Implicit Bodies Through Explicit Action

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Abstract
This paper contends that the body is performed. A body can “act” as a site of emergence, a boundary project, and an incipience. While Rebecca Schneider’s “explicit body” in feminist performance art performatively unfolds (Latin: explicare) and explicates, the implicit body concordantly enfolds (Latin: implicare) and implies. Inter-action is both constitutive of, and always already involved in, the flesh. Like an animated Möbius strip, the body feeds back between affection and reflection. The last section of this paper attempts to think through interactive digital art as a proscenium for, and framer of, the implicit body.

Keywords: art, digital, embodiment, interactive, relationality

I. Introduction

Brian Massumi, in his Parables for the Virtual, implores us to put “movement, sensation, and qualities of experience” back into our understandings of embodiment, without “contradicting the very real insights of poststructuralist cultural theory” (2002: 4). “Our entire vocabulary,” he says, “has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences” (ibid.: 27). He doesn’t wish to undo the important work of cultural studies’ linguistic model for understanding race, gender, class or other forms of identification, but is looking for “a semiotics willing to engage with continuity” (ibid). Following Gilles Deleuze, who followed Bergson, Massumi points out, “When a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation...In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own...potential to vary” (ibid.: 4-5). In contradistinction to ‘known’ structures, Massumi avers that “the body is in a state of invention” (ibid.: 103). It is “an accumulation of relative perspectives and the passages between them...retaining and combining past movements,” continuously “infolded” with “coding and codification” (ibid.: 57, 98, 83).

Massumi’s book is, overall, a philosopher’s plea; he asks us to re-member how the experience of the body is constructed not only through Saussure’s linguistics or Lacan’s Symbolic Order, for example, but also through its passage. “It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, whereby each immediately summons the other?” (ibid.: 1). Massumi
becks us towards an embodiment that includes a moving, thinking, feeling body, which is more than its inscriptions and significations, and not assumed to be understood. Like the artists examined in this paper, Massumi plays with “affirmative methods,” “productivism” and “inventiveness” in his writing, to disrupt, and add insight to, the dominant discourse surrounding embodiment in the humanities (ibid.: 12-13). As Katherine Hayles asserts, “One contemporary belief likely to stupefy future generations is the postmodern orthodoxy that the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive construction” (Hayles 1999: 192). Massumi instead attempts to work with the body as a continuously unfolding and infolding (and material) event.

This paper is less a focus on new vocabularies for movement (Massumi’s continuity), and more so a thinking-through of this infolding of the movement. More specifically, it asks: How might the body’s continuity, and its potential disruption, be attendant, provoked and contextualized in contemporary art?

Following this introduction, Section II goes on to define the body-image, the body-schema, and their relationship to each other as concepts that parallel Massumi’s structure/continuity distinction, and which help to set up the critical art framework I propose. Section III, “the body as per-formed,” goes on to use contemporary theory from performance and cultural studies to elucidate on performance as a metaphor for both embodiment and interactivity. Section IV, “from the Explicit to the Implicit,” ties the last two sections together, illustrating how performance art has historically been used to provoke questions about the body-image, and suggesting digital art be used to interrogate the body-schema. Section V, “encountering performance,” proposes ‘the implicit body as performance,’ deployed in order to think art as embodied relation. And finally, Section VI, “Working with Work,” uses this framework to unpack and critique a few samples of exemplary interactive art in the field.

II. The body-image, the body-schema, and topology

One useful distinction for understanding Massumi’s discontinuous versus continuous dichotomy in embodiment is that of phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s body-image and body-schema. Mark Hansen defines them:

Whereas the body image characterizes and is generated from a primarily visual [or observational] apprehension of the body as an external object, the body schema emerges from what, with autopoietic theory, [Merleau-Ponty calls] the operational perspective of the embodied organism. (Hansen 2006: 38-39, my emphasis)

Embodiment—“the process through which bodies are produced” (ibid.: 79)—and exteriority, what he calls “technicity”—are transductions: “neither one is the cause of the other” (ibid.: 79). Here, active and processual embodiment can be understood as the body-schema, whereas its exterior apprehension is the co-original body-image. Along with Shaun Gallagher and Jonathon Cole, who assert that the body-schema is “a
system of motor and postural functions that operate below the level of self-referential intentionality” (Gallagher et al. 1995), Hansen says that it is “a prepersonal sensory being-with” (Hansen 2006: 21). In other words, the body-schema includes nonconscious, sensorimotor perceptions and actions. Further, it is “a flexible, plastic, systemic form of distributed agency encompassing what takes place within the boundaries of the body proper (the skin) as well as the entirety of the spatiality of embodied motility” (ibid.: 38). Hansen suggests that it is the entire “scope of body environment coupling” (ibid.: 20).

