

# **Undoing Anatomy: Resisting Global Choreographies in the Capitalism of Affects**

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Underlying the imaginaries staged and projected in texts, theater pieces, video, cinema and publicity there are certain anatomic constructions of the senses that are the conditions of possibility for those imaginaries. Such sensory anatomies underlie implicit power mechanisms in late capitalist societies, which operate at the level of the production of affect and desire of consumers as well as of the concealment of global violence through which the economic system operates. I will propose a framework of analysis of such power operations through the analysis of movement, and more precisely of what I will call the panchoreographic: a set of technological devices of global distribution that disseminate discrete, standard choreographies in bodies, thus contributing to the production and dissemination of standard affects. Finally, I will show some examples of the work developed by REVERSO in recent years that aims at the radical redefinition of the sensory anatomies that underlie media culture and information society, aiming at the production of a post-anatomical relational body.

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## **Introduction**

**T**he implicit connection between the technologies of the stage, the text, computation, the camera and the screen, makes it a relevant task to explore the issue of textuality and performativity in a transversal way that connects the theater as such with the more diffuse and ubiquitous stages of media culture and information society.

I will propose that underlying the imaginaries staged and projected in texts, theater pieces, video, cinema and publicity there are certain anatomic

constructions of the senses that are the conditions of possibility for those imaginaries. Furthermore I will argue that such sensory anatomies underlie implicit power mechanisms in late capitalist societies, which operate at the level of the production of affect and desire of consumers as well as of the concealment of global violence through which the economic system operates. I will propose a framework of analysis of such power operations through the analysis of movement, and more precisely of what I will call the panchoreographic: a set of technological devices of global distribution that disseminate discrete, standard choreographies in bodies, thus contributing to the production and dissemination of standard affects.

Finally, I will show some examples of the work developed by the laboratory and group REVERSO in recent years that aims at the radical redefinition of the sensory anatomies that underlie media culture and information society, aiming at the production of a post-anatomical relational body. The “metaformances” developed by REVERSO will be an example for a possible post-anatomical paradigm where immanence and multiplicity of relational experience substitute the spectacular passivity of the humanist subject/audience.

### **Performing Sensory Anatomies—Performing Subjectivity and Power**

The correlation between the technologies of the stage-screen-paper-book-canvas-wall-museum, on the one hand, the camera and interfaces on the other, which I will refer to as the technologies of representation and textuality, can eventually be boiled down to three basic sensing parameters: Framing and Fixity, Distance and Exteriority, Focus and Exposure, of vision, hearing and proprioception, whereby the experiencing subject assumes a fixed external position with regard to “the world” and representation, thus defining the container for an abstract disembodied subject capable of operating in terms of patterns of information without presence, where textuality has been substituted by computation, as the humanist subject has been displaced by the posthuman in information society.

Preceding or succeeding the technologies of representation are specific standardized sensory anatomies that are the conditions of possibility for the imaginaries and the textual performances enacted in those media. The production of standard sensing bodies through the technology of the camera has eventually its first modern manifestation in the use of the camera obscura by painters of the fifteenth century. Afterwards, the ubiquitous dissemination of certain orthodox approaches to the photographic image, and

later in cinema, TV, video, computers and internet, digital video, surveillance and scientific research has produced the possibility of a notion of objectivity, precisely through the sharing of a standardized framing, distance, focus and exposure of the technical images, where the camera as prosthesis becomes the necessary mechanism of standardization of sensory experience and therefore the condition of possibility of objectivity and positivism. Here lies the hyperreal character of technical images and the fact that politics is mediated by such technologies, whereby life will only matter, as far as power systems are concerned, as long as it occupies a place in the screens of global simulation of the media, as long as it is framed by the “correct” use of the camera. Thus cameras perform the status of a life as abject or sovereign. No wonder that performances for the camera have become ubiquitous, spreading the stages across all spaces controlled by media culture. Posing for a family picture, posing as tourists, posing as porn actors in cybersex... Ubiquitous poses. And ubiquitous shooting of pictures and videos. Posing and shooting: discrete choreographies for the production of affect and life-that-matters.

Interfaces are a significant part of these technologies: where they are assumed to mediate between the machine and the faciality of an abstract subject, through visual interfaces (screens) and devices that operate through them. Interfaces distribute discrete choreographies through the daily performance with the mouse, the keyboard, the joystick, movements translated into reduced cause-effect relations by the text of the software, the choreography of algorithms. These constitute what we will call the Panchoreographic: a set of technological devices of global distribution that disseminate discrete, standard choreographies in bodies, thus contributing to the production and dissemination of standard affects. The Panchoreographic is eventually key to the functioning of the Capitalism of Affect, a present condition of capitalism in which marketing strategies aim directly toward the production of affects and desires of consumers.

