hierarchy of performance. Several of the writers indicate that visual aspects of performance are often restricted by the hierarchical structure in performance, and all demonstrate that scenography and visual aspects can and must be far more than a visual metaphor or applied elements. Sharifi discusses two systems in the production of theatre, one that will be recognized by many in the industry that is driven by hierarchy where the scenographic department are subordinate and the other that he argues for, where there is a more collaborative approach and where power and influence are equally portioned. From my own perspective, costume design and scenography more broadly need to be released from the representational and applied approach in Sharifi's first example.

The idea that visual elements are applied to the performance or choreography seems at odds with the process of performance making and with the design process itself, which is an active process. This, coupled with an understanding that the body is a creative and performative site as highlighted by Cohen, demonstrates that the visual alone does not make the body present; rather, the body informs the visual, the performance itself, and the reading of the total work.

The discussion that has emerged between these chapters demonstrates the power of the visual aspects in generating new approaches and performance experiences for all participants in the making and experience of performance.

Clearly the visual alone cannot create presence or meaning in performance, as it is between the visual aspects and the body of the production team, performer, and viewer that performance is made and understood.

### **3. Haya Cohen:**

In this volume, chapters discussing the body in performance draw attention to new understandings of the relations between performance and the presence of the human body. For me, one of the main issues that comes out of the discussions is that the term 'presence', when discussing the body-in-performance, should be considered as mutable and multidimensional. I suggest that rather than attempting to define 'presence' through the function of 'seeing' – as visually seen, or not – the presence of the human body should be perceived as a part of a complex network. Namely, in performance the human body is always there through multiple levels of presence. Presence is evidenced in the material traces or in the threads of thought that are woven into the involved research, design, and/or production. Whether it is in the involvement of the body in the design stages, the production stages and/or the performance itself, the bodies of the researcher, designer, choreographer, and/or scenographer are involved. Evermore, performances are designed and created not to deliver a mere narrative but also to elaborate on the audiences' experience. Experience is always through the body of all participants.

Presence of the body in performance is constituted in various ways and to different degrees. In Pantouvaki's curatorial work, for example, bodies were brought to life through her design. In her research and curatorial and scenographic work, Pantouvaki negotiated bodies – the performers' bodies, dressed in the costumes, and the bodies of people who were invited to visit the exhibition. As a result, various degrees of presence, whether the suggested bodies of the costume-wearers or those of the exhibition visitors, were performed. In Fuller's work, discussed by Malka Yellin, the body of the dancer was concealed completely underneath the long fabric drapes – its shape was not seen but the body was present through creating the movement – it became movement.

As evidenced in some of the projects, movement is used to allow the body to be present even when visual presence is annihilated. Movement enables the body to become a site available for meaning making in performance. There are meeting points in all of the chapters, where the connections are between the moving body, in dance, theatre, or the body that makes, drawing attention to the space created in-between the experience of researching, designing, and performing and the experience of the audience. This is a space that elaborates on a body that perceives through difference, whether it is sensing the texture of the cloth that rubs against the skin or the constricted space that is left when confined by binding fibres. It is always the change in environment that provokes a sensory event. Through sensation, a person becomes the other, always in concert through the body, which gives and receives. At the same time, fluidity or a low degree of resistance to open-ended connections is necessary for movement not only in the relationship with one's environment but also within the physical milieu in order to maintain life. Therefore, movement is possible through an osmotic state of exchange in which the motion of sensation between all elements in performance crosses between

regions through the body as a semi-permeable membrane. Artists, particularly reflective artists, select movement and material processes that accentuate the body's way of feeling and connecting. In *Textiled Becomings* I chose to break away from the solidity of a sculpture and instead I decided to weave pieces that only suggest a body in order to allow the body to be present through movement. Both fabric's materiality and permeability were conducive to the awareness of the process of becoming other by becoming reflective.