Massumi, Hayles, Hansen, Gallagher and Cole, along with others such as Jose Gil, Gilles Deleuze and Allain Millon, have an understanding of embodiment as “relational,” but “not … relative” (Massumi 2002, 280), topological, but not plottable, emergent and incipient. Like an animated Möbius strip, the body is: ‘in and around.’

A Möbius strip is a topological figure that can be produced by twisting a strip of paper and looping and attaching its ends. It is thus a one-sided surface with only one boundary component which is available in three dimensions. This means that it lives in both 2- and 3-D space at the same time; it is greater than the sum of its parts.

Massumi defines topology as “the science of self-varying deformation” (2002: 134), and asserts that whether Euclidian (as is the Möbius strip) or not (the case for most), topological figures “generate a surplus-effect… due to a transitional excess of movement” (2002, 185). He explains that a topological figure such as the Möbius strip is a “dynamic form [that] is neither accurate nor fully visualizable. It is operatively vague… a qualitative space of variation referenced only to its own movement…” (ibid.: 183). He asserts that topology “is not empirical, if empirical investigation is meant
as progressing from description to prediction. It has no predictive value. Incapable of directly referencing anything other than its own variations, it is more analogical than descriptive” (ibid.: 135).

If topology is analogical, as Massumi avers, then like the analog, it is itself:

process… a continuous, variable impulse or momentum that can cross from one qualitatively different medium into another. Like electricity into sound waves. Or heat into pain. Or light waves into vision. Or vision into imagination. Or noise in the ear into music in the heart. Or outside coming in. (ibid.: 135)

Both Massumi and cultural theorist Elizabeth Grosz (Grosz, 1994) conceptualize “the body” as one such analogical and topological figure, “a membrane open to the outside.... in between dimensions” (Fernandez 2007: 83). Here, the body-image and -schema inter-act and as Hayles avers, “outside becomes inside becomes inside becomes outside” (Hayles 1999: 195-196). Massumi’s “topological figure in the flesh” (2002: 183), like Grosz’s and Hayles’ understandings of embodiment, is described precisely through its “expandable and pliable nature” (Richardson 2003: 231). We are always of the relation, asked to engage with “new ways of understanding how our spatial topologies and bodily boundaries are continually reinvented” through movement and interaction (ibid.: 231). Massumi calls for and provokes new ways of articulating and exploring this movement, this continuity, with greater (or at least equal) concentration on the body-schema—which he argues has been largely ignored by cultural studies—along with its relationship to the more structural, though inseparable, body-image.

This paper parallels Massumi’s ongoing call, but for critical art. He might say that we have a discourse (or several discourses) centered around the body-image, but the body-schema is lacking discussion. My assertion is that while we have critical production models and visual vocabularies for making art that challenges the body-image, we need to also find ways of engaging and interrogating the body-schema.

III. The Body as per-formed

A key metaphor that this paper appropriates for the process of embodiment proposed in the preceding pages is that of ‘performance.’ Richard Schechner is largely credited with opening up this figure of thought, using a combination of anthropology, cultural theory, postmodern reflection, and his practice as a theatre director. Performance, he says, “is a very inclusive notion of action; theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from ritualization in animal behavior (including humans) through performances in everyday life – greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, and so on – to rites, ceremonies and performances [as] large-scale theatrical events” (Schechner 1977: 1). Since the inception of Performance Studies, performance has been labelled (and this is by no means an exhaustive list) “processual” (Zarilli 1986a), transportative (Schechner 1985: 126), transformative (ibid), and an “activating force or energy” (Drewal and
Drewal cited in Zarilli 1986b). It is a “liminal space” (Schechner 2002: 24), in-“between modalities” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett cited in ibid.: 3), that is not “reducible to terms independent of its formation”(Kapferer cited in Zarilli 1986b). In a study of digital art inter-actions, Nicole Ridgway builds on these anthropological foundations, but uses the “philosophical tradition[s] of… relation and emergence” (Ridgway forthcoming) to bring new light to performance. She likens performance to Massumi’s “virtuality,” and says that it is not, in fact, “‘in’ the between, but ‘of’ the relation” (ibid).

In her own paper on interactivity, Katherine Hayles similarly turns to emergence and relationality as the origins of both body-image and -schema, which she calls “the body” and “embodiment,” respectively. She is worth quoting at length:

[T]o avoid the Cartesian mind-body split in my recent book How We Became Posthuman … I made a distinction between the body and embodiment. The body, I suggested, is an abstract concept that is always culturally constructed….At the other end of the spectrum lie our experiences of embodiment. While these experiences are also culturally constructed, they are not entirely so, for they emerge from the complex interactions between conscious mind and the physiological structures that are the result of millennia of biological evolution…I tried to stay on the holistic path by insisting that the body and embodiment are always dynamically interacting with one another. But having made the analytical distinction between the body and embodiment, I could not escape the dualistic thinking that clung to me regardless of my efforts to avoid it….Rather than beginning dualistically with body and embodiment, I [now] propose instead to focus on the idea of relation and posit it as the dynamic flux from which both the body and embodiment emerge. (2002, 297-298).

