The Locus of Looking - Dissecting Visuality in the Theatre
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— As Lacan observed, the geometrical dimension allows for a glimpse of how the subject is caught maneuvered, captured inside the field of vision, and how painting can deliberately exploit it to captivate the ‘subject’ in a relation of desire, but one that remains enigmatic. [...] That the place of the ‘subject’ is not the geometrical point defined by optic geometry, and that the same subject moves about within the painting, that it can be attracted and seduced by it, like Narcissus by his specular reflection, such is the very law of vision. In this respect, the visible resembles the tangible: my hand can touch something only because it can itself be touched, and if vision, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, following Descartes, is ‘a palpation of the gaze’ it follows that the person who gazes must not be unfamiliar to the world upon which he looks: “From the moment I see my vision must be doubled by a complementary vision, or another vision: myself seen from without as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, in the process of considering it from a certain spot” — (Damish 1995: 46, italics in the text).

As Duchamp in his Etant donnés shows, the seer is always also an element seen within the visual field. This condition of being seen, of being part of the visible world, is what threatens to undermine the condition of the seer as the one who is able to see it ‘as it is.’ This awareness undermines the position granted by perspective, a position marked by absence. Awareness of being seen undermines the illusion of mastery of the visual field because it brings with it an awareness of being seen from a position from which one cannot see oneself.

In this chapter, I will explore some of the implications of the intertwining of seeing and being seen, in dialogue with Heinrich von Kleist’s text Über das Marionettentheater (On the Puppet Theatre, 1810) and a performance based on this text titled The Path of the Dancer’s Soul (De Zieleweg van de Danser), co-created by theater director Gerardjan Rijnders and choreographer Krisztina de Châtel, and performed by a dancer and an actor. The Path of the Dancer’s Soul blurs the boundary between dance and text-based theatre, a move that, as pointed out in the previous chapters, is typical of many experiments by Dutch and Flemish theatre makers in the 1980s and 1990s, including Gerardjan Rijnders himself. Rijnders worked with the Dutch National Ballet for his version of The Bacchae, and later used the experiences he gained from working with these dancers to create Ballet with actors from his own company.

The Path of the Dancer’s Soul is a continuation of these explorations in what, at first sight, seems to be a paradoxical format. A theatre director, a choreographer, a dancer and an actor collaborate to come up with a performance in which an actor stands still and speaks a text on one side of
the stage, while on the other side a silent dancer performs dance movements. The stage is thus divided into two in a way that seems to confirm rather than cross or dissolve the boundary between the disciplines.

The title of the show is a quote taken from Von Kleist's text. This text consists of three short stories about bodies seen, followed by a conclusion that turns the three stories into an argument about the relationship between self-consciousness and bodily grace. Von Kleist wrote that self-awareness and bodily grace are antithetical. The less self-conscious living beings are, the more beautiful their bodily appearance is, thus relating grace and bodily beauty to a state of innocence that precedes the awakening of self-awareness. Typically, Von Kleist's text directs all attention to bodies seen, implicitly placing the seer in the position of objective observer of what is there to be seen. In their staging, however, Rijnders and De Châtel manage to redirect attention and to expose the body seeing. Their staging reveals Von Kleist's narrator's objective observations on bodies seen as a highly subjective account. Rather than resulting from the consciousness of the bodies he sees, it seems to be his own consciousness that produces the disorders he observes in them.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall — In Von Kleist's On the Puppet Theatre, a first-person narrator tells about an encounter some years earlier with Mr. C, the chief dancer of the opera-ballet in the town of M. Much to his surprise, the narrator discovers that Mr. C is a great admirer of the puppet theater. Mr. C appears to think that puppets make much better dancers than human beings, and he goes so far as to state that "any dancer who wished to improve his art might learn all sorts of things from them" (Von Kleist 1982: 211). The narrator sits down with him to listen to the grounds on which he bases this remarkable assertion.

According to Mr. C, the movements of the marionette are more beautiful because they are more natural, and he explains this beautiful naturalness, or natural beauty, in terms of a lack of self-awareness. He acknowledges that the range of movements that these mechanical bodies can produce is, of course, limited. But the lightness, grace, and serenity with which they are executed must, according to him, amaze every thinking person. These movements are produced by an operation that may seem simple from a mechanical point of view – consisting of a movement of the center of gravity in a straight or curved line – but which is really quite mysterious, "for it is nothing less than the path of the dancer's soul" (Von Kleist 1982: 212, italics in the text). In the mechanical puppet, this soul is located in the exact center of gravity of the puppet's body, and this is what makes their movements so graceful.
Unlike living dancers, the puppets have the advantage of counter-gravity. They know nothing of the inertia of matter, which of all properties is the most obstructive to the dance: for the force that lifts them into the air is greater than that which pulls them to the ground” (Von Kleist 1982: 214).

This weight that grounds living dancers also appears to have a metaphorical meaning. Mr. C associates the disturbed relationship between movement and soul, which he observes in living dancers, with the Fall. Living dancers paid for their bite from the apple of knowledge with the loss of grace. More than their material weight, it seems to be their conscious awareness of themselves as bodies seen, that disturbs the relationship between their soul and their movements. As a result, their vis matrix – or soul – is usually located at any point other than the center of gravity, which results in the disturbance of natural grace and produces affectation, which Mr. C associates with baroque mannerism.

