RECONFIGURING THE BODY: SIMULATION AND CORPOREALITY IN MEDIATISED PERFORMANCE

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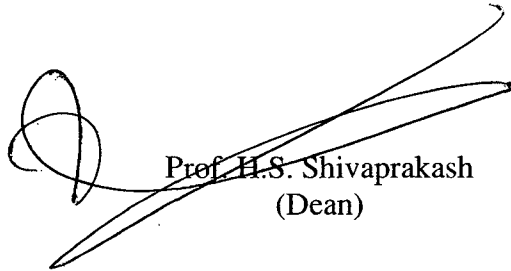
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CERTIFICATE

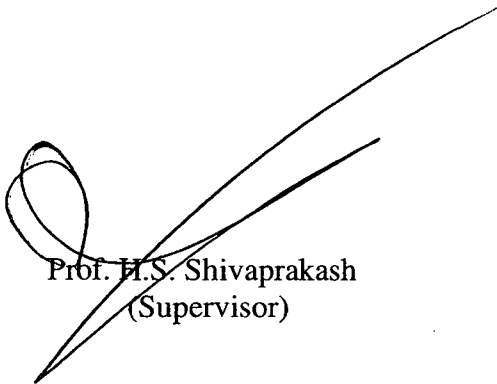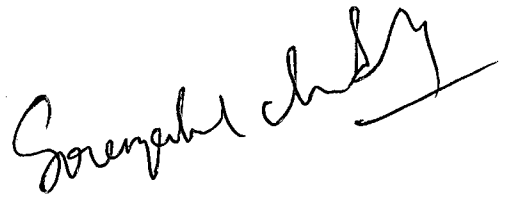This is to certify that the dissertation titled, "Reconfiguring the body: simulation and corporeality in mediatized performance", submitted by Manola K. Gayatri, the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is her own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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This dissertation titled, "Reconfiguring the body: simulation and corporeality in mediatized performance", submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any university or institution.

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For Appa

*Who could accept the boundaries of time and was wise about
how we chose to be present in it.*

Contents

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INTRODUCTION

In the field and practice of performance, the discussion around media and technology has generally been an emotionally complicated one. That I would choose to talk about technology in my MPhil dissertation was a choice I did not think I would ever have made. My own interest in performance was in its liveness, I disliked most mediatized art, refusing to watch TV for the longest time, having a grudging interest and being most selective of the films I watched. Whereas whether it was a kindergarten class performance, a folk performance or a play with every cliché about the badralok repeated, I considered it a privellege to watch any and every live performance. Like most theatre artists I knew, I took an oppositional stance to media arts, seeing it not simply as a rival, but one whose artistic merit was simply less superior. Like most performers I knew, I too experienced the 'high' of being on stage before a live audience and the slightly discomfiting intimacy of being in the audience while a performer exposed their art to you live on stage, and could never match the thrill and excitement of this unvirginning, of this act of revealing and exposure to that experienced while watching TV or films.

I was initially tempted to think that perhaps at the heart of this debate over the authenticity of a live stage performance and anything that is mediated is finally one fought because of a love for a certain kind of experience of the theatre. I wondered if at the heart of all the theory is an experience of theatre not quite definable that is being defended. I had to ask myself if it is a love that is worth fighting for or were we simply preserving a vanishing species?

Today in particular, artists in different fields have been responding to the pervasiveness of technology in many ways. This is especially because today it is difficult to ignore the pervasiveness, accessibility and even 'user-friendliness' of the newest phenomenon of technology: the digital. Digital technology, in particular, has allowed many more people to participate in the media, create and circulate work. The relationship of performance artists of different fields to the media is a particularly crucial one, as performance has to take into account the pervasiveness of film and television as entertainment forms.

Philip Auslander in addressing the question of whether media and theatre were rivals or partners, answers clearly that at least as far as cultural economy goes the relationship is one of rivals and that theatre and other live performance is clearly at a disadvantage. Whether a performer's craft is acting, singing or dancing, they are in demand in the media. Their time in performance schools be it drama, music or dance often serve as a training ground for their entry into film or television. The position of live performance is at best a tenuous one. The practical disappearance of the Parsi theatre with the coming of Bombay cinema provides an example. In India as elsewhere, if artists are not leaving the stage to be part of media productions whether it is film or television, there tends to be an oppositional stance to mediatization. Such an opposition is often anchored in the belief that performance remains an ideological and cultural site of resistance against hegemonic media practices.

In 2005 in Bangalore (already getting comfortable with the title of IT capital) however, when Girish Karnad's play *A Heap of Broken Images*, which in the process of unraveling a crises of identity, used multiple television frames in which a recorded image of the actor interacted with the main character, newspaper critics hailed it as a play that was finally grappling with the phenomenon of technology that was having such a pervasive presence in our lives. The highly successful play that was staged in both Kannada and English was the second instance of the playwright/ director Girish Karnad's break from primarily using classical characters and historical figures as central characters in his work. Close on the heels of this premiere came the contemporary dance group Attakalari's production 'Transavatar'. From the music, to the movements and the incursion of digital images on the stage, this production worked around the theme of a highly technologised environment that urban living was getting used to.

One of the earliest statements on the use of filmed presences on stage, a precursor I consider to the current digital presences on stage, was by Sergei Eisenstein who sought to make theatre more 'cinematic'. Later in 1941 Robert Edmond Jones suggested that the living actor combined with film projections on stage provided endless possibilities. For him the filmed sequences would symbolize the Unconscious

and the live actor the Conscious. [1] Talking about an experiment in mixed media performance in 1977 by himself, Robert Blossom says that the filmed sequences were more captivating than the live performance. Ausslander goes on to conclude that the competition of live performance with media is not a competition of equals. He gives several reasons for it, including the mediatized aesthetic sense of the audience, for whom media has become the referent for the live.

In the 1960s theatre, film and performance artists were staging what came to be known as 'Happenings', and in many of these experiments film was incorporated into live performance. Like the early avant-garde these creative pieces worked at the intersection of the different arts. Hans Thies Lehmann argues for the recognition of a postdramatic theatre by discussing the shift from the logo-centric drama to physicality in performance. He says that "As postdramatic theatre moves away from a mental, intelligible structure towards the exposition of intense physicality, the body is absolutized."[2] If we consider the elements of the postdramatic theatre, it is possible to see the shift. There is a use of multi-media, digital work in live performance, the audience is constantly being engaged with in the performance, the audience and the performers together make the performance 'event' happen, the body is real material and real experience. The shift is therefore from the Hegelian dialectic model of dramatic performance to a witnessing of the experience of the body. [3]

To discuss the live as representing the corporeal is not a new idea. Even before Peggy Phelan's authoritative pronouncements on the nature of performance with her emphasis on the 'agonizingly relevant body of the performer' in live performance[4], as early as 1966, Robert Blossoms in attempting to unify cinema and theatre saw the filmed representations as consciousness and the live actors as representing the corporeal. Through the three performances from Bangalore I, unlike Blossoms and in a similar thread to Phelan, attempt to explore the *force* of the corporeal, unseparated by Cartesian duality of mind and body, consciousness and a suggested inert physicality. I engage with this while also thinking through specific questions about aesthetics of performance in these productions.

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[1] Ausslander gives a brief summary on the discussions around multi-media performance. (Ausslander: 2008 [1999])
[2] Lehmann, pg 96
[3] Lehmann, pg 44 .
[4] Phelan, pg

The early avant-garde films of Europe in the 1920s and America in the 1930s reveal the deep impression that film had made on artists from different fields. Dancers, painters, writers and other artists experimented with the medium of film to explore their artistic visions. These experiments mark an interesting moment in aesthetic practice where the intervention of a technological medium dramatically changed the possibilities of aesthetic practice. Happenings in the 1960s, the fluxus movements and experiments in performance art and video culture are perhaps all a part of this trajectory. I would like to read the 21st century performance experiments with digital technology (the performances of three Bangalore productions, experiments with DVDs and the Internet and even perhaps performances resisting technology), against the backdrop of the earlier avant-garde movement.[5]

I do however also take into account the disruption of time and space that technologies like that of the Internet are responsible for. I do not yet dismiss the possibility of recorded performance *being* performance and am skeptical of what Phelan states as 'performance's betrayal of its own ontology by participating in the circulation of representations of representations'. The ontological truths claimed have come under scrutiny and been challenged. It however remains an ideological stance based on the notion of what an 'authentic' performance is but my enquiry is interested in reconsidering the category of what is 'authentic'.

The ideological stance is also one that I find hard pressed to subscribe to given the many possibilities digital technologies have opened up for artists and viewers to both showcase and circulate work. To foreground this I consider specific performances viewed on the Internet or on DVDs. I take up the reading of these performances that seem to have a history of their own from dance films to video art, but read this in the

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[5] In this context it would be interesting to consider the work of spoken word and music bands like Sridhar/Thayil for whom working with the digital had become commonplace enough to do an entire show with different filmed sequences and digital images of youtube clips of art shows, political struggle, paintings, photographs, and even a film by Jean Genet. This live performance to all purposes also an 'event,' *happened* at a night club in Bangalore. A space that was more and more opening up for performance events and live shows.[5]

context of performance traditions and the engagement of theatre and live performance with new media technologies.