Here, relationality and interaction produce the bodies that interact and relate, both linguistically and materially.

Seeing entities emerging from specific kinds of interaction allows them to come into view not as static objects precoded and prevalued, but rather as the visible results of the dynamic on-goingness of the flux – which in itself can be neither good nor bad because it precedes these evaluations, serving as the source of every-thing that populates my perceived world, including the body and experiences of embodiment. (ibid.)

Ridgway’s aforementioned study allows us to name per-formance as precisely this activity-centred flux. She juxtaposes the Deleuzean notion of preformism—“the already preformed” (Grosz, 1999, p. 25 cited in Ridgway), “completely given” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 98 cited in ibid), “rather than produced” (Grosz, 1999, p. 25 cited in ibid)—with performance—“a taking place, something in process and, by definition, unfinished.”
Performance, she says, “inaugurates not enacts…Interaction is not a meeting of two extant essences, but a movement and unfolding of the [relation] that is always supplementary and incomplete” (ibid).

It should be noted that Ridgway’s performance metaphor—used for understanding interaction in her paper and embodiment in this one—is not the same as that found in the performance of identity put forward by cultural theorist Judith Butler in the early nineties. Butler uses the word performance as a combination of a metaphor for “on stage,” such as in Goffman’s classic The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Goffman 1959), and as a reference to the “performative,” performances (or texts) that make an ontological change.4

Butler suggests that gender is a ceaseless and cyclical narrative, a “tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions” (Butler 1999: 140). She attests that we perform gender, both culturally and personally, both for the social order and to better understand ourselves within it. There’s no doubt that this is an extremely important understanding of the recursive body-image construction, which led to many breakthroughs in the liberal arts, as well as fine arts.

In Ridgway’s model of performance, however (just as with Hayles’ relationality), performance does not sit between, for example, me and my desire to be something or someone; it is not a means to an end (even if that end is an unreachable fantasy, as Butler avers) and perhaps most importantly, it is not based in any kind of conceptual construction. It is, rather, the relation of flesh and world (and word); it is the folding that has no end, and whose means are a loop between potentialization and actualization; it is an emergence through physical inter-action, virtual and per-formed. While Butler’s text occasionally mentions material form as problematic within her discourse-based renderings of gender, she never addresses this directly, instead concentrating on performative construction. Contrapuntally, Ridgway’s performance should be understood as constitution.

A body in space can ‘act’ as a site of emergence, a boundary project, and an incipience. And the philosophical definition of processual performance put forward here, when coupled with embodiment and the body-schema in this paper, foreshadows and amplifies what is at stake in interactive artistic encounters.

IV. From the Explicit to the Implicit

Schechner avows, “The relationship between studying performance and doing performance is integral” (Schechner 2002: 1), and it is in this space that he and I are in sync. We are both less “concerned with stasis than with dynamis” (Turner cited in Schechner 1985: xii) and “committed… to interference” (ibid.: xi). The end of the last century saw a multitude, for example, of feminist performance art that attempted to question structures such as those Judith Butler writes about in her aforementioned texts.
The “explicit body” is a term coined by Rebecca Schneider, one of Schechner’s long-time colleagues, to describe such work; it speaks to a “mass of orifices and appendages, details and tactile surfaces…[that] in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality—all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and deprivilege” (Schneider 1997: 2).

The explicit body in performance “explicate[s] bodies in social relation” (ibid). Through an “explosive literality,” and with an eye towards the Latin root explicare (or, to unfold), the explicit body is used to “peel back layers of signification,” to “expose not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves” (ibid.: 1-3).

Schneider’s explicit body in performance “renders the symbolic [as] literal” in order to “pose a threat… [to] implicit structures of comprehensibility” (ibid). It is a body which is scarred by a history larger than the body’s wearer - we are peeling away to reveal what is already there, but unbeknownst to us.

In the work of performance and visual artist Karen Finely, for example, the explicit body intervenes in the spectacle of engenderment. In one piece, she challenges Freud’s theory of penis envy, and that women have children as a replacement for the phallus, by literally “strapping on,” and wielding, an infant across the stage. Here the explicit body literalizes the legislative frontier, that aspect of power, which both authorises and invalidates representations and gestures to that which is un-representable.