I will argue that the dissemination of choreographies-performances enacted by the panchoreographic is key to this process of production and diffusion, where affect turns out to be an *effect* of movements enacted by bodies at levels that both encompass and exceed the imaginary of semiotics and meaning production. Technologies of information society thus frame the subject within its condition of exteriority and fixity and at the same time enact the performances of the bodies in motion that account for the production of affect, through the enactment of standardized sensory anatomies.

Traditional theater architectures assume a centrality of vision and hearing that ignore the multidimensional space of experience and perception. Bodies in theater and dance are framed in their condition of distance and exteriority that constitute the basis for the spectacular society. The position of the spectator is fixed and secured in its exteriority. In a world entirely mediated by communication technologies, by ubiquitous screens and cameras, there is hardly any chance for experience to have a life of its own outside the framings of the spectacular. Participatory paradigms of web 2.0<sup>1</sup> are in fact disseminating the framings of spectacular action in unprecedented manners, whereby participation is always already framed within mechanisms of production of subjectivity and power that leave little or no room for emergence amidst the restless impingement of never-ending simulation.

In the theater of surveillance and control every camera is potentially a surveillance camera. The political scenario enacted by bodies in media culture through the pervasive use of cameras in terms of standard framings, focus, distances and exposures is one in which “citizens” permanently re-enact surveillance and control, precisely through re-enacting the conditions of cultural intelligibility of interpretation which has at its basis a precise sensory anatomy. Ultimately sensory anatomies account for the formation of the social body and for the enactment of power and violence. It is only through the establishment of an exterior fixed perspective that both the subject and the material objective world are constituted, thus opening the ground for the measuring, fragmentation, territorialization of reality.

It is through the establishment of an external fixed perspective that it is possible to recognize patterns and forms. I will argue that for contemporary accounts of violence and power to operate and materialize, it is necessary to reproduce the anatomical frameworks that render reality measurable and exterior to the performing subject. Normative categories of gender, sexuality, intimacy, race, class, age, bodily form or disability, require the mapping of bodies according to recognizable patterns. Most evident is the case of sexuality and gender, whereby biological sex, as the subtract for viable or abject subjectivity, is constructed through arbitrary mapping of the body in genital anatomies and their measurement with regard to functional heterosexual reproduction criteria. The surgical operations per-

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1. Web. 2.0 is the paradigm for a participatory internet or world wide web, currently in use and subject to further development, in which the consumer is presented as “prosumer,” or producer of contents and not mere spectator.

formed on the bodies of intersex people are one of the violent forms of enactment of such regime.

Is it possible to think of a different paradigm, where it is no longer possible to situate oneself in an exterior and fixed position, where it is no longer possible to produce an account of objective material world that is thus made available for power operations to map and measure, for violence to operate? Traditionally critical discourses on the posthuman have proposed the idea of a heterogeneous subject that is situated in a multidimensional and changing field that operates according to multiple perspectives.

What if we have no perspective any longer? What if we live in a plane of immanence with the world? How could such an experience be brought together? Or do we experience immanence already at various levels?

### **Post-anatomical Bodies—Performing Immanence**

What happens if we radically transpose the technology of representation?

Over the past two years in the framework of the Institute REVERSO, we have developed a number of media performance projects in which surveillance cameras are placed on the skin, pointing to the skin, anywhere on the body for the performance of microdances, movements performed through looking at the image in such a way that the image of the abstract amorphous body fragments “moves” the body, rather than it moving through usual proprioceptive awareness. The Nietzschean idea that there is no doer behind the deed, no dancer behind the dance, no subject behind the action, takes over.

The parameters that account for the technology of representation have dissolved: there is no longer a distance and exteriority of vision, no single fixed framing, no clear focus and exposure: the eyes of the (former) subject are no longer placed in a face, but have transposed everywhere on the body, and move constantly in a triple or quadruple choreography of vision: the movement of the camera itself, the movement of the microdances that the camera sees, the movement of the partial lighting placed on the body, which has become its own stage in a complete circuit of self-production. Occasionally the body is also wearing the projector thus choreographing the projection itself which can also be directed to the same body or to other bodies.