Permeability is identified in some of the chapters as an important quality in contemporary performance. Bioscenography, suggested by Sharifi, achieves permeability when the human actors are not functioning as the main drivers of the performance but become a part of the hybrid characters. The hybrid characters also include a virtual entity, which creates multiplicity – an option to become additional characters. Both Sharifi and Malka Yellin see virtual performance as pushing the limits of the body and moving away from a traditional representational model of theatre to one of performance of sensation. Performance of sensation can be achieved when the boundaries between theatrical entities are obscured and considered as either rhizomatic mutations or virtual images. In performance of sensation it is the deterritorialised body that opens up the options for the artist and the audience. It is where the body without organs enables the communication that goes beyond visibility to become permeable.

Deterritorialisation, however, implies a constant movement from one territory to another, always in a process of temporary settling and moving away to another place, reterritorialising, connecting and reconnecting in a non-centralised way. Thus, subjectivity is always in the process of becoming, perceiving of life as a network of singularities when the body becomes a fluid concept. The constant process of becoming drove my project, *Textiled Becomings*, by both following processes evolving multiple subjectivities – such as becoming an art practitioner or becoming a nomadic researcher – and the way in which they all are linked to processes of materialization and performance.

In performance, 'visuality' as an end point to the 'non-visible' and vice versa is defied when presence is accepted as a fluid concept. The benefit of considering viscosity in the widest perspective is the dialogue provoked between the creators and the audience. Dialogue in performance taps into the cognitive space of conceptual blending, which assumes sharing knowledge that is accumulated into a cognitive space and brought into conversation during a performance. In *Textiled Becomings*, when I focused on the movements of making, for example, I was also able to connect to social histories through the body's relationship to others and otherness. At this point the structure of temporality changes or transforms, making fluid the link between past, present, and future. These connections are also considered in Pantouvaki's curatorial exhibition, in Burnett's drawings of the scenery, or in Bugg's specifically designed dancing clothes in collaboration with the dancer. These projects also include a sense of vacancy, a void, a negative

shape. This absence allows movement and remnants of that movement that function as threads that are left to be connected.

Open threads are left for communication through acknowledgement of both the notions of performance and performativity in all projects discussed. The notions of performativity, in which the body as well as the work itself are performed, tap into the importance of the inclusion of the process rather than delivering a mere product. By including both performance and the performativity, the notion of becoming both object and subject through sensation follows the Deleuzian idea that sensation is always working through the bodies of both the maker and the viewer. Any system of thinking that identifies primary properties and relationships – which give rise to a whole embedded in other wholes and a whole emergent from the constituent parts – relies upon a particular mode of engaging with the world. This mode is active and enactive – which is to say that it is always in relation to the on-going and concurrent systems of selection, perception, and action that shape the shared environment and social context. Very similarly to Bugg's project, in *Textiled Becomings* the creative products, research, and exegetical writing take movement and perception as their central and driving issues. The body not only is present through interaction but also is suggested through embodied understanding and material engagement.

To summarise, in performance the body is present as a flux, whether the body is implied or fully seen. Like Sharifi, I see the relationship of bodies in performance as rhizomatic – woven of connections between bodies of all the participants; the researcher, designer, participants, virtual bodies and the bodies of the audiences. What considering a wider perspective of the term 'presence' of the body in performance allows is a multifaceted experience for all participants. Works discussed in this volume embrace movement as a way to allow the body to be present even when visual presence is annihilated. Movement of a visually seen body or of the suggested body is also conditioned by permeability. Permeability is what enables awareness of the process of becoming other by becoming reflective by all participating bodies. Moreover, considering presence as a part of absence and vice versa opens up the bigger picture of performativity where the involvement of bodies in the thinking, designing, and feeling are included as a part of the performance. I share with Bugg the idea that the emotional aspect of bodies is a fundamental component within the design and the performance. A fluid approach to 'presence' facilitates the awareness of the complex experience of partakers. Examples could be seen in the work of Pantouvaki, who brings to life past dance performance through costumes, in Fuller's work, discussed by Malka-Yellin, that is appropriated repeatedly by contemporaries, in Bugg's use of fashion to communicate emotions, in Barnett's use of hand drawings to tie the strings between collaborators, and in Sharifi's use of Bioscenography to create experience.

Therefore, the body is always present and its presence is constituted to some degree.