Massumi’s reading of the Zeno paradox (taken from Henri Bergson, who follows Aristotle) might illuminate Schneider’s contention further. Zeno’s infamous arrow flies through the air, but never reaches any target. The paradox says that in order for an arrow to reach the bull’s eye, it must first get halfway there, it must also get halfway to that halfway mark, and halfway to that. And so on, inevitably making an infinite number of markers that the arrow must pass through, thus making it impossible to get to its goal.
Of course, says Massumi, movement does not work this way. To map out all the possibilities through which the arrow must travel in order to reach its goal is to see the arrow as only going between many points of stasis, rather than as in motion. It only ‘is’ when it ‘isn’t doing.’ Accordingly, now imagine many arrows’ paths across 3-dimensional space: post-event, completely mapped-out points of stasis turned into a uniform grid of mediated, understood, unmoving, and ultimately limited possibilities. This, Massumi tells us, is how we have unfortunately come to view the subject, and the body, through contemporary theories of construction.

I’m arguing that artists like Finley use the explicit body to put such gridpoints in quotes; they performatively literalize, ironize, and call into question the sacred signifieds of “race,” “gender,” “woman,” “child,” or “phallus,” depending on the explication. Actually, to borrow a phrase from Walter Benjamin, they are “quoting without quotation marks” (Benjamin cited in Benjamin 1997: 48). According to Andrew Benjamin’s reading of his notes on the subject:

In its most general sense, to quote means to restate what has already been stated. Any citation, therefore, must also re-site [with an “s”]…what could be described as a re-situation…What is given is given again. This re-giving is neither a simple iteration nor a repetition of the Same…. The re-giving therefore needs to be thought of as an iterative reworking…. The process of reworking re-presents the given in such a way that other possibilities…already inscribed within [what is given are]…able to be revealed…The absence and presence of quotation marks…indicates the presence of different moments of historical time—chronological time…The absence of quotation marks signals the disruption of context (Benjamin 1997: 50-53).

Explicit bodies in performance put Zeno’s stop-points in crisis. They re-cite and re-situate our structured inscriptions, asking us to look at what is both inside and outside of the quote, its history or continuity as well as its disruption, all the while bringing “ontological and temporal considerations to bear” (ibid.: 53).

Within the framework of the performance art, body art and Happenings movements that Schneider writes about, this notion of the explicit body is extremely productive. The encountered performance ‘unfolds’ and reveals to us our stories, preconceptions and, perhaps most importantly to Schneider, social boundaries.

In a previous collaborative paper, Nicole Ridgway and I argued that under the conditions of digitality, and the work that comes, directly or indirectly, with those conditions, there is potential for a shift in subject/object and performer/audience hierarchies, and thus a shift in how we might perceive or read such explicit inscriptions. We proposed that the ‘flesh’ can perhaps be thought of as more of a palimpsest, where we inscribe and scratch away, and enfold, alongside our continuous unfolding, in order to not uncover or discover our bodies, but to emerge as bodies (both legible and illegible), as not-yet-bodies, bodies in process—implied bodies, in relation and drawn out. Where the root of explicit is to unfold, to imply is to enfold. And, the relationship between them
is neither dichotomous nor dialectical.\(^5\)

For Massumi, “passage precedes position” and process has ontological priority in that it constitutes the field of emergence (2002: 8). Again following Deleuze, he calls it ontogenetic (ibid.: 206). As did our predecessors, Ridgway and I pondered this continuum as not a binary between emergence and positioning, between regulatory operations and comings, or between implicit and explicit. It’s a both/and, a co-telling—in, of, and by the flesh.

Here, my contention is that where explicit body quotations surround Zeno’s positions and put them in crisis, implicit body quotations do the same to the movements between, to their passage and their emergence. They re-cite our body-world couplings at large, and can more fundamentally incorporate and/or re-situate, specific relations, examples being “flesh-space,” “social-anatomies” or “body-language,” depending on the implication. To imply in Latin is not only to infold, but also to involve and entwine, and in this case, to re-work or per-form.

V. Encountering Performance

The implicit body phrase in my usage is specific to art encounters as used to frame discrete bodily foldings with “sensible concepts,”\(^6\) interrelated transformations and co-emergences that invite us into our own potential to vary. Where the ‘Explicit body in Performance’ uses the stage to put aspects of the objectified body-image in quotes, the ‘Implicit body as Performance’ rigs quotation marks around the emergent body-schema and its contrapuntal relation to something else. My ongoing study will almost entirely lie in the domain of interactive art spaces, attempting to think through such technological art as a proscenium for, and framer of, “embodiment plus X”—X being a variable or variables (an artist text, the gallery space, other bodies) feeding back between the artwork and its participant. This formula is not meant to say that embodiment and X are either separate to begin with, or that they are ‘added together’ per se; it is a heuristic device to show implicit body art as able to contextualize and highlight our bodily performances of/with/in, for example “space” or “networks” or “text.”