Theoretical Influences and Material Engagements

My own project firstly, weaves its way through various sites of performance, which form the material of the study read against the backdrop of the early avant-garde. Secondly, it takes up debates around the body, liveness, media and performance in performance theory. And thirdly, it moves into some of the philosophical questions that begin to open up within the aesthetics of performance itself. It engages with different philosophical issues around this subject through the works of Jacques Derrida on the question of representation and writing through the body and the digital, Donna Harraway on the cyborg, Antonin Artuad on the nature of corporeal performance and Maurice Merleau Ponty on the experience of the body.

A fourth thread that emerges from time to time in this narrative is my own subjective encounter and engagement with some of this material. I have not distanced myself from the material at key points as I organically see how the work is also negotiated through my own experience and life. Allowing this space in my writing has been a principle of feminist research methodology that I hold very dear for it always bring back to work the sweat and blood of our personal engagement with it and the importance of acknowledging this for the work itself to gain a necessary transparency that is honest. My interest in using these different approaches is to be able to theorize the phenomenon of mediatized performances and the role of corporeal presence taking into account the different work already done in this field.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception' is an interesting study on the perceived materiality of the body. Part of my project considers the insights of this landmark reflection on what we think of as the body. At the heart of the debates finally seems a question on how many degrees removed does performance become from itself when it participates and enters into the world of digital circulation.

A reading of Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation[6], rather late in the day, completely changed the direction that this thesis was taking. Not simply because of the text itself, but also because of certain events that happened in Karnataka that I especially as a woman and feminist could not ignore. I refer here to the Mangalore Pub Attacks, the Pink Chaddi Campaign and later to the attacks on individual women on the streets of Bangalore and the forming of the FK/BK group in Bangalore. The latter was in many ways speculated to be a backlash against the Pink Chaddi Campign, which in its turn had been a response to the MPA, which led to the forming of yet another group called FK/BK or Fearless Karnataka/ Bhiruddha Karnataka, which in its turn has liked back with the Pink Chaddi Campaign. While I was shocked, horrified and angered by the attacks and was both happy and relieved when the PCC was launched by a group of women that allowed a lot of us to express our indignation and fight back, I was also partly bemused by the mediatized nature of both the attack and the response to it.

It is in this context that the Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation became an exciting theoretical model through which to explore how a city had been responding to simulations and entering into a simulacrum, not just with the artists who had begun their engagement with how the media was blurring boundaries and how the new Multi-national/ global culture was leading to a confusion and defining of identities.

Chapters

This dissertation has three chapters, which are differentiated by the material I focus on in each and in the questions I ask in them. In the first chapter I consider performances that use mediatized images and simulations in the performance and consider the relationship that the image has with the performer's body. The two performances I read in this chapter are playwright and director Girish Karnad's A Heap of Broken Images, a solo piece that was performed by Arundati Nag in Kannada

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[6] A rather challenging discussion on my use of the word simulation in this dissertation with a friend, drew my attention to the Baudrillard's own use of the word simulation and then later to the idea of the simulacrum, which given what women in Karnataka had experienced, made me change what I decided to engage with in my second chapter and reinforced some of the arguments I was attempting to make in the next chapter.

and Arundathi Raja in English, and the London based dance group Imlata's Transavatar. The artistic director of Imlata, Jayachandra Palazhy brought the piece to India, which was performed by the dance company and centre for movement arts that he founded in Bangalore called Attakallari with new pieces added and some changes. Both performances are interested in the formation of new identities and subjectivities that interactions with the Media, with technology are bringing in and explore this quite directly in their work.

The second chapter moves from looking at simulations in performances on stage to a media event, whose theatricality and performance I argue is embedded in just the very blurring of the boundaries of reality and the Media, within what can be called the simulacrum. Responses to this attack were also across these blurred boundaries. I discuss the Mangalore Pub Attacks and the Pink Chaddi Campaign. I take up the part helplessness of the 'mute spectator' to televised violence and some of the options that open up in terms of action through speech as discussed by Luc Boltanski.

The third chapter then looks at performances that seem to focus on a certain corporeal experience of the body or of a certain 'nowness' in its meeting. These performances seem to push at the boundaries of what a performance itself should or could or they explore the corporeal presence of the body in performance. In looking at Bob Flanagan's work or the reaction of Bangalore based artists to the mediatized events, I move into a consideration of how in performance the suffering body then becomes a point of authenticity or the 'nowness' and infinite possibility of that nowness in performance art that is taken advantage of by performance artists, who in some ways freed from the needs of technical perfection of a hundred rehearsals and one plot open up to multiple possibilities in the here and now.

As I chart through different historical, geographical, virtual and theoretical terrain I divide my dissertation into three main chapters. The three chapters each take up different theoretical issues and look at different sets of performance. The thread that runs through each of them remains an engagement with the corporeal and simulated in performance, post the incursion of newly, proliferating availability of media technologies. Deleuze's rhizomatic map to understand phenomena is the underpinning influence of this project. While dealing with material, such as the Internet as an

archive and a 'live' space, makes necessary such a mapping, the project with its definitive separation and interest in looking at different things in each chapter, finally demands a rhizomatic approach to gain coherence.

Chapter 1

Incursion of the digital into a city's imagination:
performance in IT Bangalore

Introduction

The IT capital of the country or Silicon Valley as Bangalore has come to be called by over the last decade, is an interesting city where certain tensions within the ontology of performance have come to be played out post the Multi National Company invasion of the city that went hand in hand with the IT revolution. I discuss the context of the city and the nature of engagement of two performances with the changing context and environment of the city. While Girish Karnad's play *A Heap of Broken Images* emerges directly out of this city in many ways, Jayachnadran Palazhy's *Transavatar* is actually the work of a London based group Imlata. I consider how the use of simulations in these performances engage with the traditional aesthetics of the stage. I discuss this in terms of how a simulation seems to stand in an for an actor or become another character, how simulations are used for amplification of movement or of the body of an experience and how in other places layering is achieved through simulations. I finally consider what questions the use of simulations in a live stage performance with live bodies of the actors poses to the ontology of performance, which I problematise around a question of speech and writing.

A Heap of Broken Images and Transavatar

In the 1990s important changes were taking place at the pensioner's paradise, the garden city, the relaxed pub capital of the country. That something was the IT industry. From innocuous beginnings with NIIT offering programmes to undergraduate students in software training and the slow sprouting of different internet cafes, the city transformed itself into an Information Technology hub, replete with soft ware development centres, hardware courses, and all kinds of additionally supportive industries. The colonial Victoria Hotel as well as many other old buildings in the city were brought down or revamped to make way for city malls or trendy new

coffee shops, auto drivers lost the relaxed look, more old buildings kept getting down, parks were built over and the very sounds, the smells, the vibe of the city changed as it started to choke with the ever increasing number of vehicles that were introduced on the roads practically every day along with the increasing levels of noise and pollution in the city.

It was also in the 1990s that cable channels finally began their reign over Indian television and for the first time, Indian people had such a vast array of television channels replete with the various entertainment etc to chose from. It was in the 1990s that both advertising firms and the Media as an industry 'boomed'. The UGC began to introduce and promote 'media' courses at the undergraduate level through various colleges and universities. Foreseeing and contributing to the growth of the Media as an industry, courses and training was offered in different aspects of the media. Content developers, technical persons, presenters, reporters were all being slowly churned out of various colleges and institutes.

The handful of theatre groups, which had been doing full length plays and performances suddenly changed formats of their work fitting in to new requirements of corporate shows and entertainments. Shows plays in English were in demand at a scale not seen before and it would not be too much to say that the IT industry actually contributed to the revival of the English theatre scene in Bangalore. Furthermore many theatre practitioners, were also able to make their living as voice and accent trainers for not just the Call Centre industry, but also for the various courses that the new software companies were offering their employees in an effort to train them to be articulate and socially savvy in what was becoming a 'globally' cultured office space. English-learning courses were also in demand at an unprecedented scale before, because a good command over the language was not simply an asset for those looking for work, in some cases like the Call Centre Industry, it was practically the means for employment.

But it was not simply a question of knowing and speaking English, but doing it the accents of the company's native country. Furthermore for easier communication, people often had to use fake British or American sounding names that they used during calls. The natural tensions building up around this suppression of identity of

course manifested itself in aggressive and often ugly regional language movements that were very often willing to spill into violence. The exhortations to speak only in Kannada, have all public signs be written in Kannada too was however not only a resentment of the sudden increased market value of English. As employment opportunities in the city increased and as the government and foreign companies pumped in more and more money in to city, so did the number of migrants from all over the country increase, especially the North.