This radical choreography of vision is one in which sensing has become movement (it always was, but it was presumed to be the sensing of an abstract fixity) in which the vision is immanent with the movement it is part

of, since it is never fully possible to separate the microdances from the choreography of the camera, the lighting and the projection.

The body rendered by this transposition is unrecognizable, only nearly legible, it has no clear defined anatomy, no binary sex and gender, no recognizable humanity, it proliferates in multiple becomings of sex and species, it is a becoming element and inorganic. In parallel, the voice is electronically processed life, spatialized in four channels, dissolved, amplified and multiplied, so that again the human gendered voice is no longer intelligible; instead a chorus of dissolving voices, nearly human, nearly organic, perhaps animal, perhaps inorganic, generates a decentralized field of hearing that again informs proprioception in novel ways and overlaps with the images of the post-anatomical body so that it seems that it is the amorphous anti-anatomy that “speaks.”

The audience has no fixed, secured space. There is no division between their space and the space of the performer: at times performers approach the skin of the audience that becomes part of the landscape. A new kind of intimacy mediated by the surveillance camera, or rather a post-intimate relationship in which there is no intelligibility that allows to fully recognize an action as public or intimate.

The project spreads in a variety of media, disseminating the body without anatomy like an antibody of form: performance in closed spaces, urban interventions, performances online and in private houses, video, photography, sculpture, architecture, with one or many performers, in large or small spaces, with one or many persons in the audience. Thus the project aims at challenging the anatomy of the social body and its disciplinary frameworks of power and coercion. From the extensive measurable space of architecture planning, we go over to a notion of intensive space in which there is no measurable space pre-existing the body, but rather space is an unfolding and projection of the motions of the body. The body becomes an intensive space, radically decentralized.

*Microdances* is a photography, video, installation and performance project concerned with two related aspects: the transformation of the form of the body, of its landscapes and languages, its intelligibility as a body through the proximity of the camera and the precise framing; and secondly, the transformation of the perception of the body that happens when you improvise *through* the fragmented *image* of the body.

In the photography series the concern is purely with framing, proximity and focus. The black and white images have no digital processing but the photographic medium is explored in directions that challenge the notion of

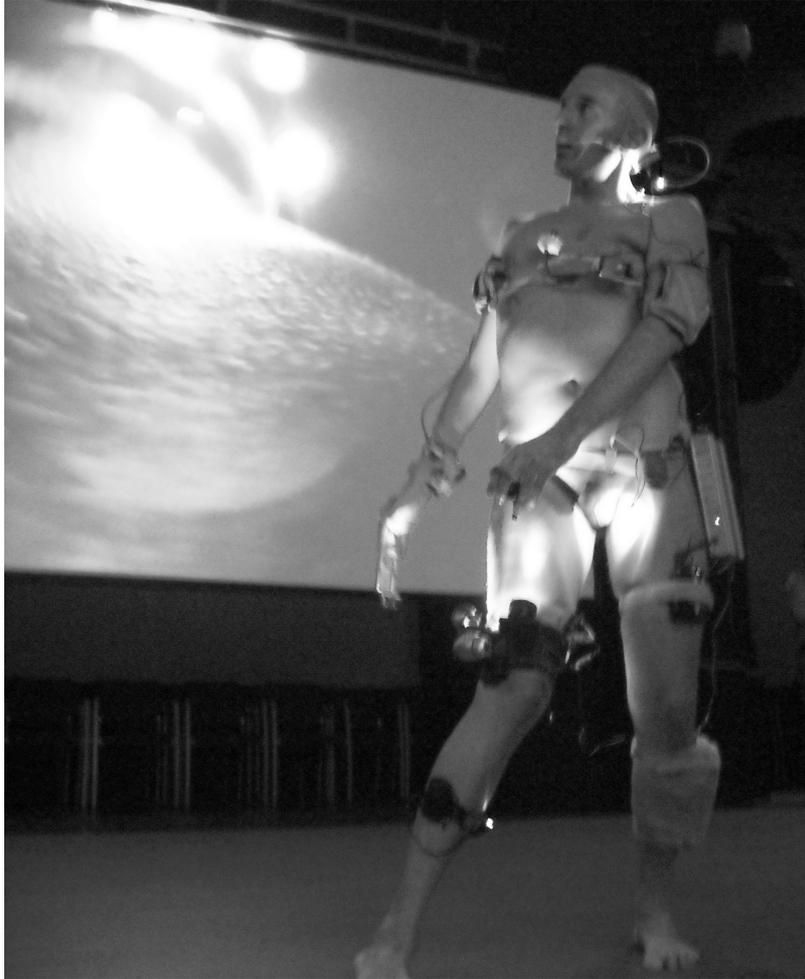
objectivity. A question is posed: Is this a body? What part of the body is it? It is alien and yet so near, its excess is engulfing, it absorbs you in every direction, it cannot be contained. It is an exploration of unknown landscapes and forms that may or may not sediment and enter the realm of the concrete.