Hansen also directly gives power to digital art; his ‘body in code’—“the technical mediation of the body schema” (Hansen 2006: 20)—substantially ties exteriority and the evolution of the human (and embodiment) to technology. He says that a “technically triggered experience,” can “stage…the excess of the body schema over the body image to increase [the participant’s] agency as an embodied being” (ibid.: 19-20). He looks at the “mixed reality” movement within interactive art to argue that inviting action and enactment, rather than producing illusion and simulacrum, creates more immersive spaces (ibid.: preface and introduction).

As a producing artist myself, I am not necessarily interested in work or environments that are more illusory or more immersive, but that, rather, explicitly ask us to move in ways we normally would not, implicitly pushing into the realms of performativity and affect, interfering with, and putting into crisis, distinct bodily relations. I produce awkward interfaces that ask us to chase or stutter or build or write with our bodies,
and hope to unpack other -up art works that intervene in our incorporating practices, situations-as-events that beg questions of how we relate, and what that implies. These kinds of invitational performances are “exploiting the margin of indetermination” (ibid.: 30). According to VR-guru Char Davies, they “temporarily deautomate habitual perception and facilitate a ‘seeing freshly’” (Davies in Hansen 2006: 11). Says interactive artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, “the real motivation… is the modification of existing behavior… [to] create a situation where… the participants relate in new, ‘alien’ ways” (2000).

It could perhaps be argued that all successful art interrogates our understandings of the world in such a way, but the Implicit Manifesto here is to intentionally open up interactive environments and more general performance encounters to new criteria and critique. Within this framework, artists are seen as creating works and interfaces that co-emerge with their viewer-participants in and around the interval; these pieces are a driving of, and attention to, the movement in the spaces between. By setting the stage, interactive artists-as-directors create productive tensions between the per-formed and the pre-formed, shifting our experiences of ‘body.’ At stake are potential strategies for intervention in our understandings of enfleshment, art that situates a continuous embodiment in relation to specific concepts and ideas.

VI. Working with Work

It must be duly noted that since this paper is focused on the primacy of action and experience, page-bound but demonstrative studies of art work are no small task. The provided cross-section of printed images are quite literally a series of snapshots (i.e. Zeno stop-points), and the process of writing out how participants are moving and interacting in these photos are simultaneously turning incorporation into inscription. Web addresses to online video documentation are provided for each piece, but even then, those who choose to view the artworks (assuming they are still online when you read this) will not be experiencing them with their bodies, in space and in relation.

For these reasons, the ideal implicit art case study concentrates on four key areas of evaluation: artistic inquiry and intent; art work description; movement and interaction; and relationality. Respectively, these would attempt to show what kinds of questions the artists were exploring in production; how each installation works both technically and sensually; what viewers see and experience through their active engagement with the piece; and the complex relationships that are accented as emergent through this embodied dialogue. There are, of course, grey areas between each of these regions of assessment. But this approach—which gives equal weight not only to intent and content, but also to the interaction (per-formance) itself and to the feedback loop between all three—is precisely the strength of my thesis and framework. Below are three samples of work that would benefit, and benefit from, just such an implicit art reading.

The aforementioned Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is a Canadian-Mexican artist who develops large-scale, public, interactive installations that, in his own words, attempt to “transform urban spaces and create connective environments” (Lozano-Hemmer
According to his web site, “Using robotics, projections, sound, internet and cell-phone links, sensors and other devices, his installations aim to provide ‘temporary antimonuments for alien agency’” (Lozano-Hemmer 2006). Here, ‘temporary’ refers to the ephemeral nature of his technological and performative installations; ‘anitmonument’ because, while their scale is certainly monumental, the installations are an event, rather than acting to commemorate one; and ‘alien agency’ as a phrase should read to mean that although participants are responsible for and aware of their actions, the ways they move are foreign: the experience they have in each piece is an intervention in movement, the sensorimotor body, the body-schema.

Dubbing his ongoing series of work ‘Relational Architectures,’ Lozano-Hemmer claims to “focus on the new temporal relationships that emerge from the artificial situation...[of] ‘relationship-specific’ art” (Sullivan & Lozano-Hemmer 2002). He describes his work thusly:

Relational architecture transforms the master narratives of a specific building by adding and subtracting audiovisual elements to affect it, effect it and re-contextualize it. Relational buildings have audience-activated hyperlinks to predetermined spatiotemporal settings that may include other buildings, other political or aesthetic contexts, other histories, or other physics...But apart from special effects, beyond plasticity, the real motivation behind relational architecture is the modification of existing behaviour: the artist creates a situation where the building, the urban context and the participants relate in new, ‘alien’ ways. The piece can be considered successful if the artist’s intervention actively modifies the point of dynamic equilibrium between the public’s actions and the building’s reactions, and vice versa. There can be a variety of causal, chaotic, telepresent, predetermined, or emergent behaviours programmed into the piece and the uncertainty of the outcome is one of the main motivations for doing such a piece. (Lozano-Hemmer, 2001)