Added to this was the sudden change in lifestyle and spending culture of the city's new middle class. It was a glass walled city where those who could enter the new market place to touch or taste or feel were forced into voyeurism as every transaction was done before their very eyes. Thus all the eating, the shopping for gadgets of every kind, the changing into new clothes was visible to those who could not afford these new lifestyles and for those who were not a part of the new economy. Needless to say practically everyone benefited or made sure they benefited monetarily from this change. House rents increased, auto prices increased. Designer boutiques, hand-made paper, candles and many other luxury items made available also increased. Needless to say the number of health spas, weight loss clinics, gymnasiums and fitness centres in the city also increased as the nee middle class spread itself more and more. But the new elite were those whose incomes were directly linked with the IT industry's biggest names like Infosys, Hewlett and Packard, Wipro, Microsoft, Satyam etc. And like all local populations, there was a resentment to all those perceived as the 'outsiders' who had come in to get jobs. So the language resentment was also against Hindi though this time round for very different reasons.

It is against this bubbling atmosphere that Girish Karnad's play that *A Heap of Broken Images* (*Odakalu Bimba* in Kannada and *Bikhre Bimb* in Hindi) was written and should be read. Particularly because it is a new participation in the 'global' economy and the increase of the presence of Multinational Companies that fostered the kind of change in the cultural and social climate of Bangalore. The mediatization of daily life and the slow distortion of perception as the simulacrum forms, is brought about by the economic changes in the city. Girish Karnad while he focuses on the break down of the self and the localized identity in this new world and the taking over of the

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splintered image, also in passing makes references to the changes brought about by these different economic transitions

He address key issues of the time that is the wealth of the new middle class, the language debate against a new 'global' citizen, the role of the media and technology in distorting a sense of the self. *A Heap of Broken Images* had a number of inspirations. Apart from the ever increasing role of technology on our lives, the dominance of media and the image, celebrity culture, the regional language versus English language debate for writers in particular and a conversation with Shashi Deshpande[7], the play also deals with the fragmentation of the self and the many truth and half-truth and lies that get thrown because of it.

In the beginning of the play Manjula Naik the protagonist makes a tongue in cheek remark about a rant by UR Anantmurthy against regional writers writing in English, during which he says that Indian writers in English are like prostitutes. By making the protagonist of his play a woman, Karnad is not simply doing so because as he says Shashi Deshpande was a woman and because the private lives of women increases in pressure and complexity when she is successful, but he also begins to engage with the question of the feminizing of betrayal. UR Anantmurthy calling writers in English prostitutes is taken up very seriously for the misogyny also invoked by this statement and the double barb it necessarily is for successful women writers in English, who even other wise usually have to pay for their success by a difficult personal life.

Briefly the play is set in a television studio where the protagonist is finishing an interview with a news channel. She, Manjula Naik, was a not very successful Kannada writer, who suddenly achieves international fame overnight and becomes extremely successful with the publishing of her first novel in English. It is in this main part of the interview that she addresses the different language debates and makes sardonic remarks about people suddenly getting wealthy and moving into posher localities etc. As she prepares to leave the studio upon finishing her interview where

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[7] Karnad mentions in many interviews that the seed of the idea for this play was a conversation he had with the writer Shashi Deshpande where she described a rather emotional encounter that she had with regional language writers at a writers' conference in Neemrana.

she has come across as witty, political and charming, she is confronted by her own image which begin to ask her a series of probing questions.

As she breaks down under the probing of these multiple images of her self, it is revealed that she had had a troubled relationship with her talented younger sister who was paralysed from her waist downwards and was confined to a wheel chair all her life. It is revealed that her parents had always seem to love the younger sister more, leaving her a larger share of the property etc, and that on her parents death when she is forced to look after her younger sister herself, she gets jealous of the growing closeness between her younger sister and her husband. Her sister dies and she finds a novel written by her in English and is surprised by the talent and cringes in jealousy as well. As an act of revenge, she publishes the book as her own and her disgusted and disgusting husband leaves her.

Transavatar tries to capture the diaspora's engagement with identity and the impact of technology on our lives. Though the piece was initially put together under Jayachnadran Palazy's artistic direction by the London based Imlata Dance Company, Jayachandran Palazy's Bangalore based Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, presented the piece as part of a dance concert called Sanchari in March 2007. It had eleven dancers as part of its Bangalore production with Julie Kagt adapting the original costumes that were designed for the Imalata Dance Company performance by Ursula Bombshell. The well-known and award winning digital artist from Germany Christian Ziegler was responsible for the design of the simulated spectacle, while the very original score that seemed to capture the riffing of digital sounds and a certain electronic beat of highly technologised living was created by Joseph Hyde. Besides Transavatar the recital Sanchari also included ooooooooooooo, which I will not be discussing in this disstertation.

One of the opening images of Transavatar was of 30-feet images of four dancers swaying to a quiet digital sounding static score, which lasted almost five minutes. In terms of movement technique there was a blend of Indian traditional dance and contemporary dance movement. There were solo pieces, duets and pieces where the group performed together. Digital images of the dancers, or parts of their bodies, for example a hand enclosed or just the face rotating were projected on transparent

gauzes that were placed in the front and back of the stage. The live movements of the dancers were often seen through these layers, against them or before them.

Opening a review of the performance in 2005, A.D. of The Hindu begins:

> "How do today's global citizens fit in with their identities beyond passports? And the imaginary homelands they create for themselves? Are they at home wherever they work or travel? Do they dance across the diaspora? Or carry schizophrenic identities within a single self?"

The question of identity is one that is very consciously taken up by the artists and so is the question of what happens to it in cyber realities. Says Jayachandran from the same interview:

> "I'm fascinated by people who share a sensibility that is Indian," explains Jayachandran. "Especially those who have gone to other places, encountered new cultural experiences. I would like our experiences, our stories, to conquer cyberspace, which is western-dominated today."

Simulation Aesthetics and the Performer's Body

1. Challenge to the performer's body

In an interview with Deepa Ganesh, Arundathi Raja, who plays the protagonist in the English version of Karnad's play, says about her interaction with her recorded image:

> "To act with my own recorded image, whose timing remains constant was a great task." She explains how in her vast experience as a theatre actor, Arundhati has played several roles where one's timing keeps changing with the fellow actor's. "But in this case, keeping pace with the recorded version was daunting."[8]

For Jayachandran Palazhy's work the simulated images are the extensions of his own body in space. The unraveling different layers of thought, memory and experience that keep reconfiguring identity is showcased in the way the projections layer and unlayer different movements and different aspects of the dancer and his body in

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[8] Ganesh, Deepa. Explorations of Language and Identity, Hindu Metro Plus Theatre Festival 2005.

movement. It is a cyborgian extension of the self that Palazhy's work engages with. Christian Ziegler the multi-media expert responsible for the creation of these visuals, had initially scanned Palazhy's movements and then reinvented them digitally.[9] The dancers are however also challenged to be at their physical finest to keep up with the clean definitions in space that the simulated bodies make. An opposite move into the excess of the human body and its lethargy is not explored or contrasted yet though this could be interesting.

2. Redefining matter (the performer's body) and space

Digital arcs that the performers also danced through, which kept redefining the stage space and the relationship of the dancer's bodies to it were also part of the visual effects. In the creation of these digital arcs which continued to redefine the stage architecture, Transavatar found not simply a means to create a spectacle of the cyborgian extension of the body and explore shifting identities, but also found a means of creating a visual spectacle for the extension of cyberspace and its shifting spaces that the cyborg self engaged with. Thus it is both the extension of the body and the extension of space into virtual, cyber and digital spaces that finds expression in this work.

The dancers then engage with how their own identities shift, morph and get constructed and broken down in these shifting spaces and shifting selves. At on moment huge simulations of the head of the dancers stare probingly at the audience as they slowly seem to scan one end of the auditorium to the other. There are moments when each of these faces of the performers morph into the other. In addition to the gender neutral, almost de-sexed costumes of the performers, this the assuming of different identities and even the blurring of gender identities gets highlighted.

3) Amplification .

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[9] A.D.

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One of the major uses of recordings and the projections is to achieve a sense of largeness on stage, or to amplify a tiny movement that gets lost otherwise. Movements of the fingers, an arch of the foot or the concentrated simplicity of a head turning all get amplified, bringing these tiny shifts to the attention of the audience without taxing their concentration but by simply enlargening them so much that they cannot be ignored. The scanned and scanning heads that tower over the audience is another example of how this is used as is the projections of slight movements of the hands and fingers.

3. Character and Layering

It also often becomes another character on stage such as in the case of *A Heap of Broken Images*. It drives the plot and the narrative forward by engaging with the live actor. That it is a recording is what makes it a manifestation of the alter ego. The alter ego has been a traditional device used on stage and in drama for the examination of conscience of a character. Sometimes another actor is used to represent the alter ego when there is a dilemma of the conscience, and even more often the character launches into a dialectic monologue, debating the pros and cons on her own before arriving at a given course of action or before a truth that has been hidden is revealed. This probing of the conscience is taken up by the televised presence or the recorded image of the actor in *A Heap of Broken Images* in ways that change the nature of the interaction. The actor waits on the cues of the recorded image, is stimulated and governed by it. It is not the same as working with another actor because the recording is in many ways infallible.

Transavatar on the other hand through the gauze and the digital projections are able to create different layers on stage. The layers are not just in space but of the dancers bodies themselves as each simulation unlayers or layers a new texture of movement or a new sense of definition or perspective on it.