#### **4. Liora Malka Yellin:**

I take this opportunity for a ‘postscript view’ to offer some initial thoughts on the issues of performance methods, particularly in the context of interdisciplinary studies. All the chapters in this volume, with the exception of mine, have been written by practitioners and, further, are based on their own practical experiences. While presenting and analysing their personal projects my fellow writers thus move between several positions, particularly between that of the artist and that of the researcher. The usual separation between these two standpoints is, however, challenged, as these chapters exemplify not only practice-led research but also research-based practice. Haya Cohen refers to this directly, and while elaborating on the possible connection between the researcher and the artist, she suggests the concept of ‘the nomadic’ as that strategy which enables us ‘to construct connections across previously separated boundaries’. Thus, by becoming nomadic researchers, practitioners ‘are able to interlace and correlate embodied experiences of their engagement with the history of ideas’. Practitioners can thereby perform what Cohen calls ‘living inquiry’, and apply research methods as embodied and performative processes while moving across the spaces of the different roles: ‘The body of the nomadic researcher within the living inquiry moves between the roles of researcher, writer and becoming the artwork itself’.

This move across roles and boundaries seems to be the connecting thread between the practitioners-researchers-writers in this volume. For despite the methodological and analytical differences between their chapters, all relate, explicitly or implicitly, to the junction between research-led practice and practice-based research. Informed by theoretical exploration and ‘by qualitative research into memory of clothing,’ Jessica Bugg, for example, has designed and produced garments using the results of her research as ‘emotional, visual, and physical triggers in design. These garments have then been tested in performance and recorded in collaboration with a dancer and a filmmaker.’ Sharifi’s experimental projects are not only informed by theoretical research, but also literally designed as an applied exploration of concepts such as ‘body without organ’ and ‘rhizome structure’ in performance. Sofia Pantouvaki conducted a two-year archival, visual and performance ‘research in practice when undertaking the project to curate and design the exhibition’, and while designing the exhibition she sought to ‘investigate costume as generating performance by its sole existence, independently from the performer’.

The experimental nature of these projects becomes apparent and, further, they demonstrate a notion of interdisciplinary methods that seek to explore the interrelations between theory and practice, and are thus particularly pertinent to performance research as proposed by Patrice Pavis: ‘Instead of an interdisciplinarity in the strict sense (applying different kinds of knowledge to the theatre), we propose to establish connections between different theoretical viewpoints and stage practices. Thus, we should attempt to make unexpected or



even impossible connections to put in contact theoretical and practical worlds which are usually taken to be mutually exclusive.’<sup>4</sup> Not only are the theoretical and practical worlds not mutually exclusive in these chapters but, rather, they are interconnected and placed within an encounter in which the exploration of their potential interaction is enabled.

Furthermore, as the experiential body is the focal point of these chapters, all relate in one way or another to personal lived experiences, including, at least by implication, the artist-researcher’s embodied experience, as Cohen notes: ‘The body of the designer, the maker and/or the viewers, either seen or not in the performance, whether it is the main character or not, is always involved in the artwork’. Jessica Bugg takes this a step further, maintaining that the processes of design are, at least in part, the outcome of personal embodied practices: ‘Designing and making clothing for the body is in itself a performative action, as designers we communicate our own experience, knowledge and associations with clothing as well as sculpting meanings and messages through materials, colours, details and forms’.

The researcher-artist-writer’s transit across roles and boundaries is thus embedded in, and generated by, one and the same body. This dynamic transient process accentuates the issue of presence and absence, for while this multi-layered, implied or actual, body moves in-between the different spaces of researching, creating or writing, it also moves along the presence/absence spectrum. This spectrum is thus opened up and extended to include the design, preparation and pre-production processes, all of which are eventually inscribed in one way or another in the performance. The fluidity of the separating boundaries between presence and absence is thus highlighted, and what becomes clear, and noticeably demonstrated in various ways throughout this volume, is the ever-changing borders in a constant flux of interactivity and even interchangeability between presence and absence. For the moment that presence is manifested is also the moment that absence surfaces, and vice versa; and the body in performance is the ultimate example of such interfaces between presence and absence. For, in its very existence as an evasive entity, oscillating between physicality/materiality and intangibility/conceptuality, and between the factual and the fictional (or the literal and the figurative), the body is already loaded with a presence/absence complexity. Through performance strategies it can thus be made present/absent in a range of possible ways in order to make its diverse ontological dimensions visible and observable. The visual, however, has no exclusivity or priority in constituting presence in performance, for the experiential body appears, performs and communicates in its entire capacity to sense (i.e., to see, hear, smell, touch . . . ) and to be sensed. In other words, the full spectrum of the senses is at work in creating experiences of presence, and participates in forming and communicating potential interfaces between presence and absence.