For Mr. C, the dancing body of the marionette represents a state of natural grace and innocence – a state that he, as a conscious being, has lost. The naturalness and truthfulness he perceives in the marionette’s movement therefore, do not result from a convincing representation of bodies as he knows them. It is not because he is able to recognize himself in these bodies that they are so attractive to him; on the contrary, the marionette’s true and natural movements are more ideal than his own, and they therefore seem to promise fulfillment of what he lacks. Looking at the marionette’s dance provides him with a link to a state of innocence he has lost. It provides him with a provisional, temporary, and of course – in the end – incomplete recourse to what he will never (again) be.

The narrator replies that he, too, knows only too well the “disorders that consciousness can produce” (Von Kleist 1982: 214), and tells of an event that happened to him three years before. He had been swimming with a young man whose physical form seemed to radiate a marvelous grace, of which the young man was not yet aware. While the young man was drying himself, he unconsciously assumed the position of a famous statue called the Spinario, a statue they had admired in Paris shortly before. Looking at himself in a large mirror, the young man recognized the similarity and jubilantly pointed it out to the narrator. The narrator, however, although he had had to admit that he had noticed it too, laughed, saying that the boy was seeing phantoms. The boy, confused, tried to re-create the jubilant moment, but was not able to do so.

From this day on, as though from that very moment, an inconceivable transformation began in that young man. He would stand whole days before the mirror; one charm after the other fell from him. An invisible and incomprehensible force, like an iron net, seemed to spread over the free play of his gestures, and when one year had passed not a trace could be detected of that sweetness which had once so delighted the sight of all who surrounded him (Von Kleist 1982: 215).
In front of the mirror, the body seeing and the body seen, separated in the case of the marionette, merge into one, and it is exactly this merging that, according to Mr. C, produces the reprehensible condition of self-consciousness. The marionette's inability to see prevents it from making the discovery that the boy made. The puppet will never become aware of itself as a visible body and, therefore, will not lose its bodily grace. The boy, however, did recognize himself in the mirror; he recognized the Spinario's beauty as his own, which resulted in one jubilant moment; from that moment on, however, he was on a downhill path. Like Mr. C, nothing is left for him but to mirror himself in the ideal but unattainable grace of, for example, the marionette.

Von Kleist's story about the boy in front of the mirror shows remarkable similarities with Lacan's psychoanalytical account of the development of a sense of self in what he calls the mirror stage. The mirror stage describes the moment the young child is suddenly able to recognize the image of its body in the mirror, that is, to recognize an image of its body as its own. According to Lacan, it is at this moment that the ego comes into existence as a mental refraction of that image.

Lacan founds his concept of the ego on Freud's remark that "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego: it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (Freud 1961: 27). With this statement, Freud acknowledges that our experience of self is always circumscribed by and derived from the body. In the Lacanian mirror stage, the role of vision in the inauguration of the self is given a hitherto unimagined prominence. Through the mirror stage vision, body and self are inextricably intertwined. It is through the mirror stage that one enters the scopic domain. Lacan calls it the "threshold of the visible world" (Lacan 1977: 3). Furthermore, what is formed in the mirror stage will be the rootstock of later identifications.

The moment the child recognizes itself in the mirror image is, according to Lacan, "an identification in the full sense that analysis gives to the term," namely "the transformation that takes place in the subject as he assumes an image" (Lacan 1977: 2). It is a jubilant moment, for the visual imago of the body is more coherent than the organic disturbance and discord of the body as felt. However, as Lacan points out, the jubilant moment of assuming an image is in fact a mis-recognition: It is an identification with something outside the self. Like the marionette, the mirror presents an image of a more ideal body, but unlike Mr. C, the child in front of the mirror does not see a more ideal other body. Instead, it recognizes the image as its own, and identifies with it as the form – or Gestalt – of the ego in a way that conceals its own lack. This conflation of self and other on the threshold of the visible world will remain an important ingredient of vision for the rest of the subject's life.
Inner Mimicry — Lacan presented his idea on the mirror stage at a conference of the International Psychoanalytic Association in Marienbad in 1936. Three years later, John Martin published *Introduction to the Dance*. Like Von Kleist, Martin believes that looking at dancing bodies is so attractive because — in the ideal case — it allows for direct contact with the moving force — or *vis motrix* — behind the movements seen. This way, dance can compensate for something lost, for a lack.

All art, with the dance in the forefront, is a matter of compensation. It deals not with what we already have, but with what we lack (Martin 1939: 130).

For Martin then, as for Von Kleist, this lack results from the loss of a more natural or original state.

The oneness of all dance lies in the fact that in its every manifestation it consists of movement arranged in form to provide compensation for suppressions and unfulfillments in life experience (Martin 1939: 132).

According to Martin, modern life does not offer the opportunity to live one's inherent potentialities to the maximum. Therefore, a set of circumstances must be set up to compensate for the denials and suppressions that occur in daily life. Dance is such a circumstance: it helps to restore the individual to what Martin calls "normal and harmonious functioning," that is, to a more natural functioning which, according to him, is lost during the process of ongoing civilization. This re-creational function of dance applies not only to dancing, but also to looking at dance. Looking is what Martin does.