In many ways it seems as if experiments with live performance working with simulated images has come a long way from the early experiments of Blossom and others, who quite simply conclude as mentioned earlier that the competition between the simulation and the corporeal body is an unequal one and one in which the

corporeal body simply loses out. Going by the work and aesthetic experiences created by *A Heap of Broken Images*, however I see that this is highly debatable.

In fact for artists like Jayachandran Palazhy working with simulations is no longer so much an experiment as much as an integral part of their aesthetic style and engagement. It is as necessary as thinking about a sound score, lighting design, or costumes. In fact, the digital projections and simulations have often come to replace a light design in Jayachandran Palazhy's work. The work that he continued since then to do with the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts carries forward this engagement with digital images. His dancers and his choreographic conceptions take into account and give space for the projection of simulated images on stage.

While his work does get its share of criticism for what is sometimes seen as a rather dominating visual spectacle created by the digital design sometimes, he continues to find ways in which to think and engage with the relationship of the corporeal body and digital simulations. Sometimes this works very well and sometimes it does not do so to the satisfaction of all audiences.[10] But it is perhaps for this reason that his contemporary dance work deserves the labeling of avant-garde. The Diploma that Attakallari offers is in Contemporary Danced and Mixed Media as Jayachandran Palazhy's own work has found ways to engage with the virtual, the simulated, the digital presences in our lives rather than feel in competition or threatened by it.

Speaking and Writing

If one of the questions that Girish Karnad's script *A Heap of Broken Images* deals with is the question of regional language politics, the production and direction of the play begins to engage with the possibilities opening up with technology for the language of theatre. In the production of the play, the solo actor is recorded speaking the lines of the alter ego of sorts and on the day of the performance, this recording is played during the performance. It is with this recording that the main character

interacts and engages with for the development of the play and for the unlayering of her character.

Likewise in watching the simulated and real bodies of the performers in Transavar, another performance that self-confessedly deals with shifting identities in the new realities which are also a new reality of language too we are faced with the question of what the difference between a recording and the performer could be understood as in performance.

This problematic of ontology then becomes also a question of representation. Derrida's many interesting insights on the nature of representation and the seeming conflict with the corporeal in his book 'On writing', provide interesting insights into this problem. His essay on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty directly addresses this while the general thread on the nature of *force* in his work is an important category via which I think through my work. To make this question on the corporeal and the simulated in performance a problem of language and writing maybe rooted in the fact that the simulated is considered an expression of a new often digital language with a new linguistic structure that seems to so closely represent the signified that we have come to describe its text in some instances as virtual reality. Yet in another important way too, in distinctions between reading and listening too, the difference of both maybe considered.

In a course on Phenomenology, Professor Sundar Sarukkai of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore spoke of an exercise he conducted with a group of students in 2008. Instead of lecturing the class for the day, he recorded himself and then played the tape in class. He sat for a while as the class listened to the recording and after some discomfiture at having to hear himself talk over the speakers, left the room and returned at the end of the 'lecture'. Speculating on what the difference between hearing him talk in person and listening to the recording, he concluded while in the former his act was the act of speech, in the latter it was the act of writing. While he did not immediately elaborate on how he had come to this conclusion, I use this important insight to analyse recorded performances and speculate for myself on what the difference might be.

A couple of things seem fairly obvious however. For example while listening to the recording, students did not have the opportunity to intervene and change the course of the 'speech' whereas the space for this, whether it was used or not, was always available in a live lecture. Likewise in conversation in speech, there is always the possibility of interruption. The second obvious difference is that of control. In a recording the speaker is disembodied, you hear what Sundar had to say at a given time, but it is not Sundar speaking at that moment. Recorded speech thus becomes an act of writing, something that the speaker has no more control over as it becomes a text in its own right outside of the grasp of the speaker.

In this context I would like to talk about applause as the particular language of response for an audience in performance. In most performances, the play carries on without an interruption to the play by a member of the audience that takes the play in a different direction. I have suggested that the difference between being and representation in performance is the difference between speaking and writing. The difference is therefore in the possibility of intervention in the actual performance. Perhaps it is this possibility of intervention and the tension it produces is often the difference that artists often feel in different kinds of energy they get from different audiences and the way that it affects their performances. Each live performance is different from the previous one, because the circumstances always change. Applause, which is quite simple the response to the artist's work and the expressions of the conversation or interaction between artist and audience, is always different depending on the nature of the audience.

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Coming back to the performances themselves while, the presence of the performers seem to get amplified by being projected back through multiple televisions or projected through enlarged simulations in the *A Heap of Broken Images* and *Transavatar*, perhaps this is not very different from the use of mikes on stage to amplify sound etc. It is the visual of the body that is being amplified. Its image. It is not the body itself. Perhaps it is then *force* of the live body subject to injury, to breaking, in all its vulnerability that distinguishes it from the simulated. The recording due to technical failure may go off, but the empathy of the audience to a performer potentially breaking down is at a much greater level of self-identification. This is an identification that expresses itself in emotional and visceral ways. The sympathy and

worry towards the actor having to keep timing with the recorded image is different from the frustration, irritation or even disappointment faced if there is a technical mishap.

In *Transavatar* however there are interesting moments when the visual spectacle that is made by both the live performing body and the simulation appear in such a haze that it seems to blur the distinction between the live body and the simulation. One such sequence is when two hands are amplified and digitally projected while the dancer, moving between the gauze and into the simulation appears to sometimes be held by it and at others seems to be a projection herself. It is in this sequence that identities of the corporeal body and the simulated one seem to conflate and achieve a cyborgian moment and do indeed create a moment of the simulacrum on stage.

Is it possible to think of this moment as also the conflation of speech and writing into one act? Interestingly it is in a recording of this sequence that the blurring of the boundaries seems to make the corporeal body in performance indistinguishable from the projected image. I therefore argue that even if the spectacle of the live performance achieved a visual blurring, the force of the corporeal body and the intention of its movement in stage space, creates a certain energetic momentum that continues to distinguish this experience from the simulation. One may surrender to the illusion but there is an awareness of the corporeal body's frailty and its *force*.

Chapter 2

And the flesh became image

Introduction

"Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible."

Jean Baudrillard in *Simulation and Simulacra.*

Performance Studies emerged as a discipline different from Theatre and Drama Studies and marked its difference in its interest in studying the performativity of social behaviour, while also continuing to engage with performance within the arts too. When Performance Studies was just beginning to emerge as a new discipline, Richard Schechner in one of his defining essays says that practically every action may be and in Performance Studies is indeed read as a performance. Yet there seems to be a certain suggestion that this is differentiated from what is performance. In this chapter, however, as I bring together an event and a response to that event in 'real' life, I argue that these differences are actually not all that clear.

Like Baudrillard I begin to worry that the differences between simulations and lived reality begin to blur enough to create a simulacrum. That what is performance and what maybe read as performance are not that different within the rather warped mediatized space that events begin to play themselves out in. This is a little more than simply the 'theatricality' of events. The difference in these performances is quite simply perhaps a willingness to actually hurt and affect another.

Picking up on a thread about the bubbling resentment against the new middle class in Bangalore, I would like to argue that the chauvenism displayed in the MPA was an extension of sorts of regional chauvenism and a resentment not against what was described as western culture per se but also against the visibility of independent women. The resentment comes at a time when It has to be said that the emotional hunger and violence enacted by the ubiquitous spending and luxurious lifestyle, the endless eating of fancy, rich foods in public spaces helped add to a bubbling resentment against the new middle class, which manifested itself in particular ways.

One of the outlets that this resentment was channeled through was through regional language chauvinism that groups like the Kannada Chaluvalis expressed. It was of course the working class that were in the first line of battle, usually unemployed youth who were getting pushed out of their city spaces by an insensitive, loud and daily fattening new middle class. Thus it is possible to see in this incident that the blurring of the boundaries is not simply a response to the media, but the media as it stands today is itself a product of the new economy and culture of consumerism that is creating tensions at so many levels, including especially a seeming inability to negotiate one's identity.

I have been very tempted to and do indeed express some of the natural skepticism against the airing of these events on Television. Several people have accused the Media and audiences of getting voyeuristic pleasure through events such as this. Other questions about the Media's role in it at the time of the event too have been taken up by various forums on the Internet, people's groups etc. For example why the cameramen and others don't drop their cameras to save is a question that always come up in times like this. One article concludes that though it's a dirty job, its role as witness should be kept irrespective of controversy. Others have accused the cameramen of not simple being the witness but the director of these events too.

Yet the paralysis of the viewer, who is often a helpless spectator to an act of violence or suffering happening many miles away from her is one of the aspects of the moral demand on the spectator that the Media makes in telecasting suffering and violence, is taken up very well by Luc Boltanski in his book *Distance Suffering- Morality, Media and Politics,* who searches for ways past 'the denunciation of the perverse spectator' that I myself am often tempted to fall into or a ' smug celebration of the return of kindness' and moving past also 'the absorption into one's own pity at the spectacle of another's suffering'[11]. Assessing the options available for the viewer in such a situation he reiterates the power of speech and offers a commitment through speech as one of the few options available for the viewer. He says that in speech one takes an ideological stance for or against the spectacle of suffering, and that such speech must

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[11] Boltanski, pp xiv.

necessarily also describe or be informed by the personal reactions that the viewer has to that spectacle. He then considers what forms that speech begins to take to be articulate to others and become a communication outwards. I consider then the response that the Pink Chaddi Campaign was to the Mangalore Pub Attacks in this context.