## 5. Sofia Pantouvaki:

This short section provides the opportunity to share how participating in this dialogic volume has provoked further consideration of the notions of presence and absence of the body in performance beyond the case studies and themes presented in this book. Through reflecting in a written form on the absent body in my own chapter as well as while reading my colleagues' contributions to the volume, I have continually revisited, revised and enriched the way I perceive the presence and/or absence of a performing body. In my artistic practice in performance design, I am usually engaged in creating a concrete visual and three-dimensional physical character of bodies present in performance. It is true that *making* bodies *present* is a central concern particularly relevant to a costume designer's perspective. While making this volume, expressing and exchanging ideas on the performing body beyond materiality has been thrilling and enlightening, and has led to an exploration of the represented body against the suggested body, and an investigation of the absent body against the present.

During this process, I have constantly reflected on the multiple levels of absence and how absence leaves space for interpretation. I have reconsidered the performing body outside traditional practices, focusing on the body's potential in communicating ideas and expressing a meaning through its absence and through what this absence implies. This discussion has extended to reflective considerations in a number of occasions addressing bodies in different performative contexts in various sites beyond conventional performance. I would like to share two specific examples from two such encounters I experienced as a spectator while the current volume was in progress. Both examples address absent yet powerfully performing bodies.

The first example comes from a recent visit to the new Acropolis Museum in Athens, Greece. In the on-going debate between Greece and the United Kingdom about the relocation of Parthenon marble sculptures from the British Museum in London – where they are currently displayed – to the new Acropolis Museum in Athens – where they would be displayed next to the original site for which they were created – the notions of presence/absence are addressed at multiple levels. The background of this debate is as follows: These classical Greek marble sculptures and relief architectural decorations were removed from the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, and other buildings of the Acropolis of Athens by Lord Elgin from 1801 to 1812 under a controversial permission from the Ottoman authorities, as Greece was under Ottoman occupation at that time. They were purchased by the British government in 1816 and held at the British Museum, where they were put on public display. The presence of the sculptures in the British Museum automatically results in an absence from the Acropolis Museum, where most of the remaining invaluable Greek artefacts from the monuments of the Acropolis are preserved. This is emphasized in the contemporary debate.<sup>5</sup> The concept of the artefacts *performing* together, united in their original historical and cultural

environment within which they can be contextualised, is a key argument in favour of the return of the marble sculptures to Greece. ‘Conceived and designed as integral parts’ of the same ancient temple, ‘it is evident that only if the unity of the whole is again acquired, by reuniting all its dismembered parts, can the Parthenon be re-established as a supreme symbol of universal spirit,’ claims archaeologist Nicoletta Divari-Valakou.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore suggested that the meaning making process be enriched by the physical presence of the additional parts of the body of the artwork.

On the other hand, the opposing view supports that the display of these Parthenon marbles in the British museum places the sculptures in a European artistic context, alongside the work of art that both influenced and was influenced by Greek sculpture, thus allowing parallels to be drawn with the art of other cultures.<sup>7</sup> Both perspectives emphasise the importance of the sculptures *being present* for the contemporary audience. The debate is far more complex than expressed here, and engages historical, scientific, ethical, legal, political and aesthetic aspects, which touch sensible issues related to museum strategies and to the protection of national cultural heritage, as well as to scientific practices on setting a frame for contextualisation.