For Martin, the *vis motrix* or soul of the dance does not reside in the center of gravity of the moving body, but in its ability to tap into pan-human emotions. Through looking at dancing bodies, we have, according to him, access to a universal core of basic human feelings made evident through the choreography and performance, and this is accomplished through what Martin calls the body's capacity for *inner mimicry*. Through inner mimicry, we cease to be mere spectators and become participants in the movement that is presented to us and though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature (Martin 1965: 3).

Through a reaction of bodily responsiveness not unlike the one of the man photographed by Renée Kool in front of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* (fig. 5), we become aware of how it feels to make movements seen without actually executing them. Rather, this bodily awareness allows us to feel not only movements, but also feelings of the body seen executing them because, according to Martin, there is a natural connection between seeing movement and feeling it, and between feeling movement and emotions. In this way, dance provides us with a universal language that unites all mankind.
Martin writes not about marionettes, but about modern dance. With his explanation, he provided a rationale for the (then) new modern dance. His theory revises understandings of the meaning of bodies seen on stage and no longer explains them in terms of Swans, Willis, or other ghosts in the representation of a narrative on stage, nor reducing them to sexualized appearances constructed to satisfy the desires of a male gaze. Nevertheless, his explanation also presents problems. As Susan Foster points out, Martin presupposes an intrinsic and mechanistic connection between seeing, movement, and feeling.

[He] imagines movement to be the transparent vehicle of an innermost, and hence, pan-human emotional realm. In the same way that muscular action intrinsically links to emotion, so for Martin, the individual psyche replicates the tensile patterns of the universal human condition. (Foster, unpublished paper)

He builds his universalist claim on the presupposition that the body spontaneously maps the contours of the psyche, the veracity of its pronouncements a direct product of its intrinsic connection to interiority. This would suggest that all human bodies have the capacity to feel what other bodies feel just by looking at them. Yet, notwithstanding the claimed universality of this pan-human realm of feelings, not all humans appear to have equal access to it, nor do all human bodies appear to be equally able to express these universal emotions through their movements. Martin's body willingly mimics some bodies, but refuses to mimic others. For, while his concept of inner mimicry serves to justify Martha Graham's impersonations of native American dances and Helen Tamiris' embodiment of the plight of the Negro, he also uses it to criticize black and native dancers for being too specific to represent the universal. Like Von Kleist, he blames this difference on disorders perceived in the bodies seen, claiming that it is their racial and ethnic features that obstruct direct access to their vis motrix. They have to leave behind their racial and ethnic features in order to enter a realm Martha Graham and Helen Tamiris possess 'by nature.'

Spacing-out the Mirror Stage — In Martin's model there are two bodies: the one seeing and feeling in the auditorium, and the one seen as a spectacle on stage. The gap separating them is bridged by an instantaneous mapping of one body onto the other within the act of looking. Although Martin does not refer to psychoanalysis, it is hard to miss the analogy of his theory of seeing dance with the Lacanian scenario of the mirror stage. And, surprisingly, Silverman's critique of the Lacanian mirror stage in The Threshold of the Visible World (1996) parallels Foster's critique of Martin on at least one crucial point, namely the presupposed instantaneous and natural character of the jump from the body felt to the body seen needed to support the claim for universality.
In Lacan, this instantaneous (mis)recognition serves the constitution of the self. In Martin, it allows for a direct contact with the feelings of the other body seen on stage. In both cases, the automatic alignment of the visual and the corporeal as presupposed by the authors produces a mixing up of what is self and what is other. This mixing up is the core of Silverman's critical engagement with Lacan. Her project is not to undo this mixing up, but to 'space-out' the instant in which it is supposed to take place, in order to show it as a process of interaction that takes place over time and in which different positions are involved. A process, furthermore, that is not the result of natural or intrinsic mechanisms, but is mediated by culture.

Silverman turns to the work of Henri Wallon and Paul Schilder, two contemporaries of Lacan, for a slightly different account of the mirror stage, one focusing less exclusively on vision in the constitution of the self. According to Lacan, the mirror image itself - the image of the body seen in the mirror - is sufficient to induce the "assuming of an image" that inaugurates the self. Silverman comes up with an alternative model, in which the bodily ego has a sensational as well as a visual dimension. A model, furthermore, in which the bodily ego is not unified but produced in an ongoing process of "laborious stitching together of disparate parts" (Silverman 1996: 17).

Following Wallon, Silverman calls these components the "exteroceptive" ego and the "proprioceptive" ego. The former is comparable to the mirror image; the latter refers to "the egoic component to which signifiers of deixis like 'here,' 'there,' and 'my' are keyed" (Silverman 1996: 16). Silverman points out the etymological roots of the term proprioceptivity as a combination of proprius - "which includes among its central meanings, 'personal,' 'individual,' 'characteristic,' and 'belonging'" and capere, "which means 'to grasp,' 'to conceive,' and to catch'" (ibid.) She concludes that proprioception signifies "something like 'the apprehension on the part of the subject of his or her 'ownness'" (ibid.). Proprioceptivity is bound up with the body's sensation of occupying a point in space, and with the terms under which it does so. It encompasses the muscular system in its totality, and involves a non-visual mapping of the bodily form on the basis of a gathering together of otherwise disparate and scattered sensations, provided by the various sense organs. And, finally, it "provides something which the specular imago alone could never provide - something which Wallon elsewhere, in an unfortunate choice of words, designates as 'presence'" (ibid.).

