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# Transplantations

RIC ALLSOPP

In 1997 the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine<sup>1</sup> staged an exhibition entitled 'Doctor Death: Medicine at the End of Life'. The exhibition included a section on transplantation that took as its impetus a title from the 1827 pamphlet 'The Use of the Dead by the Living' by Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith, a pioneer of modern anatomy who later (in 1832) carried out the dissection of the body of the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Among the exhibits in this section - which included a lock of the physician Matthew Baillie's hair (1823); and eighteenth century notebook 'bound in human skin'; a set of extracted natural teeth set on a walrus ivory base and said to have been worn by Edmund Burke (1729-1797); a (disturbing) photograph of John Hunter's early experimental auto-transplant of a cock's spur into its own comb (1760s) - was a Playskool® 'Big Frank' (1993) - a plastic and metal talking Frankenstein toy whose head opened to reveal an Allen wrench, a doctor's stethoscope and a pair of tweezers. These 'monster tools' could be used, by budding (or perhaps reminiscing) Dr. Frankensteins and transplant surgeons, to 'fix' Big Frank when he was in 'broken' mode, a service that would cause his eyes to light up and his voice to say 'Mmm ...good' or 'Thank you'.<sup>2</sup> As the curators of the exhibition pointed out, Big Frank incorporates a number of popular cultural themes: 'the conversion of the Frankenstein image into a cuddly toy, the body presented as a machine, and do-it-yourself transplant surgery.' (Arnold, 1997: 55) During the course of the twentieth century medical science has moved

beyond the grasp of the layman, and myths of modified, constructed or hybrid beings following Mary Shelley's 1818 exemplar, have proliferated, and to a certain degree become a part of our increasingly hybrid and transplanted realities.

In his monograph *The Dominion of the Dead* Robert Pogue Harrison suggests that the dead live in us through language, that 'we speak with the words of the dead' and that the origin of our words 'lies not so much behind them as *in* them.' (2003: 72). Language can be thought of as a continual series of transplantations, a means of creating our hybrid realities, rather than simply receiving them. Our decision to edit, or perhaps stitch together, an issue on 'transplantations' came out of a proposal from Phillip Warnell, whose fine art based performance and film work, has for more than a decade been exploring the body as site in the contexts of medical and performance research;<sup>3</sup> and a broader sense that performance (as a mode of thinking, making and doing) can perhaps be thought of, like language, as a series of transplantations; of the gathering and binding together of ideas, images, texts, movements.

'Transplantations' then is really an issue about 'composition', about how bodies of thought, practice, experience, politics, material, are put together; about how individual voices might be brought together to form an interweaving and dynamic conversation between different modes of writing and thinking. The composition of 'Transplantations' is, in the tradition of *Performance Research*, as much a series of

<sup>1</sup> Now the Wellcome Collection at 183 Euston Road, London.

<sup>2</sup> 'Press Big Frank's heart to hear heartbeat sounds and hear Big Frank laugh and say 'I'm alive!' You can also remove his heart, with the tweezers or your hand, and press the button to activate Big Frank.' (Playskool®, Big Frank Instructions, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> See Notes on Contributors (133)

4 'The first implantation of an artificial apparatus came in 1959 with the heart pacemaker, [see cover] developed in Sweden by Rune Elmquist. Implants nowadays include eye lenses, cochlear implants, vascular prostheses and heart valves, while artificial prostheses such as metal-and-plastic hip joints (introduced in 1961) have become routine.' (Porter, 2003: 130)

5 See for example Lupton, 1996: 50

6 'The urge, of a creature to break out from its presumed, restricted role or function is surely reminiscent of the immuno-suppression with which current medicine successfully, but never completely, constrains the functions, memories and DNA of one body within another. A layered, composite body: denatured and irreconcilable.' (10)

7 Due to circumstances beyond our control we are unable to include a full version of this text in the issue. The Editors have therefore decided to extract the text and make it available for viewing in full online and as separate hardcopy. See p. 18 following.

conversations between pieces, as it is a thematic collection of stand-alone research. The late medical historian Roy Porter noted that surgery in the twentieth century had made a transition from removal to restoration and replacement, with implants as a good marker;<sup>4</sup> and the metaphor of body parts is a key part of the vocabulary of the book - with its headers and footers, appendices and spines.<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps no surprise then that **Phillip Warnell** starts the issue with an invocation of the figure of the Golem, a figure which, like performance itself, leaves us with a sense of both fascination and unease as it threatens to undo or overturn our expectations and assumptions.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly the issue is loosely divided into five parts that explore ways in which the theme of transplantation traverses medical, biological, horticultural, socio-cultural, post-colonial, philosophical, linguistic and performative perspectives and practices.