Using this example, I would like to focus more specifically on the performance of the Caryatids in the current Acropolis Museum display. The Caryatids of the Athenian Acropolis, six statues of maidens (*Korai*), were created to support the roof at the south porch of the Erechtheion temple on the Acropolis hill. They are sculpted female figures that take the place of a column or a pillar. They all look similar, yet their faces, stance, the coiffures of their hair, and the drapes of their attire are carved in detail individually. One of them was removed by Lord Elgin in 1801 and is today displayed in the British Museum. For protection purposes, the originals have all been removed today from the actual building on the Acropolis hill and are replaced on site by replicas. The ensemble of the remaining five original statues is presented at the Acropolis Museum in a formation: they are placed on a U-shaped base that represents their original positions at the porch.<sup>8</sup> The bodies of the Caryatids and the space in between them hence formulate the ‘absent whole’ in the visitors’ minds: the architecture of the monument and the original spatial setting of the Caryatids’ bodies becomes present inside the museum space through the perception of the geometry of their new spatial display. The standing bodies – and the extension of the bodies shaping architectural capitals on the top – form the basic structure of the porch. The notional continuation of the capitals on a horizontal level outlines the absent roof of the porch. Through this geometrical setting and the relationship between present and absent elements, the bodies shape the space. The invisible construction becomes present. The absent Caryatid – the one that is preserved in the British Museum – is also part of this display: she is given space on the pedestal, which remains empty. This empty space acquires multiple meanings: not only does it delineate that the Caryatid is being ‘offered a

place' amongst her fellow maidens calling for the ultimate return of the statue to her native Greece within the context of the debate. It also underlines a notional presence from a performative perspective, born from this new spatial narrative context: The viewer is invited to fill in a visual absence in the display of the Caryatids; therefore the single statue's body's absence connotes a clear presence on a conceptual level.

I experienced an analogous encounter when visiting the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne where *The Commoners* installation by Indonesian artist Jompet Kuswidananto was displayed.<sup>9</sup> The exhibit was described as an ensemble of "'ghosted' or absent figures" representing the 'role and place of the common worker – the roadway or construction worker and, equally, the farmer or fisherman – within contemporary Indonesian society.'<sup>10</sup> The artist refers to them as 'ghost figures'.<sup>11</sup> The Commoners are nine present/absent bodies – that is, nine bodies suggested only by the presence of elements that usually dress a body: boots, T-shirts shaped as head-covers, and props such as tools, megaphones, drums and flags. The installation had a true performative character in that music was played at regular times alongside the drums playing in rhythmical repetition. The setting and position of the installation enhanced its dramatic character as the high and open space of the NGV foyer naturally amplified and echoed the produced sounds.

In this case as well, the bodies were absent yet very present: the elements visually present constituted a fragmented body; by looking at its parts, it was possible to reconstruct the whole. In addition, this human body 'representation' through absence of realistic depiction embodied a powerful socio-political commentary: without a body, the attention was drawn on the tools and props of the fragmented figures, which performed similarly to a street demonstration – perhaps one the real bodies would seemingly not be allowed to perform. This is certainly an interpretation based on cultural symbols and social construction. Through their absence, these bodies seemed as persistently claiming a right to be present. My subjective meaning-making of this installation was generated by the actual powerful performance of the absent bodies outlined or notionally contained between the presented fragments, and animated by the soundscape.

The performativity of the absent bodies in the aforementioned examples lies in the tempo-spatial context and how it is read by the viewer. In my position as spectator, I read spatial and temporal relevance and continuation; therefore I constructed a historical, social and political narrative and thus extracted meaning(s). In both cases, absent bodies were perceived as present. Using Derrida's term, I perceived the body(-ies) as an 'absent present'.<sup>12</sup> These thoughts contribute to the continuous discourse on whether the dichotomy presence/absence is to be questioned or just to be understood as an inseparable context within which different possibilities for signification are disclosed.

## 6. Parjad Sharifi:

There is a common ground in most of the chapters regarding presence in performance. Presence is constituted by the absence of human resemblance as the core of 'tree' structure representation. We can categorize all approaches towards constitution of presence in two major approaches. The first category is the complete absence of the flesh in constitution of presence and the other is the absence of subject.