**Embodied Presence** — Silverman calls Wallon's use of the term 'presence' unfortunate, because it does not correspond with the idea of presence as being non-relational and independent from cultural interference. The concept of proprioceptivity as Silverman develops it on the basis of Wallon, includes all the effects of physical interactions not only with the physical environment, but also with other bodies. These interactions take place 'within culture.'
Through these interactions the subject comes to have a body that is sensation-ally marked by gender, race, and sexual preference. It is in relation to this sensationally marked part of the bodily ego that we perceive things as being exterior to us, that the specular image might be said to be ‘outside.’ It is also this relationship that, in Silverman’s re-reading of Lacan through Wallon, allows for the jubilant experience of ‘here and now-ness’, in which the image outside and the bodily self as experienced from the inside seem to merge into one. Silverman writes:

As I have already suggested, the visual imago cannot by itself induce in the subject that méconnaissance about which Lacan writes. The experience which each of us at times has of being ‘ourselves’ – the triumph of what I have been designating the moi part of the bodily ego – depends on the smooth integration of the visual imago with the proprioceptive or sensational ego. When the former seems unified with the latter, the subject experiences that mode of ‘altogetherness’ generally synonymous with ‘presence’. When these two bodies come apart, that ‘presence’ is lost (Silverman 1996: 17, italics in the text).

‘Presence’ thus understood is not something given and observed to be ‘over there,’ but an effect produced as a result of a particular relationship between visual imago and proprioceptive ego, one that suggests its own absence in a jubilant moment of (mis)recognition. ‘Presence’ results from a relationship between a body seeing and the image of a body seen, and both sides of this relationship as well as what connects them, are embedded in culture. Within this relationship, ‘presence’ is an experience of confirmation of the body seeing rather than a quality observed or present in a body seen. It is for these reasons that Silverman calls the term ‘presence’ unfortunate. It is for these very same reasons that I think such a relational notion of ‘presence’ might be a useful concept for rethinking the intense effects produced by the bodies seen on the contemporary stage.

Wallon’s notion of ‘presence’ might help to turn presence into a critical and productive concept again, because it allows for a relocation of ‘presence’ to the eye of the beholder. It helps to understand presence as an effect of culturally mediated vision, constituted within a relationship of seer and seen. Furthermore, Silverman’s re-reading of the mirror stage through Wallon makes it possible to theorize how the eye of the beholder is embodied, that is, how the beholder, as a body, is involved in seeing bodies on stage. Finally, this new notion of theatrical presence might contribute to a re-reading of John Martin’s concept of inner mimicry as a way of making things one’s own through a process of non-visual mapping of what is seen on a culturally inflected body.

Yet, if the mirror stage is to be used as a model for the theater, some questions have to be answered. Is it possible to use the mirror image model of identification to describe the relationship with bodies other than one’s own? Can the model of mirror stage identification describe what happens
when bodies see bodies that are not comparable to a mirror image in the strict sense, as for example John Martin's 'assuming' of the image of Martha Graham's body? This immediately brings up a second question: Why does his proprioceptive ego smoothly integrate with Martha Graham's white female body, but not with the image of a black dancer? What forms the limits of mirror stage identification?

The Screen — In Lacan's account of the mirror stage, the subject 'assumes an image' and as a result a transformation takes place, one that inaugurates the self as we know it. The image assumed differs from the body as felt in some important respects. Lacan puts it as follows:

The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as a Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (un relief de stature) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him (Lacan 1977: 2, italics in the text).

The difference between the body as experienced from within and the image perceived in the mirror, is of crucial importance for the assuming of the image to take place. It is because the image is more attractive than the body as felt, that the infant subject is prompted to recognize it as its own. At the same time, Lacan's reliance on the mirror – that is, on a tableau in which the visual image seems to be a direct extension of the physical body of the child and naturally related to it – implicitly but strongly suggests the importance of correspondence. As a model, the mirror suggests that the child recognizes itself in the image, because it is an image of its own body and is recognized as such because it is the same. At this point as well, Silverman argues for more 'space' in the Lacanian model. She sets out to theorize the possibility of a disjunctive relationship between visual imago and sensational body, a relationship that is mediated by culture. She proposes to replace the mirror with Lacan's concept of the screen from Seminar XI.

In Seminar XI, Lacan repeats what he had said previously, namely that for his or her visual identity the subject relies on external representation. In his explanation here, however, he does not refer to a mirror, but to what he calls the screen. The screen is not reflective like a mirror surface, but is opaque. The images of the screen appear as a result not of mechanical reflection, but of cultural intervention. The screen makes visible what culture admits, and blocks out the rest. In Male Subjectivity at the Margins (1992), Silverman proposes imagining the screen as the repertoire of representations by means of which our culture figures all of those many varieties of 'difference' through which social identity is inscribed (Silverman 1992: 150).
Von Kleist’s story of the boy in front of the mirror offers an example of the working of the screen. In this story, the boy does not recognize himself in a mere image of his body in the mirror. His jubilant moment of (mis)recognition takes place at the moment that his mirror image resembles a classical statue that he and the narrator had admired shortly before. The classical statue represents an ideal of bodily beauty, especially at the time Von Kleist wrote this text. “Copies are familiar and to be found in most German collections” he says (Von Kleist 1982: 215). The statue represents an ideal that belongs to the cultural repertoire of images that makes up the screen.