In the video series (both videodance and abstract film) similar framings are explored but the time dimension is crucial now. A new layer comes in: the abstraction of the movement, of the body as time, of gesture, the exploration of minute movements that evolve, in a minimalist manner, like phonemes and syllables of a potentially new language. Any movement thus amplified and framed, acquires suddenly an enormous and open potential of signification that explores all the uncertainties and contingencies of our understanding. Yet the most interesting part of the process is not the finished video pieces and the time editing, but the *process of improvising* in front of the camera: I move watching the image of the body fragment in a monitor or projection. It is my body yet at some point I start to perceive it as something other, the amplified scale induces the discovery of new realms of movement, sensation, and time, I suddenly lose contact with the body from within... only to recover it through the embodiment of the amplified fragment that has become another body. I become another body that is itself my own. It is a thrilling sensation of rediscovering embodiment, and the more you practise, the more you explore the new realm, the more the improvisation sediments in a *tèkhne*.

It's also a deterritorialization of the body: any part of the body, and any movement it may do can be performed in front of the camera, and it becomes something other. It is not a parody of the body's actions, but an open redefinition into an unknown field. For example you may find it hard to distinguish the organs (are they not discrete representations after all?) and take a hand for a sexual organ that palpitates, but then who cares; it is not about eroticizing the whole body (or perhaps yes) but rather the territory of sex itself is put into question: it cannot quite be pornographic or post-pornographic, for the actions and the parts of the body are always at the frontier of the intelligible. They could be many different things. It is no longer so relevant whether it is a body or something other, for it speaks by itself, as pure excess of language. Yet I try to explore the disturbing threshold where you are not sure any longer of what it is that you are seeing: the threshold of the morphogenesis of representation.

Finally, I also do this improvising or micro-choreographing in live performance with the naked body moving in front of the camera while the amplified image, projected onto translucent screens, becomes like a huge ar-

chitecture, a landscape I inhabit. The voice is sampled live and processed through the camera-based interaction of the body fragments, becoming also a dense, low sound-landscape where the original voice is hardly recognized any longer.



*Fig. 1. Antibodies of Surveillance—Microdances. Performance by REVERSO. Canarias Mediafest 2008. Photo by Rafa Moran.*

*Antibodies of Surveillance—Microdances* is a transmedia “metaformance” (performance-installation-intervention-architecture-instrument-process-metabody) that uses wireless micro surveillance cameras on the

naked body as interface to generate cross-media, analogue-digital, interactual, intersensory and emergent environments, liquid and poetic spaces of the body, which subvert the technology of surveillance and the camera in order to question implicit mechanisms of power and control, to defy the categories of gender and sexuality, and produce a (meta)body of relational intensities, expanded and diffuse, pan-gender and metasexual; an Antibody that defies the viral mechanisms of signification, control and standardization in the late capitalist market society.

The images, projected onto large translucent screens like a landscape of moving body fragments, are analyzed in real time and the outcoming movement parameters process the voice of the performers, spatialized in four channels, distorted until it becomes a fluid landscape, a granular chorus of multiple voices. Performers, wearing partial illumination on their bodies, are immersed in the same space with the audience, surrounded by large projections and sound, an intimate space for an intimate interface, where the performers move and interact with each other, and with the audience, whose skin may become part of the landscape, generating new uncertain possibilities of (post-intimate) relation.



*Fig. 2. Antibodies–Dissolution of the Body Politic. Performance by REVERSO. Alterarte-Murcia 2008. Photo by Alterarte.*

The proximity of the cameras, placed all over the body, with no distinctions of discursive or normative boundaries, offers a landscape view that is both intimate, because of the proximity, and absorbing, because of the scale of the projections. There is often a confusion to our eye, used to Cartesian reproductions of known forms, so that it is not clear what part of the body you see, or what it is doing.

The micro evolutions of movement in minimalist chains are indeed choreographies. These micromovements seem quite essential in character: they may be the kinds of micromovements that we as bodies are unconsciously doing all the time, yet suddenly they acquire a completely new scale of meaning and potential. Since we cannot ascribe precise meanings to the movements, they relate often to palpitating organs and proximities such as they are at times perceived and embodied in the formless flow of sex. Every organ could be a sexual organ that palpitates, and yet the impossibility to fully recognize it as sexual organ breaks down the lines that define the territory of sex as such, and with it of pornography. Every movement is a potential organ of an intensive body that resists organicity and therefore is truly a body without organs.