*Body Movies*, Lozano-Hemmer’s award-winning piece circa 2001 projects an archive of thousands of images, one by one, each taken on the streets of cities all over the world, onto large buildings. These are shown using powerful, robotically controlled data projectors located around a square. From the centre of the square, huge floodlights wash out these images; they can only be seen, therefore, when passers-by block out the whiteness with their shadows, revealing the projected photographs underneath. Said shadows range in size from two to twenty-five meters, depending on a visitor’s distance from the light, and they are tracked in real-time with Lozano-Hemmer’s custom software; if the participants on the ‘live’ square align their shadows to reveal all the bodies in the image beneath, the program triggers the next image in the sequence (Lozano-Hemmer 2001).

With *Body Movies*, participants’ interrelated interactions—all of which they may or may not consciously be aware of—are a performative experience of stories and space. At the outset, “everyone has a sophisticated vocabulary of expression using his or her
own shadow” so it is unnecessary “to explain how to participate” (Sullivan & Lozano-Hemmer 2002). But the sheer scale of the shadows takes into account a large field between the lights and building, begging for players to make 2-dimensional movies out of, and projected onto, 3-dimensional space. They become active agents whose bodies might span several stories high, or remain close to their actual size, depending on where they move. And the revelation of other bodies in the images found beneath their shadows—a play on presence that Lozano-Hemmer ironically calls ‘tele-absence’—adds another layer of interaction to the experience. Viewers can reveal all, part or parts of the artist’s photographs from around the world, and try to tell a story by playing around the image’s contents and/or triggering the next in the sequence.

As seen in the provided images, this encourages would-be static viewers who are embodying per-formance objects to run back and forth between buildings and lights, shifting their sizes in relation to each other, the architecture, and the photographs they’re revealing. They taunt or eat or ‘uplift’ one another; they bicycle on the streets of the international cities in the photographs, use umbrellas to protect their inhabitants from the rain, and create multi-armed beasts that grow and shrink as they scale building walls or invade foreign lands. They can (physically and literally) align themselves with strangers and friends alike, in this time and space, or in someone else’s. Here, stories and memories are made through movement, an embodied continuity and relation between presence and absence, rather than one or the other as binary choices.

*Body Movies* invites us, says Lozano-Hemmer, to “study the distance between people and re-presentation in public space.” The “people on the square…embody different representational narratives,” creating “a collective experience that nonetheless allows discreet individual participation” (Lozano-Hemmer 2001). Portraits are revealed by shadows in a nonverbal interaction, a literal embodiment of other, a relation between people and site, a small gesture at huge scale, a playing with inside and outside, a question that poses space as representational, material and perceptual, through movement.

*Body Movies* severs time from movement and space from location; it enables viewers to draw out that part of an event that cannot be reduced to the limited image we see on screen. Lozano-Hemmer’s work gives “discourse to the body…the body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself…it is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought….Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought (ibid.).”

We are not, in *Body Movies*, witnessing or partaking in memory content (or the politics of memory), but rather, engaging in a mediation of the between of perception, action and content: it both exceeds and forms the preconditions for body and world. It “ensures our openness to the preindividual, the preperceptual, the new, and with it, the very future-directedness of the constitutively incomplete present” (Hansen 2004: 268). Like Leibniz’s incompossible worlds, there “are innumerable variations of the future virtually present in the moment we now inhabit” and make (Rodowick 2001: 228). Massumi says that in a space such as Lozano-Hemmer’s, “energetic impulses…take place in every level of the body…[through] proprioceptive receptors in our muscles.
Body Movies by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 2001
http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/bm-hk.mov
and our joints” (Cruz & Massumi 2003). Our emergent action is performed and felt “in the flesh,” and we have the “conversion of the materiality of the body into an event, it is a relay between its corporeal and incorporeal dimensions. This is not yet a subject” (Massumi 2002: 14).

Like space itself, bodiliness is accented as “susceptible to folding, division and reshaping…open to continual negotiation” (Kirby 1993). Participants shrink and grow, speak through a present absence and shift stories and meaning through movement in the environment. This accented shift, a bodily unfolding and enfolding, turns the context of architecture into a situational, sensible concept: ‘flesh-space.’