There is no existential connection between the screen image and the subject who is defined through it, and no necessary analogy. The screen can invite identification with images that are rather different from a mirror image in the literal sense. This distance, however, does not imply freedom. To be able to successfully invite identification, the image must possess a certain ideality. It must appeal to a desire, just as the mirror image appeals to the child who identifies with it. What can appear as ideal, is culturally mediated. Furthermore, what is culturally mediated is not only what can appear as an ideal image, but also who is allowed to identify with it. It is not enough that the subject (mis)recognizes him or herself within an image. In the Lacanian model of the field of vision, the (mis)recognition can only be successful if the subject is apprehended in that guise by the other. The alignment of the proprioceptive with the exteroceptive ego involves more than the look of the body seeing and feeling. It involves the look of others, the look of the other. Identification, it turns out, is a three-way rather than a two-way transaction (Silverman 1996: 18).

The experience of being seen has a tremendous effect on our sense of self, and on how we experience the relation between self and world. It can confirm our self(mis)recognition, but it can also deny positive identification, as happens to the boy in Von Kleist’s story. The older man, being the authority, has introduced the boy to the culture represented by the Spinario, and to the notion of bodily ideality represented by it. He taught him how to see it and, more important, taught him to see ‘through’ it, and even to see himself ‘through’ it. Yet in the end, what is decisive is not how the boy sees himself or would like to see himself, but how he is seen. As soon as the boy recognizes himself in the mirror image, he turns to the man for confirmation of what he sees. The man, instead of providing such confirmation, destroys the self-image of the boy, leaving him in confusion. This negative possibility is implied by Lacan’s account of the mirror stage, but he does not theorize it. This possibility, however, is central to Silverman’s elaboration on the Lacanian model.

Silverman refers to Franz Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks (1986) in order to illustrate the devastating effects of such a denial on the construction of a self-image. Fanon – a black man born in one of France’s former colonies, and “raised on a steady diet of Gaelic culture” – regards himself as ‘French’ rather than ‘black’ (Silverman 1996: 27). At least, as long as he remains in the colony. When he moves to France, however, he is suddenly confronted
with what he looks like in the eyes of those who are not black. He describes how he feels himself being addressed by the look of others in a very disconcerting way. He feels himself being seen through images of blackness and in this way, forced to identify with an imago he did not identify with before. six

Von Kleist’s and Fanon’s stories demonstrate how we become aware of ourselves as bodies not only through reflections in mirrors, but also through the look of others seeing us. Through our awareness of being seen, we become aware of ourselves as a spectacle for others and as part of the spectacle of the world. This is not the result of the look of individual people projecting things onto one another. Fanon states how it is impossible for him to indicate the source from which he is seen through these images of blackness. Whenever he tries to point at where it comes from, the source seems to evaporate. His awareness of being seen results from an unlocalizable mechanism that makes him feel ‘photographed’ in an undesirable way. This is what Lacan theorizes as the mechanism of the gaze.

Silverman describes the Lacanian gaze as something that impresses itself upon us through the sensation each of us at times has of being held within the field of vision, of being given over to specularity (Silverman 1996: 167). The gaze is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and manifests itself more through its effects than through its source. It has much in common with the Sartrean concept of le regard in his famous theoretical story of the voyeur peeping through a keyhole, which has become deeply familiar in contemporary critical theory. Although Lacan engages himself with Sartre’s text only once, his account of the gaze, according to Silverman, “begs to be read in tandem with that text” (Silverman 1996: 167). This is not only because of the similarities, but also because reading them in tandem can help to clarify the differences between them. Since these differences are crucial to the critique of vision as presented in The Path of the Dancer’s Soul, I will follow Silverman’s argument and start with a brief look at her reading of the Sartrean model.

The Gaze — Sartre distinguishes between two different acts of looking, and illustrates the difference between them with the example of a voyeur peeping through a keyhole, like the seer in Duchamp’s Etant donnés discussed in the previous chapter. The voyeur is absorbed in the spectacle in front of him to such a extent that his own embodied presence escapes his attention. In his condition as voyeur, he is devoid of self-consciousness and paradoxically, this is synonymous with a certain transcendence. But then, suddenly, something happens that reminds him of his ‘being there,’ for example, the sound of footsteps behind him.

The sound conjures him out of his state of ‘nothingness’ into existence. He becomes aware that he himself is part of the visual world as well, seen from the point of view of the other evoked by the footsteps. From having a pure consciousness of things, the voyeur now becomes aware of
himself as a spectacle, and it is through this awareness that a consciousness of self is produced in him. This sense of self is inextricably bound up with an awareness of his own specularity, of his being visible to others, to the other.

The voyeur suffers his specularity as the loss of transcendence. His transcendent position is transcended, and he feels himself no longer master of the field of vision. His mastery is unmasked as an illusion, as he suddenly realizes that he himself is also 'on view.' Like Von Kleist's Mr. C before him, Sartre relates this falling into a state of self-awareness with the Fall. To function as a spectacle, and thus to exist for the other, is to lapse into a 'fallen' state (Silverman 1996: 165).