The Mangalore Pub Attacks and the Pink Chaddi Campaign

In the days following the 24th of January 2009, the nation was maltreated to yet another rather creepy media spectacle, where a bunch of aggressive boys jostling under the banner of a pseudo right-wing group called the Ram Sena, barged into a pub that was rather wishfully named Amnesia and began to beat up the girls there. Camera crews captured the entire incident with many other non-media people recording as much of the event as they could, while the girls fled outside, tripping and falling and scurrying away as fast as they could. A few lone male defenders of these women were also beaten up and had to flee the scene.

Or at least this was the scene televised. A fact-finding team that investigated the incident found a much more ugly story behind the televised spectacle. The group of boys had stood outside the lounge negotiating their entry, huddled in a corner shouting Jai Mata slogans before trying to barge in. When the bouncer shut the door on their faces, a curious member of the kitchen staff opened the kitchen door, which the attackers quickly rushed in through. Once inside they went straight for the girls and started beating them and slapping them. The girls were then not just rounded up in the middle of the dancing floor and beaten up, but were also stripped, groped and molested. None of this was however aired. The attackers justified their actions as necessary to preserve the purity of their culture. By attacking and defiling women in public they hoped to reinforce the purity of women's bodies.[12]

It is tempting to say that apart from the pleasure generated by the violence and public sexual assault for practically everyone concerned but the victims, (the pleasure and sexual stimulation of the violence being a part of the attack that will never of course

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[12] Cultural Policing in Dakshina Karnataka,

be publicly acknowledged), what do we find if we read the incident in the terms of the Ram Sena itself? That a holy group of Hindu warriors in an effort to protect a declining Hindu culture, gathered outside a small pub in Mangalore, fervently sought blessings of their various cults and figures and in a moment of great spiritual courage and daring forced their entry into the pub and attacked a bunch of adoloscent girls because that was what the spiritual insight of their fervent meditations on Hindu culture directed them to do? That the camera-crew that was invited to accompany them was a necessary witness to their spiritual exercise?

One witness speaks of how the cameramen were literally calling the shots, shouting action after properly angling their cameras.[13] Muthalik had blamed the media coverage for making a big deal of a small incident. Most agree the incident would not have received so much action had it not been for the repeated telecasting over national television of these events. And yet it was an event that had too many of the right elements to not make news for the next few weeks: violence, alcohol, religion, politics, young women. Compared to droughts and floods and farmer's suicides, a bunch of hooligans, costumed in bandanas and chanting their way into a pub and slapping and chasing young people out of a tiny pub in small town Mangalore would not seem such a big deal.

Yet like the Mumbai attacks and a number of media/ live catastrophes, it was the symbolic nature of it that created such an uproar. It was a media event in many ways: the event was staged and performed to the cameras which in its unswerving dedication to its duty captured and telecasted all the relevant bits, TV channels aired every few minutes over the next few days, talk shows, opinion polls, debates were staged, creating ample discourse around it. The sexual violence, the molestation and stripping: aspects that could lend this incident far more graver and serious over tones and would have also possibly prevented any division of opinion regarding the sickness and wrongness of this act was kept out of the media. (Though it is quite possible that some extremists would say that all women in pubs are 'asking' to be molested and should not complain about it.)

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Somehow the simple slapping around and beating up of young women was considered a not too grave thing: its what any father or brother or husband had the right to do. As one gavinsoans, a Youtube blogger says:

> "Also if it is just about girl "drinking" in the afternoon then I think they should have called the parents of these girls and only their father should have the right to drag them out of this place. A black spot on Mangalore."[14]

Indicating seemingly that the only crime of the attackers was in not being the relatives of the adolescent women beaten up. At any rate, the beating up of women is not as drastic an action as molesting them. By a twisted logic, if the molestation had also been telecast, there would have been no space for a Media controversy or for debate. After all even if forced incest does occur in Indian families, nobody is willing to step out to condone it. So the softly suggested argument about the attackers merely exercising the rights of being surrogate fathers and brothers would have fallen through.

What the media chose to air and what finally became an exciting but comparatively safe discourse, with many saying the act was shameful an. In many ways the division helped many argue for a liberal position. In many ways the editing out of the sexual offences gave liberal groups the space to dialogue even if it was rather one-sided against the right wing. There was enough space to assure people of the undercurrents of approval for what the ram Sena did. Shivalik himself mentioned many times the calls of gratitude by parents who felt their children were getting spoiled by a liberal culture and appreciated the threat of harassment that would keep their children at home.

Having been part of the actions that formed part of the reactions against the violence against women, I feel a good deal of anger and irritation at having to respond to an action that was mainly hype, a call for attention and more than anything else an unnecessary pointless one that did not serve any real purpose even for themselves. At best it was a costumed outlet for a group of disadvantaged, inadequately educated hooligans who used this performance as an outlet for their pent up rage against the

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[14] Youtube. "Mangalore: Attack on Pub, Daijiworld Exclusive Video", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEbD2aXs-XU

social mobility and financial independence that women had been enjoying in visibly manifested ways in the recent past in Karnataka. The rage against capitalism and consumer culture that leaves many feeling 'out of the picture' finds an outlet in pseudo-religious groups.

The consortium of forward, loose, pub-going women that organized themselves under the Pink Chaddi Campaign and started as a Facebook group, was one of the other media-highlights around this event. The group not just picked up on but focused on the sexual politics of the attack and insisted on putting the spotlight on their own brightly coloured panties, which they mailed to the Ram Sena chief, Muthalik. Under the Pink Chaddi Campaign many women and men to the number of joined and sent in *chaddis,* sometimes with seductive messages and phone numbers written on them.

The campaign came under sharp criticism for several reasons but worked more than adequately as a brilliant counter to the media spectacle of the Mangalore Pub Attacks. What worked most brilliantly however was the diffusion of laughter into the atmosphere of fear that the Ram Sena had tried to create. Muthalik and his goons became a laughing stock in a way that just made it impossible for him to draw a fearful political fascade after this. Humour is one of the best ways to counter fascism.

Pleasure and pity

If the repeated excited ravings of journalists, spokespersons and the general public are to be taken into account whenever an act of violence occurs, can we accept our innate sadism and an innate pleasure of disgust and pleasure in 'outrage' against some seemingly mindless, fundamentalist act? What is becoming more and more apparent also however is how these acts are neither mindless nor fundamentalist, but performed as such with careful precision to become a random, newsworthy event that ' shocks the nation'. Fundamentalism is in fact espoused as a convenient, easily accessible and coherent mask. Fundamentalist terror and violence is an easily accessible logic in everyday Media discourse. To say that it is done for attention and political mileage in some cases is only a partial truth.

In the particular case of the Mangalore Pub Attack, it is apparent that the staging of the event was done explicitly for the Media. It was also apparent that the Media knew just enough of what to telecast and what not to, in an effort to keep up a heated debate. There is a certain awareness of the 'enjoyment of the perverse spectator' that all of us in some parts are that drive these incidents and allow for them to become an event, which the Media and the planners of such attack are well informed and even encouraged by. Confronted by such incidents we are moved by pity and by pleasure and in many ways are rather helpless victims of these feelings. It is on how we choose to act on these feelings that we may perhaps deliberate the ethics of the question because in our reactions we are indeed helpless. We are all 'prisoners of experience'[15] in this sense and there is often little we can do about how we immediately react to a stimulus. It is therefore on manifested action, where we have the option of exercising choice that we can make judgement.

I would go so far as to say that the Media though it benefits from each act of violence and chooses to do so as well is also forced to telecast these incidents as that too is its responsibility. There is no doubt however that it is this very responsibility that is abused so violently by both the Media and those who choose to enact incidents that a worthy of media attention. There have been many debates on what guidelines the Media should follow in such cases but this very interesting issue is unfortunately not one that I choose to discuss in this work.[16] It is useful however to consider the nature of the crime of the Mangalore Pub Attacks. If indeed the media is the medium through which they choose to attack the nature at large, then it is not simply the girls in the pub who were attacked but all of the viewers of the televised incident as well.

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[15] Prof Sundar Sarukkai of NIAS while speaking about the nature of experience during a session on Phenomenology, speaks of how as we are trapped in an experience we have no choice but to undergo it and uses the phrase 'prisoners of our experience' to describe this.

[16] Practically all the news channels, televising the Mumbai attacks 'live' came under huge criticism for not simply its questionable ethics while charging after the grief stricken for interviews, but also in quite simply putting the lives of many in danger by televising the action as it was happening. Debates around this including a Facebook group called 'Get Barka off the air', sufficiently revealed just how tired people were of the greedy, insensitivity of news reporters.

The nature of the attacks against the girls apart from having severe emotional and mental repercussions as well repercussions on their social and family life, was direct, physical assault. The assault on the viewers however apart from creating fear and indignation amongst urban women and their families, was also in terms of the pity and the pleasure and of forcing an experience on the viewer that is both violent and uncomfortable. Distanced from the immediate vicinity of the act, the viewer is a helpless victim of his own emotions and the spectacle he is forced to witness.