In Aitor Throup and Jez Touzer's *Funeral of New Orleans*, cited in the chapter by Jessica Bugg, there is a shift from the human subject to the subjectification of costumes. The presence of body as subject is presented through its absence and subjectification of anthropomorphic costumes. Presence of performative costumes in this rhizomatic mode is the presence of absent flesh. Sofia Pantouvaki's costumes are expressive of memories and characters in the absence of the body. These expressions are presented by parameters of space relations to costume gestures while the human subject is absent.

Meaning making is the process of signification between signified and signifier. In the context of this discussion for evaluating the construction of meaning within the scope of visual aspects of the body, we need to explore the appearance of signifiers in relation to the signified. In Fuller's *Fire Dance*, as described by Malka Yellin, the appearance of the body is deconstructed in between the absence of the signified and presence of signifier; the signifier is in flux between the real flesh and the virtual, therefore the body is absent and present at the same time. In fact light as the visual element plays a significant role in the interruption and catalyzing flux between the absence and presence of the body and meaning making process.

Knowing about absence is impossible without referring to presence and the ontology of being. Based on Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, appearances are not the truth; they are representations experienced through mediation, therefore presence is mediated. Aristotle on the other hand rejects transcendence of pure being and affirms that presence is only limited to representation. Unlike these schools of thought, Derrida and Deleuze have poststructuralist approaches towards the qualities of presence. Derrida with deconstruction believes in indefinite deferrals in signification, which presents signifiers in the absence of signification. There is nothing outside of text for Derrida; therefore there are always aspects of absence and lack of signification, which constitute presence. For Deleuze, there are different kinds of representations such as resemblance, copy, and simulacrum. Copy is an image with resemblance and simulacrum is an image without resemblance. In simulacrum, resemblance is absent; therefore it constitutes the presence of absence.

Relating Derrida and Deleuze's discourse of absence and presence to performance, absence of resemblance is traceable in most of the projects in this discussion. The *Funeral of New Orleans* project that Bugg references is comparable to Deleuze's concept of simulacrum where resemblance of identity is

absent, as well as are Kate Burnett's scenographic drawings that establish expression and narrative with the absence of human movement and voice.

Comparing the visual fields in most of the projects discussed in previous chapters, with other elements of sensory, there is definitely more concentration on visual aspects than on other elements. For establishing presence through visual signification there is Derrida's deconstructive approach, which constructs the presence of absence. Haya Cohen's hybrid art of becoming is a Deleuzian simulacrum, which establishes the presence of the hybrid body without any resemblance. Again in Cohen's project, resemblance is absent from the signification of the visual. Bugg, Pantouvaki, Burnett, and Cohen deconstruct the authority of image presence by presenting absence in various ways.

## 7. Epilogue, Adele Anderson:

The multiple approaches reflected above suggest three emergent themes in the presence and absence of the body. The most immediate is entailed in *experiences of embodiment* as multi-sensory, time-based, and the collective result of actions among diverse roles, while the entire array of experience remains fundamental to performance, whether it occurs with human bodies onstage on a single occasion or the presence of something quite different – as often illustrated in this volume. The Body without Organs, emptying out, negative space, and the void frequently operate as openings to a new construction of meaning (and sometimes, as an absent present) through engaging the imaginal, both for the artists and for audiences receiving their work.

A second theme is the authors' practice and discussion of *processes of abstraction* from the body. Performance is at once embodied and abstracted: Drawing costumed figures-in-scene, collaboratively performing the emotional garment, embodying and making relations by growing fibre plants to be woven upon and between the artist's body in relation with space and others, traversing states and relations of virtuality through the performing body's interaction with fabric and coloured light, performing costumes in relation to past-performing bodies through the way in which they create performative space with the audience, or finally, performing the void through Bioscenographic character Ideolage – all are ways of abstracting from the body.