Silverman points out how Sartre associates this experience of specularity with a whole series of psychic 'symptoms', all of which are somehow indicative of the condition of being in a relation of exteriority to one's self. These symptoms are then imaginarily converted into a list of antithetical values to produce *le regard* (Silverman 1996: 164). She demonstrates how these oppositions contribute to a central opposition at work at the heart of Sartre's model of the field of vision: that of subject and object or, to be more precise, the antithesis of a pure or absolute subject and an object that is its absolute opposite.

As Silverman observes, Sartre characterizes this 'pure subject' in terms that are so in excess of human capacities that it ultimately becomes a phantom category, one that cannot be associated with an actual pair of eyes. She therefore calls this absolute subject a 'specular agency' fantasized into existence on the basis of the voyeur's apprehension of his emplacement within the field of vision. It is more a subjective effect than the result of an actual situation (Silverman 1996: 166). Yet, at the same time, Sartre attributes human (or at least anthropomorphically inflected) functions to this agent, as a result of which the absolute subject or other appears as an imaginary rival.

The Sartrean model of the field of vision informed what is now a strongly established line of feminist criticism that gained its fullest theoretical articulation in film studies. Theorizing the role of the camera in the construction of what is to be seen on film, how the camera mediates in the appearance of female bodies, and how this construction invites particular ways of looking at them, has assisted in unmasking the appearance of bodies on screen as product of subjective vision, constructed to satisfy what is called 'the male gaze.' What might otherwise pass for a mechanical inscription of what bodies look like, thus becomes exposed as a construction implying a specific point of view.

These developments in film theory in their turn proved to be productive for the theatre as a tool for analyzing the appearance of women in the scenarios on stage. However, the transposition of this model to the theatre has its problems. As Sue Ellen Case (1995) observes:
The power relations of the Gaze in narrative cinema seemed homologous to operations of spectatorship in the theatre. Yet the obvious but astonishing fact that this construction of the Gaze helped to inscribe a role for the technology of the camera and the screen in the critical understanding of gender politics somehow eluded our attention. We neglected to comprehend fully how the power relations in the visual were necessarily cojoined with a mechanical apparatus for seeing (Case 1995: 330).

Theatre does make use of techniques to direct attention and to guide the look of the audience, such as various modes of focalization (see chapter 2), yet it lacks a technique of vision comparable to the camera. Furthermore, although some theatre traditions and theatre practices do exploit the voyeuristic pleasure of peeping through a keyhole into another world while remaining invisible in the dark, a wide range of other theatrical practices demonstrate that this is not a necessary characteristic of the theatre event, nor is it a necessary precondition for the intense experience referred to as 'presence.' On the contrary, in many contemporary theatre practices, it is precisely the direct and explicit relationship with the audience that contributes to the intensity of the theatre as a 'live' experience, directly present and visible over there.

These bodies seen on stage are not objectified the way female bodies on film are turned into spectacle and criticized in feminist film theory. They do not necessarily capitalize on voyeuristic pleasures. Often they are explicitly theatrical. They look back at the audience, showing that they know that they show. They present a challenge to the audience to make a distinction between the act of showing and what is actually there to be seen, in this way challenging the old anti-theatrical prejudice reflected in Mr. C's rejection of the self-conscious behavior of living dancers as displaying "baroque mannerism." That is, they challenge the use of theatricality as a pejorative term that refers to false or inauthentic behavior, so concerned with being seen that appearance takes precedence over what is shown. What is more, they challenge the presuppositions that underlie this negative understanding of 'theatricality', namely that it would be possible to see things 'as they are', and that this 'givenness' becomes distorted in a self-conscious act of showing. In this way, these 'exhibitions' of bodies on stage point to some of the limitations of the Sartrean model for an analysis of vision in the theatre.

In Sartre's model, the point of view of the voyeur is transcended and exposed in its objectivity. The model thus tends to confirm rather than to deconstruct the opposition of 'mere' representation and a true presence behind it. According to Silverman, Sartre misses the crucial opportunity implicit in the concept of the 'looked at look' – that is, the opportunity to theorize it in relation not to objectivity, but to subjectivity. She acknowledges the value of his insistence upon the eye's embodiment and specularity for feminist attempts "to divest the male look of its false claim to be the gaze," yet also points out that what happens this way is not so much a
deconstruction as a relocation of the notion of a transcendental eye (Silverman 1996: 166). Von Kleist's story demonstrates what such a relocation involves, and how it helps restore a stable sense of self through the construction of a new, all-seeing point of view of the absolute subject that, like Evelyn Fox Keller's paradoxical scientific subject, has dissociated him or herself from any specific location.

Paradise Regained? — In Von Kleist's third story, Sartre's imaginary rival materializes into an actual body and literally becomes a rival in a fencing match. In this story, Mr. C recalls a visit he once paid to the estate of a Livonian nobleman. Mr. C, along with being a very good dancer, is also a virtuoso fencer and is more than a match for all but one of his opponents. After he has defeated the sons of the nobleman, they challenge him to test his skills on a bear that their father is having raised on the estate. Much to his own surprise, Mr. C appears to be unable to beat the bear. The bear makes him feel highly uncomfortable. What appears to be most formidable is the way the bear looks at him and seems to be able to read his soul.

The earnestness of the bear was robbing me of my composure, thrusts and feints followed on one another, I was dripping with sweat: in vain! It was not merely that the bear, like the world's leading fencer, parried every one of my thrusts, but to my feints he reacted not at all (a feat that no fencer anywhere could match). Eye to eye, as though he could read my very soul, he stood with his paw poised for the strike, and if my thrusts were not in earnest he simply did not move (Von Kleist 1982: 216).