To be responsible for the generation of a soft pleasure and excitement clubbed with all the horror and pity when watching violence enacted on another human being, is a singularly devious, deeply unethical and terribly violent act. It is an act that takes away innocence. And to destroy innocence is a crime that is truly violent and terrible. This is similar to the other violence of the media against the viewer that has been spoken of for a while now, and that is the desensitisation of the viewer to violence, hunger, poverty etc. In the recent spate of incidents that become events such as the Mangalore Pub Attacks what is different is that these acts are deliberately using live bodies as fodder for their own very shallow agendas but deeply destructive agendas.[17]

Being trapped in her own experience of what is being telecast, the viewer is helpless to the immediate reactions that she has. What she undergoes is similar to child abuse. When accusing a criminal of child abuse, the jury remains uninterested in the question of whether the child enjoyed the sexual contact or not. Its not really a question of whether the child knows the implications of the sexual contact, but that the abuser is touching a defenseless body for the satisfaction of the abuser. In being the agent of the sexual contact and having an agenda with the body of the child, without consent or negotiation. The viewer of televised violence has the option of switching off the television and many do. But it is usually impossible to not also be aware of 'current

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[17] Its equivalent in entertainment is slasher films, where various kinds of brutal rapes and murders are videoed and circulated both on the Internet and at Adult Entertainment stores. Sadanand Menon talking about Technology at the Attakallari Biennial 09, speaks also of how DVDs of rapes and murders of the Gujarat violence is available at local DVD shops and of the entertainment this affords to many including especially those who committed these acts of violence.

events' and of being a forced witness to it. It is in this context of being subject to both the pleasure and pity that the viewer is then caught and of being a mute spectator.

Speech in performance

The most interesting response of the audience of the Mangalore Pub Attacks came out as backlash against it in the Pink Chaddi Campaign, which initially started as Facebook group and as criticism and attack mounted and spilled into everyday life more and more in Bangalore, took to the streets too. A email sent out by Nisha Susan (who since then because of her Christian name has been accused of being funded by foreign agencies and Christian missionaries), through the newly formed Facebook group, asked people to react to the Mangalore Pub Attacks and join the Pink Chaddi Campaign, where people would send in pink panties or *chaddis* to Muthalik the leader of the Ram Sena in Mangalore. The Facebook group swelled in numbers by the hour as people kept joining the group, making the Pink Chaddi Campaign an e-movement that was soon to spill into the letter boxes and media of the country.

In Donna Haraway's many writings about the cyborg, she constantly addresses the problem of subjectivity that is perhaps a crises of subjectivity with the apparent union of the human with technology. It is through the insights and possibilities that open up from her work that I think through the question of the 'real' and authentic in performance. This is a question equally about the performer's embodied 'live' presence in contrast to a digital presence and the nature of the performance event itself. The question then has also to addresses what is perhaps a formation of new subjectivities. The ability of a Facebook group to get a spill over bodies and panties into the streets and mail is an indication, perhaps, of the human not simply entering cyberspace but the connections there pushing into real space or more accurately a blurring of the boundaries of both.

The mediatized Mangalore Pub Attacks and as are most other televised recordings, is often confused in its relationship to the attacks that happened in a pub in Mangalore. In many ways once the edited recording that is repeatedly telecast begins to be circulated in the Media it becomes its own text. The protagonists of the piece, that is the various members of the Ram Sena or the actors in the piece, were aware that their

action was a performance and they enacted it as a performance. They were performing for the event that the Mangalore Pub Attacks would soon become in the media. They were the ones who had called in the television channels to not just witness, but to film, package and distribute their performance. Their site of performance was finally different television and news channels and recordings are still available on Youtube as well. It is this very awareness of how the actual attacks were not going to be as exciting as the attacks once circulated on news channels. In fact, it can be argued that the purpose of the attacks itself was a media event.

It is this blurring of the boundaries between the attacks that happened in Mangalore with the Media event it became that reinforces the model of the simulacrum in this. For it can be argued that there was no actual attack outside of the mediatized Mangalore Pub Attacks, that it was a meditatized performance from conception, execution and response. Every single action may not have been recorded or telecast, but the entire action was planned, performed and received within the simulacrum. That there is something drastically wrong in this model is apparent because it is real people and their bodies that are getting assaulted in this confusion.

Very aware of how to function within these new worlds and hit right back, the Pink Chaddi Campaign was able to use the resources of the media, the Internet and many sign posts of a consumer culture[18] to combat the very mediatized nature of the attack. The Facebook group in having a pace for people to personally express their commitment and their reactions within a forum that was taking a stand on the issue, met very well the needs of the viewer to be able to commit to an action against the suffering that she had till then been a mute witness to. And initially all of this commitment came in the form of personal posts and comments on the site or an immediate speaking about the incident and their own reactions to it. The need to spill into 'real' space, to get the commitments of their speech to move out of inboxes and reach postboxes, for the words to translate into objects, in this case pink panties or

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[18] They had been accused of being elitist for the use of lingerie and for the nature of their other Pink Chaddi event, which was the Pub Bharo action. The Pub Bharo action invited men and women, especially women to go into pubs and have a drink on Valentine's day. Valentine Day had been the day targeted by the Ram Sena for their next attack. That to insist on going into to pubs was a natural reaction to being forced out of one, somehow seemed to slip the attention of the critics of this action.

chaddis was another way in which the simulacrum through the blurring of these boundaries gets reinforced.

It is this awareness of the power of the Simulacrum and a very intelligent use of the various structures like the Media, Internet and global economic cultures[19] that the Pink Chaddi Campaign was able to successfully combat the spectacular violence of the Ram Sena and as I have mentioned earlier were extremely successful in their use of humour to dissipate the cult of fear that the Ram Sena were trying to create around them. It is for this reason perhaps that the following attacks in Bangalore were by a nameless bunch of boys. Yet the remaining question of what happens how one addresses the violence and suffering outside of a mediatized and therefore mediated communication is a question that the next chapter begins to address.

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[19] The Pub Bharo action invited women from all over the world whether they were in New York or Toky or anywhere else, to go into a local pub on Valentine's Day in 'solidarity' with the Pink Chaddi Campaign and many indeed did.

Chapter 3

The body in performance: our corporeal frailty

Introduction

"Art is a symbol, because man is a symbol."

<div align="right">

Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis.*

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In this simulacrum that we find ourselves in, performance in many ways pushes the boundaries of its make-believe into a brutality of nowness, presence and the real to revive its power. In fact I would go as far as to say that performance has been struggling against the simulacrum by trying to break the spell of the make-believe and to activate a lived presence.

Based on the exploration of the earlier chapter, I revisit discussions around presence and being of the corporeal and cyborg in performance. Peggy Phelan's arguments in many ways echo declarations of Antonin Artaud on what the Theatre of Cruelty would be. The focus of the former however is on disappearance and the latter on not being born yet. In between this occurs what is assumed to be a true performance. Both also lay a particular emphasis on the body. The primary use of the digital to Antonin n Artaud is in amplification and as seen in the first chapter, this certainly does play a really important role.

When artists refuse to be recorded the question is mostly that of representation or the refusal of taking on representation. Has media meant the end of representation for performance, especially in a scenario where the aesthetic and the 'reality' of the media appears to increasingly be the referent for performance? Claim to the liveness of a material presence on stage is challenged by the performances that have been explored in the earlier chapters. This chapter considers the debate within performance studies itself on the nature of materiality and liveness in the present that is supposed to mark a true performance and turns the debate on the digital and the corporeal presence in performance to one about the nature of language and lived reality itself.

I begin however by looking at how performers and performance artists in the Silicon City of Bangalore seem to be responding to these questions and do so by bringing in the work of various local artists and through this carry on the discussion, before opening out the question into a deeper engagement with the performer's body as I bring in work of other performers and performance artists like Bob Flanagan and Inder Salim.

Donna Haraway has seen the formation of new subjectivities as a possible avenue to move away from a logo-centric narrative of Western theory but it is the focus on the corporeal, in the lived body itself in the work of Antonin Artaud is also another way of thinking through this problem. It is here primarily that I introduce the writings of Antonin Artaud on the Theatre of Cruelty. And it is here that the introduction of instances of physical theatre like the work of Gardzienieche or spoken word poetry and texts that focus on the body in pain, might serve to enhance the previous discussion and open up the possibility of further enquiry into the problematic of materiality of the body that has been at the core of this project.

I also draw inspiration from Oscar Wilde's reflections on Art, Suffering and the symbol of man in his reflections towards the end of his life and as a product of his own intense suffering and two years of hard labour in prison, which he with a great deal of self awareness titled *De Profundis*. Wilde's meditations on sorrow and suffering are particularly relevant here as it is interestingly in suffering, tragedy and pain that the breed of artists who choose to engage in the now and in presence express themselves. For example, the performance artist Inder Salim (who always signs as IS) cut off his own finger during one performance. He speaks of the loss and the gain of this act.