*Front* (2000) is a wearable and interactive sculpture by artists Ralph Borland (South Africa), Jessica Findley and Margot Jacobs (both USA), collectively known as The Millefiore Effect. This being the only concrete collaboration between all three, it is harder to construct a narrative around their approach than with Lozano-Hemmer, but each has gone on to use art, design and technology as means for provocation, investigation and/or innovation, respectively.

Ralph Borland, for example, develops and writes about “projects that address social issues through creative means, and [that]…look at the politics of technology”; taking cues from activist groups and under the blanket term ‘provocative technology,’ Borland investigates “tools and technologies that combine the attributes of art and design to make objects” that “may have an immediate function to perform, but that also serve as pointers” to specific “social conditions” (Borland 2007). Jessica Findley’s other work ranges from collective, interactive experiences that “transform the everyday public landscape and make people giddy or baffled” to, for example, “a serenade for plants”; she’s interested in “the idea first,” then follows through to the emergence of a story and artwork with her materials and public interaction (Debatty & Findley 2007). Jacobs’ subsequent work is focused on the “playful, emotional incorporation of technology in everyday life,” and she “holds a deep interest in developing innovative design methods and experimental prototypes for social interventions in public space” (Jacobs 2006). She’s co-founder of the California-based Keep Company, a green (i.e. sustainable) shoe and clothing outfit. The team as a whole worked to create a wearable piece that was seemingly integrated with its participants’ bodies; players were then encouraged to perform publicly, and the dynamics of their interaction were meant to elicit “behavior we see in few other contexts” (The Millefiore Effect 2002).

*Front* is “a pair of sound-activated, inflatable ceremonial conflict-suits” (Borland 2000). It is, according to Findley, “an endless game of vocal battle between two people who wear suits, equipped with fans, [activated to] inflate when they yell” (Debatty & Findley 2007). Adorned by gallery-going participants in a ring, the volume of each wearer’s screams inflates their own ‘aggressive’ parts of the suit—pointy horns, boxing gloves or wings—whilst their ‘opponent’ sprouts protective, but ultimately constrictive, forms around their more vulnerable flesh.

In the accompanying, and mostly humorous, video documentation (The Millefiore Effect 2002), the team explains that they began with the question, “How would it feel to express your emotional state through large changes in the shape of your body?” They
“looked for inspiration from animals which could transform their own bodies,” and “used the volume of their voices” as a “crude metaphor for emotional state” (ibid.).

Once suited up and told to begin, the power of each participant’s yells or cries in their face- (or perhaps body-) off has a physical affect on both them and the other. Aside from the verbal and visceral taunting, pointing and physical jabs that may come from any given screaming and growling person towards his or her subjected, and perhaps weakened, listener, this interaction quite literally amplifies and inflates the potential power hierarchies that emerge from any given relationship. As is demonstrated in the image above, we see not only aggressive and defensive positions coming out of any given duel, but also shock in the eyes of the duelers, as they recognize that their own bodies—both natural and prosthetic—and voices and feelings continuously feed back into their, and their opponent’s, tangible forms and emotional states. Although mostly playful—you can hear laughter all through the video documentation—this is also a serious investigation of how action, perception and the body itself all co-materialize from a network of interacting agents, rather than one affective source.

The tensions between how each participant affects the other, in sign and material, body-image and body-schema, stasis and continuity, accent the body as—if we take Massumi’s definition—virtual. Unforeseen dynamics between suit, opponent, audience, voice, body language, perception, action and reaction become precisely that “reality-generating potential” that emerges from the virtual cusp between possibility and actuality (Massumi 2002: 123). We make and are made from the operational perspective, including our immediate environment and all other acting participants and resonating objects within its space. Both armor and disarming, protection and provocation (Borland 2002), these suits and their integral howling matches literalize, concretize, intervene in, and make physical our potential anger, bodily networks and both visible and invisible interactions between them: ‘social-anatomies.’

Finally and broadly, my art—just as my writing—seeks to interrogate the relationships between the body and other emergent categories, including but not limited to language or self or vision or time. I try to accent and challenge that which is often presupposed in
contemporary culture, in order to foster greater dialogue around these complex systems and their relationships to affect and meaning-making. I hope to encourage my audience to investigate the entwined layers of performance and preformism.

My sample work in this paper, *enter:hektor*, is a more literal performance space—viewers enter a large interactive corridor between black and red velvet curtains—where my goal was to frame text and activity as entwined. Inspired by JL Austen’s theory of “performative speech acts,” participants use an abstracted, real-time projection of their bodies to chase after *hektor*’s animated texts, which, when triggered by their outline, are played as spoken word through speakers in the space. They must literally move, bend, extend and stretch to capture *hektor*’s continuously mobile phrases, and hear what he and they will say, together. As viewer-participants learn how to perform this space, they move in new ways. Whether they are trying to ‘speak,’ or doing their best to avoid it, *hektor* forces them to go between the same exaggerated gestures and jerky expressions that he does. I’ve watched some viewers crawl into a ball and lash out at his words with their arms, others dance and play on the fringes in an attempt to speak quickly and all at once, while still others get up close to the screen and squirm around words, so as not to speak.