Mr. C feels threatened by the bear, while in fact it is he who attacks the bear. The bear only defends itself. What is really threatening Mr. C is the bear's look. This unexpected look undermines Mr. C's notion of himself not only as a master fencer, but also as master of the field of vision. Like the Sartrean voyeur, he is robbed of his sense of transcendence and mastery, and feels exposed as part of the visible world.

In Von Kleist's story, Mr. C finally beats the bear in the conclusion in which he puts the three stories in a broader, cosmological perspective. In this conclusion, he himself produces a new point of view that allows him to transcend the threatening encounter with the bear, and to regain his sense of self as master of the field of vision. According to him, the three stories demonstrate how

in the organic world, as reflection grows darker and weaker, grace emerges ever more radiant and supreme. — But just as two intersecting lines, converging on one side of a point, reappear on the other after their passage through infinity, and just as our image as we approach a concave mirror, vanishes to infinity only to reappear before our very eyes, so will grace, having likewise traversed the infinite, return to us once more, and so appear most purely in that bodily form that has either no consciousness at all or an infinite one, which is to say, either in the puppet or in a God (Von Kleist 1982: 216).
The conclusion exploits what Paul de Man describes as “the idea of innocence recovered at the far side [...], of paradise regained after the fall into consciousness [...], of a teleological and apocalyptic history of consciousness.” This is a history in which the gap separating being and consciousness will finally be closed again in a state of immediate presence, a return to paradise lost, to a state of primordial wholeness. As de Man observes, these powerful and seductive ideas of the romantic period make it easy to forget how little this pseudo-conclusion in fact has to do with the rest of the text. (de Man 1984: 267–268)

The conclusion suggests a symmetry that is not supported by the stories it claims to be based upon. For, although it is not difficult to link the conclusion to the first story about the marionette owing its superior grace to its lack of consciousness, the question remains as to how to consider the other possibility for the return of grace – God – a bodily form with infinite consciousness. None of the three stories provides a clue about the relationship between infinite consciousness and bodily grace. On the contrary, again and again they stress the first part of Mr. C’s conclusion that grace and reflection are to be understood as antagonistic. The second story – about the boy in front of the mirror – is an illustration of how self-consciousness hinders bodily grace. When the boy self-consciously tries to assume the image of the Spinario, he is not able to repeat the graceful attitude he unconsciously assumed a moment ago. No clue is given as to how to overcome this troubling situation again. The third story about the bear, is even more puzzling in relation to the teleological and symmetrical history suggested in the conclusion. Where to position the bear in the teleological history of consciousness ‘from puppet to God’?

In the first and the second story, Mr. C and the narrator are the subjects observing grace – or the lack of it – in other bodies. They explain this lack of grace in terms of a relationship between consciousness and grace in the bodies observed. In the third story, however, Mr. C is the object of the sharp eye of the bear. Here, so it would seem, it is the bear’s lack of consciousness that allows him not to perform, but to read movements in a superior way. The bear sees through Mr. C’s attempts to fool him, and this gives Mr. C the feeling of being exposed.

The look of the bear undermines not only Mr. C’s self-image, but also the Sartrean symmetrical model of the field of vision. Although the story of the bear is similar to the Sartrean scenario in some ways, it differs from it in important respects. For example, unlike the voyeur, Mr. C can hardly have been unaware that he was the object of the bear’s vision, otherwise it would make no sense to fence with the bear. Therefore, it cannot be his sudden realization that he is seen by the bear that bothers him and undermines his sense of self as master of the situation. It is rather, the way in which he feels exposed to others, just as it is others – and not the bear threatening him – that he has to convince of the truth of his conclusion, of his version of ‘how it is’ with the world. It is the narrator’s confirmation that Mr. C seeks with
this conclusion, and it is through the involvement of this third party that he sets out to regain his sense of self and of mastery. Mr. C's story about the bear thus indicates an asymmetry at work in the field of vision that Sartre's model does not account for and is better theorized through Lacan.

Lacan stresses the asymmetry of the look with which the voyeur peers through the keyhole, and the gaze with which he is surprised. The Lacanian gaze is not the same as the look of a subject: the gaze escapes the category of the subject. At one point, Lacan defines it as "the presence of others as such," but is eager to make clear that it is a "function of seeingness" and is not to be mistaken for the look of concrete other subjects (Lacan 1981: 84). This 'function' precedes any individual act of looking, and is that out of which the look somehow emerges much as language might be said to pre-exist the subject and provide him or her with signifying resources. For this reason, Silverman calls the gaze "the manifestation of the symbolic within the field of vision" (Silverman 1996: 168). The Lacanian gaze disrupts the symmetrical opposition of subject and object, of self and other, of body and mirror image. It is neither subjective nor objective. The gaze appears as a third term mediating in the constitution of what is self and what is other. It points to the interference of culture in the experience of 'just looking,' and in how we perceive the visual field.