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**Jean-Luc Nancy's** poetic and philosophical text<sup>7</sup> in part meditates on the complex relationship of the body and 'art'. It suggests that 'a body cannot be told without its dimensions' and that dimension (the space that bodies take up) 'opens the condition of their relations - of their contacts, of their confrontations, of their gazes, listening, taste and attractions'; (13) and that this condition of bodies, is a condition of 'strangeness' which opens a new space, an 'in-between', a 'new outside of itself to the others and first, of itself to itself'. (16) He suggests that '[b]ody is nothing else but the strangeness of being. [...] A body's shape, that shape that it is, is the answer to a desire, wait, need or longing: the shape of the fruit I want to eat, of the hand I hope to hold. Thus the strangeness of being resides in this desire.' (17) He links this desire to 'art': 'We have always said and we will say it in yet another way: the desire to be is also called 'art'' (17) and, in the sense of art making as a continual process of transplantations, states that 'this dance and this image bear the strangeness of a body that knows itself - a stranger to itself'. (18) 'Art' is then not

something that domesticates or diminishes the strangeness of the body - but something that 'exposes it ... only to better let it go'. (18)

The issues that transplantation raises are never far away from larger questions of value and meaning, or from ethical debate. **Lesley Sharp** raises questions of how the transfer of body parts generates 'profound existential shifts in subjectivity'. (19) She notes that is not just the transfer of whole organs, but (and possibly with more impact) the transfer of other re-useable body parts that 'also reconfigure the social value and subjectivity of patients' (21). The problem of rejection and constructions of subjectivity which Sharp discusses in relation to hand transplants also links to Lanfranco Aceti's discussion of social and cultural displacement, and perhaps raises questions about the relationship of 'hand' to 'self' in terms of authorship, craft and the work of art. **Irina Aristarkhova's** essay on the work of Lee Mingwei and Virgil Wong addresses the 'biomedical (and cultural) imaginary of the self and non-self relation that frames pregnancy (and/ as transplant) in terms of intrusion and rejection'. (25) It contends with issues of the male body as hospitable space where 'hospitality' is used as a conceptual framework for 'rethinking pregnancy and transplantation as [an] *embodied relation to/ with others*'. The opportunity to host others in **Let Me Feel Your Finger First's** philosophical comic strip connects in a very different modality to each of the preceding contributions where the 'dimensionality', 'strangeness', 'in-betweenness' and 'subjectivity' of the character Ontologically Anxious Organism (OAO), here disguised as a boulder, is manifested and performed as an anxiety about hosting other members of OAO's comic family.

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In 'Going Viral' **Tagny Duff** asks how live performance and documentation might be encountered at the level of the cellular and molecular, and proposes a 'viral' interrelation between performance and documentation in the laboratory that is not a 'hierarchical, linear, or

historical representation of events are they occurred', but a 'mutual relation evoking liveliness, or eventfulness'. (37) The viral denotes the virus 'as both noun (entity) and verb (movement)' and implies 'viscerality and the movement of the unseen; the uncontained; what is alive and undead'. (39) This approach begins in some senses to echo in other terms Nancy's perception of 'strangeness', and argues for documentation, not as representation or interpretation, but as in itself productive of liveliness. Using the work of van Loon, Duff identifies 'enpresenting' as a method of 'bringing into being' which is neither 'presenting or representing' but rather enfolds performance and documentation into each other to 'generate encounters of liveliness' through inscription. (40) The 'Living Viral Tattoos' project and its exploration of the possibilities of enpresentation and liveliness is framed through the lens of **Mechthild Fend's** historical discussion of the tattoo as an emblem of durability that stands in for 'the inalterability of a proof [of identity] so precious to criminologists' (50). The philosophical and aesthetic shifts from the durable to the mutable that define much contemporary arts practice are exemplified by Fend in her use of Ulay's 1972 performance work which links back to the processes of inscription and transplantation.