In fact this is a deterritorialization of the body: any part of the body, and any movement it may do can be performed in front of the camera, and it becomes something other. It is not a parody of the body's actions, but an open redefinition into an unknown field. Intimate transactions that are hardly legible or not legible at all, open to multiple understandings.

What is at stake in this process is of the highest importance since it means negotiating the frontiers of the legal, of viable subjectivity. What kind of political redefinitions of viable subjects and bodies can we do if we operate in the frontier of the intelligible? Can the intimate interface challenge the frontiers of viable embodied subjectivity?

The surveillance cameras are oriented towards intimate transactions and parts of the body, however they fail to reproduce the framework of representation in which they are intelligible and thus cannot be subjected to control. In fact the image of the cameras is analyzed in a software to extract parameters of movement that serve to interact with the expanded audiovisual environment, that consists of the processed voice, and the processed image of the cameras. The data of analysis of movement serve the purpose of generating an environment in which the fixity of the body and its intelligibility are further explored into the realm of dissolution, rather than concreteness. The discrete formalization of the body through surveillance cameras is thus at the service of dissolution and amorphousness, of further

opening the lines of intelligibility into the unspeakable. *The bodies of surveillance collapse in the realm of the amorphous.*

*Antibodies-Dissolution of the Body Politic* is a “metamedia metafor-  
mance,” a political, artistic and technological intervention/performance/action



*Fig. 3. Antibodies of Surveillance—Microdances. Performance by REVERSO. Festival Zona Híbrida, Madrid 2008. Photo by Berta Delgado.*

in the public space of the city by REVERSO. A performer uses surveillance cameras on the body to decompose its anatomy and gender, and undo mechanisms of social control, in a convergence of dance, performance, media arts, electroacoustics, architecture and space interventions. It is a post-intimate, postqueer performance/action/intervention.

A naked body walks by the streets of the city with 4 to 8 micro-surveillance cameras placed on the skin, projecting fragments of the body through a projector placed in the chest. Images become unintelligible and amorphous through the proximity and the angle of the cameras. At the same time exposed and illegible, the hypervigilated body becomes uncontrollable: amorphous, post-anatomic, pan-gender, defying binaries and categories of sexuality and intimacy. It moves slowly in a series of minimalist micro-dances, micro-choreographies of a fragmented and multiple body that defies all categorization, as it appeals to the desiring look in its diffuse and fragmentary potential. Its voice is processed life in a minicomputer, becoming a chorus of dissolving voices. Through relating to by-passers new forms of relationship occur, new forms of public intimacy mediated by the surveillance camera, misused as instrument of proximity. The frontiers of anatomy, identity and form dissolve and the desiring look is dispersed in amorphous fragments, in constant morphogenesis.

An illegible, irreducible, poetic and purposeless action, with radical political after-effects and resonances: so does the group REVERSO attempt to outline that we are all vigilated and subdued to multiple explicit and implicit norms, non-verbal and intensive architectures for the bodies that we tacitly accept. Subverting the same technologies that constitute the norms, the vigilated body rebels against mechanisms of control and against the normative and disciplinary scaffolding of a market-driven management of bodies. A political experiment in wearable technology, an exercise in the undoing of surveillance and in deconstructing implicit power regimes.

This is the MUBP: MOBILE UNIT FOR BODY PRODUCTION, an inverse surveillance system, a war-machine against the disciplinary social organism understood as apparatus of power and violence, the gender, sexuality and public-private binaries and the mechanisms of affective production of bodies in late capitalism.

### **Epilogue—Quantum Experience**

A moving-dancing body projects itself in multidimensional time-spaces. In fact, for the purpose of science, it might be the case that it is much more efficient to approach the quantum realm through notions of choreog-

raphy rather than through visual representation and fixity. And it may be the case that by operating on this plane of immanence we may induce a quantum-experience to our daily life.

The kind of ethics and ecology that may be proposed in this field of immanence and relationality is an open question, yet we propose such reappropriations of technologies of control as necessary fields of aesthetic and political operation in our times, if we are to go beyond the prescribed anatomical limits to our knowledge and self production and into a more open horizon of emergence.

*Institute REVERSO - [www.reverso.org](http://www.reverso.org)*

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