Here, my audience is not interrogating what words mean, or how to behave like them as they would in an explicit art work that challenges the body-image. They are rather—and literally—moving between the words, per-forming an emergent world of meaning-making with their body-schema. The space asks viewers to ‘leave behind’ their everyday performance of self, and attempts to accent each step and movement as a rich, performative gesture: ‘body-language.’

These are just three examples of the implicit body as performance within implicit art, and a calling attention to the relations they put in quotes. For me, it’s more than a theoretical framework; it’s also a critical mode of discussion and production, an artist statement and model of critique. My ongoing research continues to unpack existing work, and what we see or experience in it, in order to foster the next generation of artists in producing new projects that push at the moving, recursive and topological boundaries of flesh and world.

The implications are wide open.
enter: hektor by Nathaniel Stern, 2000 (updated 2005)
http://nathanielstern.com/2000/enter-hektor/2/
Notes

1 This paper greatly builds on a concept I first introduced with Nicole Ridgway, in a collaborative Chapter entitled “The Implicit Body,” for the forthcoming *Cybercultures and New Media* book put out by Rodopi Press. A few short paragraphs are borrowed and edited from said paper.

2 I break down this word as re-member to stress its origins: to embody again.

3 According to Hansen, technicity can be “understood in its broadest sense as a relation to exteriority, as exteriorization” (Hansen 2006: ix).

4 Proffered in JL Austen’s posthumously published lectures from 1955 at Harvard, the basic premise is that performative utterances, or “speech acts” are spoken or written words that actually ‘do something,’ rather than simply describing an event. They perform some kind of action. The most classic example of such an event is a wedding: with the spoken words, “I do,” the speaker is transformed from a single person into a spouse. Words literally change his or her ontological state of being. Other easily understood performative possibilities include a declaration of war, to command or forbid, or to ‘ask’ something of someone, as an act itself. (In his lectures, Austen breaks these down further, into several categorical types, depending on their implementation and on what they accomplish.) More recently, performativity as a concept has been appropriated (and thus redefined) by various disciplines over the last several decades, leading performance studies scholar Richard Schechner to declare it “A Hard Term to Pin Down” (Schechner 2002: 110), and to dedicate an entire chapter in his book, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, to its definition, history and use. He says that as a noun, a performative – which is no longer necessarily spoken – “does something”; as an adjective – such as what Peggy Phelan calls performative writing – the modifier “inflects… performance” in some way that may change or modify the thing itself; and as a broad term, performativity covers “a whole panoply of possibilities opened up by a world in which differences between media and live events, originals and digital or biological clones, performing onstage and in ordinary life are collapsing. Increasingly, social, political, economic, personal, and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance.” (ibid.)

5 See footnote 1.

6 See Massumi’s chapter “The Evolutionary Alchemy of Reason: Stelarc,” in *Parables for the Virtual*, for a wonderful reading of his suspensions as, Massumi’s term, “sensible concepts.” These are the “physical experience of ideas” that manifest as “performance” (Massumi 2002: 89-90).

7 For the purposes of this publication, these case studies have been edited down from their original, longer versions.

8 Lozano-Hemmer explains that when he uses the word alien, he means something “that’s foreign, that’s non-contextual, that comes from a disparate plane of experience. Many times I use the word ‘alien’ to replace the word ‘new’ as an acknowledgement of the impossibility of originality. When I work in a public space, I don’t try to address the ‘essential’ qualities of the site, as site-specific installations do; rather, I emphasize artificial connections that may emerge from people interacting with alien memories” (Sullivan & Lozano-Hemmer 2002)

9 Here, I borrow from what Deleuze calls the “time-image”: severing the connections between situations and actions so that we experience “direct images of time.” What Deleuze finds in the time-image is a shift from “the Kantian subject to the centred subject of modernity” (Toole 1993: 227-246). In Mark B.N. Hansen’s New Philosophy for New Media, he builds on
Deleuze’s ‘time-image’ with his ‘digital image,’” which correlates affectivity with a shift from the body as a locus of perception to the body as affective source. Such images enable a subject to experience the “present as a thickness comprised of protentions and retentions,” and a past not lived by themselves. Here, time is always a reserve, shot through with unanticipated lines of action, potentialities. This time is always “outside the image,” in the interval, and we “must … allow the now of perception to be contaminated with affection; we must identify that threshold with which perception of the flux of an object affects itself and thus generates a supplementary perception, a perception of the flux itself, time consciousness.”


References

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