If these two articles problematise notions of documentation, then **Jan Eric Olsén** deals with inscription and feedback in the translation of the 'felt body' into readable displays, citing Paul Virilio's third transportation revolution: 'that of transplants and the merge of information speed and bodily metabolism.' (57) With the innovation of subcutaneous sensors Olsén sees the domestication of clinical-reading devices - the portable clinic - as becoming doubly domestic as 'a technique employed at home and a technique which makes itself at home in our bodies'. (57)

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The skin as an interface, as intermediary boundary, as geographical metaphor, as a channel or conduit, or as an entire sensory environment is

a focus of the next section. **Franziska Schroeder** discusses the 'body skinned' as a 'performative body that establishes the body as a milieu [...] [as] a body incised into, one that may be opened up by technology, or implanted into. It is a body transplanted, trans-placed, and transformed.' (61) She notes the effect on the perception of the body of such 'trans-placements' in networked environments which operate a shift from the predominantly optical to the haptic, and imply 'a radical re-thinking of the body in performance' (63) as a body engaged in 'intimately lived-in spaces with tactile relations'.

**Rita Roberto's** pages investigate Nancy's term 'right at' (*à même*) and take up the question of touch, considering it not only as a mutual separation, but also as a constantly co-operating 'modifier'. The paper insert with its diagonal cut, implanted as it were in the body of the journal, both disrupts and alters our reading of the text, and reminds us materially of a second skin or 'vellum' which simultaneously separates us from and binds us to the text. The question of the 'cut' in two early works by Marina Abramović brings **Yu-Chien Wu** to ask if it is only an inscriptive function and if so, how is the 'bleeding cut' distinguished from other forms of 'marking' that don't involve pain? Arguing for pain as a 'transferable material' and the 'possibility of transferring pain, instead of representing it' (73) Yu-Chien Wu proposes that the cut is a channel or conduit through which the experience of pain ceases to be an unutterable 'inner object' and allows for interpersonal transactions to occur. This idea might also resonate with Roberto's idea of the guardian 'of what is *other*'. (65) In their discussion of the colonial disembodiment of the land and aboriginal storylines, **Francesca Veronesi** and **Petra Gemeinboeck** ask 'what if skin could remember a past lived by others?' (78) and, as a response, developed a sound-based experimental interface *Skin Memory*, using a piece of leather integrated with sensors that remapped a geographical and physical aboriginal site (Elvina) together with its storyscape.

*/continued on page 131*

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Participants used an adapted stethoscope to hear sounds - the ancestral voices - 'as if they were resonating from a distant site of the surface of the (our) skin'.

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'I suppose it shows my naïveté, but I still wonder that a rumour can have such a powerful, variable, narcotic effect for so long and across so many domains, and penetrate so far into the collective intelligence'. **Kevin Mount** whose fragmentary work has appeared elsewhere in the pages of *Performance Research*<sup>7</sup>, shifts the theme of transplantation in a series of 'disorderly excerpts' into a consideration of transplantation as a horticultural, literary and compositional phenomenon, taking the mythology of the *Upas* or 'poison tree' of Java as a starting point. The transplantation of ideas and images between and across cultures, in Cool's case the mythology of poisoning regarded as a form of 'cold war propaganda' connects the four contributions in this section in their various explorations and modalities, as forms of literary, 'page-based', and mythic implant.

**Lanfranco Aceti's** discussion of cultural transplantation and identity posits the body as a 'space in relation' that oscillates between extremes of assimilation and rejection; it proposes the generation of a 'new hybridised space' that can 'offer a locus within which to develop personal and original re-combinatory formulae and interpretations of personal identities.' Aceti considers the re-processing, and re-construction of identity as a consequence of the transplantations of the body, to be 'part of the increasing mobility of contemporary societies' (88) and wonders if the condition of transplantation is characterised by impermanence, or has become a 'that of constant transplantations into an ideal space' that might only be realised 'within the space of a transplanted virtual existence'. The ecological implications of horticultural transplantation are set out across **Stéphanie Nava's** pages which

show graphically the layered cultural transformations brought about by the introduction of Japanese knotweed, as an 'ornamental' plant, into unsuitable, or rather unsuspecting, environments. The echoes of loss and gain in the voices of colonial transplantation, are reflected in the formal poetic proceduralism of **Peter Jaeger's** 'found' text with its insistent first-person singular voice transplanted from the diaries and records of nineteenth century settlers in Canada, another vestige of the voices of the dead that speak through us.