The Bangalore Response

In what was 'read' and 'seen' as a continuation of the Mangalore Pub Attacks, individual women were targeted and beaten up on the streets of Bangalore for seemingly innocuous reasons: wearing jeans, rolling their eyes at men who sized them up, for driving a car, for not speaking Kannada or for speaking English or Hindi etc.

After the attacks moved onto the streets, without the aid of cameras this time and without any group claiming responsibility, the response to these attacks it self had to change. By this time, initiators of the Pink Chaddi Campaign, were under attacks through legal means. Muthalik had issued legal notices against Nisha Susan and other administrators of the Facebook group. Though it was many of the same people involved in the first defence of the attacks on women who were involved in Fearless Karnataka or Bhiruddha Karnataka (FK/BK), they did so negotiating like the attackers their response in a different way.

If the nameless attackers hit out on the streets, the women went to police stations, groups organized and protested at the Commissioner's office, letters were written, street plays were performed, very clever and beautiful posters were designed, a 'claim back the night' event was organized where there was poetry, music and dancing. Performance walks with women and men dressing as they pleased and holding hands or with their arms around each other were conducted. The second line of attacks and the defence got comparatively much lesser Media attention, but the group still continues to update its events and legal action is continue to be engaged in. In cyberspace, the efforts of FK/BK are now part of the Pink Chaddi Campaign page that is no longer active on Facebook as the assaults and security risks were too much for Facebook to deal with and they disabled the group.

Other local artists had been thinking and responding to the questions around identity and language in interesting ways too. Bangalore based theatre practitioner Arca Mukhopadhyay working with the Portuguese national and dancer Teresa Prima, who was in the city at that time doing a Diploma in Contemporary Dance and Mixed Media Arts at Attakallari, for example put up a three hour performance at a gallery called Maya in Bangalore, which they called *Meeting Point*. As part of this performance, Teresa sent Arca a hand written invite to come to meet her at Maya. A small audience was also invited to witness the meeting. When they met they exchanged names, copied movement, spoke about the differences in their movement language and in their names and used both outdoor and indoor space to perform.

She asked him for example why he did not have his mother's name as part of name as she did at one point and got him to keep repeating her name until he could pronounce

it the way she did. He then did the same with his name and said he didn't really think about not adding his mother's name but from where he came you just didn't. When she showed some ballet like movement and asked him to copy, he tried and then said he didn't speak that language. She then did some Kallari movement saying he must speak this language and he affirmed and they did some kallari with each other for awhile. In these simple ways, performers had been trying to cut through the cyber city and engineer simple 'meeting points' with each other.

The suffering body in performance

"Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow. Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask."

-Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis.*

Bob Flanagan a 'spoken word- performance artist whose work included video imagery etc suffered from cystic fibrosis, which he succumbed to in 1996. The following his most famous piece and one that he is remembered by pushes right into the heart of sado-masochism, the boundaries of pleasure and pain explored, and the real, physical suffering that is the centre of the piece. The erotic tensions notwithstanding, or perhaps like Sade who saw that pleasure was intrinsically tied in with the subjecting of another to pain, that beyond a point the physical sensation of pain was pleasurable. Athletes, mothers giving birth, those in hard labour have all spoken of a point where beyond a point the body's pain gives way to pleasure.

Diagnosed early with cystic fibrosis a genetic disease because of which he was not expected to live beyond a few years, he however lived till the age of 43, a remarkable feat considering the nature of the disease and the general life expectancy of those suffering with it. His own sister diagnosed with the disease died at the age of 21. Part of the reason he attributed for his success in battling the disease was by 'fighting pain with pain'. One could perhaps see that the conversion of that into pleasure was a survivor's tool finally. What is more as New York Times critic Roberta Smith's obituary for him describes him in the title of the obituary she writes, he was 'a

performer who fashioned art from his pain'[20]. It is this conversion of his pain into art that invested it with a meaning beyond perhaps any he could by then find in other space that seems to authenticate the ritualized spaces of performance ability to hold pain and suffering in new ways.

Why

By
Bob Flanagan.

Because it feels good;
because it gives me an erection;
because it makes me come;
because I'm sick;
because there was so much sickness;
because I say FUCK THE SICKNESS;
because I like the attention;
because I was alone a lot;
because I was different;
because kids beat me up on the way to school;
because I was humiliated by nuns;
because of Christ and the Crucifixion;
because of Porky Pig in bondage, force-fed by some sinister creep in a
black cape;
because of stories of children hung by their wrists,
burned on the stove, scalded in tubs;
because of Mutiny on the Bounty;
because of cowboys and Indians;
because of Houdini;
because of my cousin Cliff;
because of the forts we built and the things we did inside them;
because of what's inside me;
because of my genes;
because of my parents;
because of doctors and nurses;
because they tied me to the crib so I wouldn't hurt myself;
because I had time to think;
because I had time to hold my penis;
because I had awful stomachaches and holding my penis made it feel
better;
because I felt like I was going to die;
because it makes me feel invincible;
because it makes me feel triumphant;
because I'm a Catholic;
because I still love Lent, and I still love my penis, and in spite of it all
I have no guilt;

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[20] Smith (1996).

because my parents said BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE, and this is what I want to be;

because I'm nothing but a big baby and I want to stay that way, and I want a mommy forever, even a mean one, especially a mean one;

because of all the fairy tale witches, and the wicked stepmother, and the stepsisters, and how sexy Cinderella was, smudged with soot, doomed to a life of servitude;

because of Hansel, locked in the witch's cage until he was fat enough to eat;

because of "O" and how desperately I wanted to be her;

because of my dreams;

because of the games we played;

because I've got an active imagination;

because my mother bought me Tinker Toys;

because hardware stores give me hard-ons;

because of hammers, nails, clothespins, wood, padlocks, pullies, eyebolts, thumbtacks, staple-guns, sewing needles, wooden spoons, fishing tackle, chains, metal rulers, rubber tubing, spatulas, rope, twine, C-clamps, S-hooks, razor blades, scissors, tweezers, knives, pushpins, two-by-fours, Ping-Pong paddles, alligator clips, duct tape, broomsticks, barbecue skewers, bungie cords, sawhorses, soldering irons;

because of tool sheds;

because of garages;

because of basements;

because of dungeons;

because of The Pit and the Pendulum;

because of the Tower of London;

because of the Inquisition;

because of the rack;

because of the cross;

because of the Addams Family playroom;

because of Morticia Addams and her black dress with its octopus legs;

because of motherhood;

because of Amazons;

because of the Goddess;

because of the moon;

because it's in my nature;

because it's against nature;

because it's nasty;

because it's fun;

because it flies in the face of all that's normal (whatever that is);

because I'm not normal;

because I used to think that I was part of some vast experiment and that there was this implant in my penis that made me do these things and that allowed THEM (whoever THEY were) to monitor my activities;

because I had to take my clothes off and lie inside this plastic bag so the doctors could collect my sweat;

because once upon a time I had such a high fever that my parents had
to strip me naked and wrap me in wet sheets to stop the convulsions;
because my parents loved me even more when I was suffering;
because surrender is sweet;
because I was born into a world of suffering;
because I'm attracted to it;
because I'm addicted to it;
because endorphins in the brain are like a natural kind of heroin;
because I learned to take my medicine;
because I was a big boy for taking it;
because I can take it like a man;
because, as somebody once said, HE'S GOT MORE BALLS THAN I
DO;
because it is an act of courage;
because it does take guts;
because I'm proud of it;
because I can't climb mountains;
because I'm terrible at sports;
because NO PAIN, NO GAIN;
because SPARE THE ROD AND SPOIL THE CHILD;
because YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE.

In this Bob's Magna Carta, his own masterpiece, one can see how in dealing with the erotic nature of pain rooted in a real suffering of the body and the tensions of a culture of guilt and reasoning and methods to cope with this suffering, he explores and brings to one's attention the many ways the heroism and pity of a culture reinforces and is invigorated by sado-masochism and how there is a pervasive sexual quality to pity, heroism and sado-masochism.

Many people seeing Mel Gibson's Passion of Christ described it simply as being pornographic in its violence[21] and in my own opinion were not off the mark at all in making such a judgement. In many ways the ritual and sacrament of the Mass holds this suffering, making it bearable and meaningful in ways that gets destroyed by the visual spectacle that a graphic movie about this violence creates. In Wilde's meditations on Sorrow in De Profundis, he comes back to the spectacle of suffering, the great tragedy and epiphany of Christ that is performed during each Mass and draws attention to the Greek chorus origins of the ritual of the Mass.

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[21] Pevere, Geoff. "Passion is Biblical Porn," Toronto Star, Feb 25, 2004. (Among many others)

If televised, mediatised spectacles of violence largely seems to desensitize, then it seems as if performance may offer a space to hold the sacredness of this suffering. Performance poetry such as Bob Flanagan's brings back the role of performance in holding a meaning for the extremes of physical and suffering in ways that engage with the spectacle of pleasure and voyeurism that the body in pain has also been subject too. In Bob Flanagan's performance poetry he takes on religious metaphor and symbols, he undresses the caring of parental love, he desanctifies the mother, the suffering God, the child, childhood, sickness, sex, heroism and many, many other things and in the whole processes draws attention to pain and the need to survive it over and over again. In his spoken word performance, he sanctifies the suffering body through his wit, his honest perversion, his nudity and his complete unmasking of the suffering body both in pleasure and in pain.