Bernard Gortais says that the function of art is not to represent reality but rather to bring to the spectator's awareness something new *about* reality not previously in awareness, thereby making possible new relations to reality.<sup>13</sup> His observation has particular salience for the work described here: As marks and lines of drawing or collage trace contour, deconstruct, or leave visually or physically 'incomplete' various spaces for the mind's eye to fill, connect, and understand within an aesthetic context, or by other sensory cues, the spaces and voids of performance invite co-presence in space and contact with materials. Artists and audiences engage in in this distribution of the sensible: What can be presented and what

cannot? How do we discern that which is suggested or left open to the imaginal? What is the distance between the performing subject, object, and spectator? What will be filled by each?

As also mentioned by multiple authors, the openness of the works discussed reveals a third, sociological theme concerned with *challenging existing roles of performance practice* in and across institutions such as the theatre, the university, and other exhibition spaces. The authors question presumptions about who determines the shape and experience of performance. The prioritisation of roles or of privileged positions, whether of author, performer, director, or an originating text, are creatively countered or subverted. The authors mobilise alternate perspectives, collaborative relationships, and multiple sources of determination for the eventual nature, shape, and signification generated by performance.

To admit multiple sources of determination is to take risks: Performance elements may be contrapuntal and harmonious or alternately, they may be contradictory, perhaps piling up discontinuous but related images in the manner of collage. It is such risk and openness that allows performance to continue to live: All of the work described in this volume is predictive of a vital future for the field of performance practice as a socially engaged and relational cultural endeavour.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Farthing, 'Humble Accomplices: The Sketchbooks of Jocelyn Herbert', in *The Sketchbooks of Jocelyn Herbert*, ed. Stephen Farthing (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2011), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Lynne Truss, 'Rereading Four Lectures on Shakespeare by Ellen Terry', *The Guardian*, 28 July 2012, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Patrice Pavis, 'Theatre Studies and Interdisciplinarity', *Theatre Research International* 26.2 (2001): 156.

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive academic discussion on this issue, see: Constantine Sandis, 'Two Tales of One City: Cultural Understanding and the Parthenon Sculptures,' in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, ed. Robert R. Janes (2008): 5-21.

<sup>6</sup> Nicoletta Divari-Valakou, 'Revisiting the Parthenon: National Heritage in a Global Age', in *UTIMUT, Past Heritage: Future Partnerships: Discussions on Repatriation in the 21st Century*, eds. Mille Gabriel & Jens Dahl, Document No. 122 (Copenhagen: IWGIA-International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2008), 117, viewed 28 July 2013, [http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia\\_files\\_publications\\_files/0028\\_Utimut\\_heritage.pdf](http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_publications_files/0028_Utimut_heritage.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Greece: *The British Museum*, 'Parthenon, Room 18', viewed 30 August 2013, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/galleries/ancient\\_greece\\_and\\_rome/room\\_18\\_greece\\_parthenon\\_scu.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/galleries/ancient_greece_and_rome/room_18_greece_parthenon_scu.aspx).

<sup>8</sup> For the Caryatids display at the new Acropolis Museum see the museum website, Acropolis Museum, The Erechtheion, available at, accessed 30 August 2013.

<http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/erechtheion/0>;

<http://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/content/erechtheion/1>.

<sup>9</sup> *RALLY: Contemporary Indonesian Art: Jompet Kuswidananto & Eko Nugroho* was on display from 18 October 2012 to 1 April 2013 at NGV International.

<sup>10</sup> This description comes from the label placed next to the installation at the foyer of National Gallery Victoria, visited on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See the interview of Kuswidananto in Duncan Graham, 'Jompet Kuswidananto: Asking if We are Free', *Jakarta Post* (online), 12 August 2013, viewed 28 August 2013,

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/08/12/jompet-kuswidananto-asking-if-we-are-free.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty (Spivak, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976). See also Lisa Blackman, *The Body: Key Concepts* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2008), 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Gortais, 'Abstraction and Art', *Philosophical Transactions Royal Society London*, B 358 (2003): 1242.

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*Greece: The British Museum*, 'Parthenon, Room 18'. Viewed 30 August 2013. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/galleries/ancient\\_greece\\_and\\_rome/room\\_18\\_greece\\_parthenon\\_scu.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/galleries/ancient_greece_and_rome/room_18_greece_parthenon_scu.aspx).

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