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The final section begins with **Zoë Mendelson's** 'These Sandcastles', a series of graphic and photographic images that draws on displacements of domestic space, fictive space, imaginary space and play-space; and, as is evidenced in her contribution to 'Further Readings' (see 129ff.), the transplantations of fictions within fictions which echo the techniques of her drawing practice. **Jon Davison** in his own practice of clown prosthetics and the three-legged man routine, observes that '[n]ot only are these body parts wrong (wrong place, wrong number, and so forth) they are also funny'. Perhaps 'self-ridicule' and the paradoxical revelation through clowning, that the body 'is not transparent' in so far as 'it fails to work properly', whilst at the same time revealing its transparency as it is 'voided of its illusory naturalness or rightness', or the equally disturbing claim that 'our entire body image is a phantom - something the brain constructs for convenience',<sup>8</sup> leads us to **Nicolás Salazar-Sutil's** discussion of Artaud's project of 'a passage or transfusion from mere recoding organisms to bodies without organs, from corporeality to trans-corporeality, where body and mind would finally be redeemed'. (119) The 'blooded thought' of Artaudian theatre, where 'body could become mind in a decisive transfusion' finds some resonance in the bodies of Balinese Barong and Rangda performers functioning as 'overflowing vessels' in **Natalia Theodoridou's** examination of the function of violence towards the performer's own body in

<sup>8</sup> See *Performance Research* Vol. 6, No.3 'Navigations'

<sup>9</sup> V. Ramachandran, quoted in Cole (116)

Asian ritual theatre. Arguing that '[v]iolence is the factor that brings the immaterial into existence', (128) she concludes that the performers are to be seen as 'overflowing vessels' rather than 'empty vessels' inhabited by deities, 'their bodies effectively *creating* rather than *receiving*. They are [...] active agents constructing a tradition [...] rather than passive receptacles merely re-enacting it', a position that, to circle back to Jean-Luc Nancy, might concur with the view that 'art' opens the space of the body 'into a borderless expansion' (18).

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#### Performance Research Vol 14, No 4, 2009 - Issue 50 From 'The Temper of the Times' to 'Transplantations'

With our first issue in 1996 *Performance Research* set out to test the 'temper of the times', and take a reading of the margins and boundaries of contemporary performance arts through a combination of articles, images, letters, documents and what we then called 'prepared pages' contributed by artists, theorists, critics and scholars. Forty-nine issues later *Performance Research* continues to explore borders and peripheries by identifying themes that shed light on and make connections between the tendencies and, often unpredictable, directions of contemporary performance. The form of the journal remains more or less the same, with an emphasis on the visual and on ways of engaging performance beyond purely academic discourse. In what can hardly be described as a landmark

innovation, we have introduced in this issue some pages of 'Further Reading', inviting contributors to tell us what other points of reference have been important for their work, and thereby widening the reach of the journal as a thematic resource for research and debate.

In this 50th issue, we turn our attention to the cultural, ethical and artistic implications of the uses and increasing prevalence of transplantation; and its intersection with physical, fictive, virtual, and viral sites of transformation, translation and performance. But perhaps more importantly our 50th issue marks and celebrates a particular and continuing approach to writing, thinking and imagining the field of contemporary performance that the founding editors initiated with the inception of *Performance Research* in the mid-1990s. As a singular project the journal has developed and sustained an inclusive and exploratory template for curating, editing and publishing in the field of performance arts. The journal has established a place for itself, by providing a dynamic and cross-cultural space for conversation, contention, dialogue, and research, which continues to be informative, influential and authoritative. As an archive of materials on contemporary performance the back issues of *Performance Research* provide a unique resource; and a complete listing of issues and contents is available on our website at [www.performance-research.net](http://www.performance-research.net) Back issues (with some exceptions) are still available from Performance Books at CPR - [www.theopr.org.uk/shop/books.php](http://www.theopr.org.uk/shop/books.php)

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all our contributors - editors, artists, administrators, collaborators, readers, writers, critics, friends, associates and institutions - for supporting our vision, and being instrumental in the development of the provocative and often unorthodox thematic approaches to and understandings of performance that have made up the first fifty issues of *Performance Research*.

**Ric Allsopp, Richard Gough, Claire MacDonald**  
- Founding Editors