This unmasking is at the heart of his work. Answering a very simple question, "Why?", he gives a hundred brutal, shocking, 'in your face' answers.[22] All of which hit like bullets and cut like a knife until there is not a shred in cultural, social, familial, religious or literary metaphor that can conceal the awful visage of the suffering human body in pleasure and in its pain. He speaks of how the pain and pleasure cut through all of it: the image of Christ, the caress of a mother, the functionality of a needle and sheets, of childhood cartoons and games, hardware tools, medical information and so many other things. And yet through his work as he reveals this the visage of the suffering human body in pleasure and pain, he converts his own disease assaulted, suffering body into a performer's body. And only in doing this can he reveal the pain and pleasure of the suffering body. Thus it is the suffering body of the performer that bares a truth and holds suffering in its instrument. It is in performance that suffering gets reinvested with a meaning or that the body is able to reveal its nakedness in pain and pleasure.

And for Bob Flanagan whose Pain Journal, reveals a remarkable self-reflexivity and deeply intelligent and sardonic awareness of the usual transactions of pity, guilt and impatience around a suffering body, to achieve what becomes a testament of pain

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[22] I am deeply indebted to the Time Out Bnagalore, Gay and Lesbian columnist and freelance photographer, Priyadarshini John for first drawing my attention to this piece and to the simplicity of its power: asking why and stating a hundred Becauses.

worthy in our post-modern, post-nietzcshian times of being comparable to Job's litanies, *Why* in performance actually offers us a clue as to the deeply important role that performance takes again in the modern wasteland shorn of belief and faith. And this role is that of ritual and the performer's body, usually a suffering body that becomes an instrument of this. It is here then that Wilde's statement at the beginning of this chapter find resonance. Art has to be a symbol because man itself is a symbol, and certainly in performance, the performer's body is the symbol of both Art and Man.

"Don't act, become!"

"Truth in art is not any correspondence between the essential idea and the accidental existence; it is not the resemblance of shape to shadow, or of the form mirrored in the crystal to the form itself; it is no echo coming from a hollow hill, any more than it is a silver well of water in the valley that shows the moon to the moon and Narcissus to Narcissus. Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit. For this reason there is no truth comparable to sorrow."

While he works with a plan and design of some loose nature, his performances are unique in that he refuses to say anything about it until they have happened, because as he says, "You never know what shape it will take. What it will become." He speaks of the difficulty of cataloguing work when working for an event or exhibition. Whether it is saddling Oscar Wilde's chair, while mooning passers by in London or staging hangings in front of India Gate as protests against the death penalty, Inder Salim is very alive to the idea of presence and curious about the possibilities opened up in entering a space and allowing the performance, the event to happen. He brings to the highly symbolic spaces that he chooses as his sites for performance, his own ideological convictions, his body and his awareness of his role as the 'artist as a critic'. Though his work is often 'catalogued' in visual art exhibitions, he himself sees his work as crossing boundaries of performance and performance art.

He is one of the artists, who as I earlier mentioned signs off his emails as 'IS', who is incredibly aware of the power of now and is almost obsessed with the compulsion of presence. All his performance work seems to 'happen' within this framework. He reacts to events and incidents that are circulating in the Media and in the News, but as

an artist and performer, it is through his body in real space on the streets and symbolic sites of protest that he enacts his protest. On the Taslima Nasreen and Salman Rushdie controversy when they were being denied entry into to India, he walked the streets of Delhi with their names painted on his shirt. It is the very simplicity of his performances and in the using of the body to speak that allow for such huge resonances with the mediatized spectacles and events that he is addressing.

Even in performance work that sees itself within the trajectory of theatre and not 'performance art', actor training has taken on a very challenging nature, where the artists are encouraged 'to be' and not 'to act'. The Gardzieniecche trained Anna Helena challenged me in a workshop when I was 'acting' Juliet and asked me to 'be Juliet'. She would insist on all of us memorising the lines but when it was time for our lines, she insisted that we speak and emote everything that was happening in our minds and our emotions. "If you're hungry and thinking about a cutlet…. Say it! If you're afraid and are forgetting your lines… make that visible. Don't cloak, don't clothe what you're going through make it part of your performance."

This was a small taste I got of what is loosely caused physical theatre, but often reflects the thinking and methodology of Grotowski, Artaud and Gardzienieche, who all try to find again a meaning in performative utterance through a naked revelation of the performer's body and craft in performance. I would like in some future work, to go into the details of this work, but bring it up here so very briefly as it is too important to ignore or leave unacknowledged. This the Theatre of Cruelty that I might like to call Visceral Performativity (or Theatre of Frailty as I take into account the incredible frailty of the corporeal body exposed even in the rawness of its power) as I expand its use to cover the work of performers working in the intersecting field of performance art as well, foregrounds once more the corporeal power of the body in performance, hearkening back to ancient guttural sounds in their music and raw imagery in their text and using a lot of choral work to communicate the mass power of the body.

CONCLUSION

When I had initially conceived this project, with the intention of looking at different things in different chapters, the result I had then hoped for was not a linear narrative or a truth arrived at, but a mapping of different insights around the subject. And yet I find that as the present thesis glides through simulations, into the simulacrum and enters into an engagement into the live corporeal presence of the body in performance that there is an argument both linear and logical in many ways that is arrived at.

It appears to me that both director and playwright Girish Karnad and artistic director and choreographer Jayachandran Palazhy confront the incursion of media and technology into our lives and the way it challenges our experiences of being human and how we engage with our body and what globalization and the proliferation of the image is doing to us in terms of challenging the way we construct our identities. The actors and dancers in their work are challenged to respond and work alongside media images and simulations. The Mangalore Pub Attack and the Pink Chaddi Campaign however, are instances of how these challenges to identity are played out by non-performers. In this way the performance space expands and the engagement with a new reality is taken out of the auditorium and performed in the Media, the internet and on the streets of a city and state. It forms the simulacrum.

In this context, it seems to me that the explorations of different manifestations of what I choose for convenience to umbrella under the phrase Visceral Performativity (or perhaps Theatre of Frailty) to be a resistance against the simulacrum. The questions about what liveness is to performance, what is authentic corporeal experience, what it means to find meaning in being human again are taken up by different practitioners of the Theatre of Cruelty in an attempt to offer up the live body in performance as the final frontier of resistance against the simulacrum. It is not wonder that these artists perform such extremities of violence and disruptions to the integrity of their bodies on the one hand as maybe seen in the work of many performance art artists or leave classical aesthetic trappings to find a primeval, raw quality of the body, the voice and experience in performance as may be seen in the work of different branches of the Theatre of Cruelty. I would say however that both performance art practitioners and

theatre artists who are seeking a raw intensity to their work, are both engaging with the principles of the Theatre of Cruelty.

While some performers chose to dialogue with questions of representation in their work, accepting and allowing themselves to be open to the formation of a new subjectivity, accepting the mutation of the cyborg, many others of the Antonin Artaud and the Peggy Phelan school choose to resist this. There is something to me heroic in both of these endeavours.

To choose to present the human body in all its frailty at a given point alongside a simulated image of it, which technical glitches notwithstanding will and can perform to digital perfection, is a heroic enterprise. Furthermore the accepting of the cyborgian extension of our faculties beyond the boundaries of skin into digital worlds and the choosing to dialogue with what seems to be an alter ego is an interesting pursuit and a useful one because to critically and artistically engage with a new subjectivity is necessary to help us come to terms with our new experiences.

While Karnad is critical of this new experience and is deeply sensitive to the many ways in which it can fragment and distort our sense of self that can and does very well lead to a violent and slightly insane splitting and duplication of identities, Palazhy is a lot more optimistic about the possibilities that an engagement with technology and media can open up. The numerous aesthetic possibilities are explored in all his work, and his engagement with what happens to our humanity and identity in this process remains positive and curious. There is a sense of curious wonder in 'what may be possible' in his work and engagement. The bodies of the actors and dancers in performance in both these works are both challenged and supported by the simulations they share the stage with.

The dangers of the confusions to the self that simulations produce get manifested in corporeally not negligible ways when women are physically attacked and people are blown up as part of the creation of a media and visual spectacle. That this is not simply a question of the image but the image as part of the obliterating of the corporeal body, is taken up by very many performance and performing artists. What is

articulated by artists sometimes as a resistance to being recorded is perhaps also a resistance to being represented outside of the live performance space.

The resistance against representation is enacted through being. Acting and performance for this new line of resistance in the dramatic and performance arts is not the wearing of a mask, but the removing of it. The new training that these artists undergo and the aesthetic expression they seek is one that leads to an experience or a confrontation of what is, of being, of presence embodied and fleshed that is discomfiting and visceral. The body of the performance and performing artist has reconfigured not simply in cyborgian ways as in the work of Jayachandran Palazhy and others but also in terms of rediscovering its rawness and visceral power as in the work of the different practitioners of the Theatre of Cruelty. This then the visceral aesthetic experience that has the frailty and power of the human body as its instrument and expression is the answer of performance to the simulacrum.

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