It is the gaze that can be seen at work in John Martin's body mimicking the body of Martha Graham, perceiving the ideal image presented by her white, female body as 'naturalness,' while rejecting the bodies of black and native American dancers as distortions of the natural essences he perceives in Graham. It is not only because Martin is white, like Martha Graham, that her body can appear to him as more natural and truthful, but also because within the culture in which Martin's observations take place, whiteness signifies this complex intertwining of the 'natural' and the ideal. It is therefore also not only because Martin himself is not black or native American, that seeing native or black bodies does not produce that feeling of recognition, the feeling of being able to spontaneously feel the feelings of the bodies seen. As Silverman's example of Fanon demonstrates, recognition is not only based on sameness or similarities; it also involves a certain culturally specific ideality, as a result of which – within a particular cultural and historical context – some bodies can appear as 'how it is', that is, as the manifestation of a 'naturalness' that other bodies lack.

**Gestures of Exposure** — In their staging of Von Kleist's text, Rijnders and De Châtel foreground the asymmetry at work in the field of vision on stage through a most effective, if not terribly spectacular, *mise en scène*. They present Von Kleist's text as an act of exposure, literally an exhibition of a body on stage, and a very specific one at that. Their staging resembles the gesture of showing which, according to Mieke Bal (1996), is typical of a museum. It is a gesture that points to things, saying 'look, this is how it is.'
Although Bal deals with exhibitions, and not with theatre performances, her analysis of the exhibition as an act of exposure is useful for an analysis of the exhibition of bodies on stage.

In an act of exposure, something is made public and, in Bal's view, this involves making public the deepest held views and beliefs of a subject. Exposition, therefore, is always also an argument. In publicizing these views, the subject exposes himself or herself every bit as much as the object. "Such exposure is an act of producing meaning, a performance" (Bal 1996: 2). The performative character of exposure however, remains hidden in the typical constative gesture of exposure of the museum that asserts 'this is how it is.'

In order to lay bare the performative aspects involved in constative gestures of exposure, Bal proposes to conceive of gestures of showing as discursive acts analogous to speech-acts. In such acts, three positions or 'persons' are involved: The 'first person' – the exposer – who tells a 'second person' – the visitor – about a 'third person' – the object on display (Bal 1996: 3-4). In the Rijnders/De Châtel performance, the actor represents the first person. He stands on the left-hand side of the stage and recites Von Kleist's text On the Puppet Theater. He acts as though he is giving a lecture, addressing the audience that represents the second person. On the right-hand side of the stage, there is the dancer making simple dance movements. He does not speak; he is just there, acknowledging the presence of the audience through his look. He represents the third person, the object on display, the body exhibited.

The object is framed in a way that enables the statement to come across. This frame helps to read what is seen according to the logic implied within the frame. An important part of framing in this performance is the change of title, from Von Kleist's On the Puppet Theater to Rijnders and De Châtel's The Path of the Dancer's Soul, which is a quote from the text. This new title turns the dancer into the object of the argument. The object seen does not participate in the conversation. The object is there to substantiate the statement. However, unlike the speech-acts that make up Von Kleist's text, in the performance the object, although mute, is present. This is important, for it allows for a critical move.

When the speaker is near the end of the text, the dancer makes an unexpected move: he leaves his position on the right-hand side of the stage, walks toward the speaker, and looks at him. This move appears to be highly uncomfortable for the speaker, who tries to avoid the dancer's eyes, to ignore his presence near him, and to focus his attention on the audience. The speaker begins to repeat the entire text at double speed, as well as his demonstrative gestures.

The unexpected move by the dancer resembles that of the bear in Mr. C's story, just as the response of the speaker resembles that of Mr. C. Like Mr. C, the speaker tries to counter the threat by attempting to impose his story – his vision of 'how it is' – on the audience, and to deny the disturbing look of the object of his vision. He literally ignores the dancer and repeats what he has already said, as though to stress that this is 'how it is.'
However, the dancer, who is visually present before the eyes of audience, prevents him from accomplishing what Mr. C manages to accomplish in the text. On stage, the speaker loses his authority, and his demonstration of 'how it is' with the object of his attention turns into an exposition of himself as an embodied subject.

The unexpected move by the dancer offers the audience a second point of view. This critical move presents an invitation to the audience to look in a different way. This moment presents an example of what Mieke Bal (1991) has called the 'navel' of the performance text. The dancer turns from object seen into a subject of focalization who redirects the audience's attention towards the speaker. Of course, this speaker was visible from the outset and was well aware of his being visible. Yet, the look of the dancer exposes him in a different way.

The dancer's move causes an actual re-reading of the entire text by Von Kleist in a different way exposing it not as a demonstration of truth, but as a nervous attempt by the speaker to keep going. By redirecting attention, the dancer turns the demonstration of 'how it is' with the dancer - with bodies seen - into a performance that instead exposes the observer as subject seeing. His critical move turns the demonstration of 'how it is' with the body of the dancer seen, into an exhibition of the speaker as body seeing. As a result, the speaker is exposed as a desiring subject, exposed to himself, and also to the 'presence of others as such.' In this process, the look of the audience stands in for the Lacanian gaze. This is not to say that the audience is gazing, nor that their look is the gaze: The Lacanian gaze refers to being conscious of one's visibility. *The Path of the Dancer's Soul* uses the theater situation to externalize the mechanism and in this way to expose its functioning.

**Exposing the Audience** — In *The Path of the Dancer's Soul*, the desiring subject exposed is a body on stage. Lacan's account of the field of vision however, allows for an analysis of how the look of the body seeing in the auditorium is also under cultural and psychological pressure. Here, moments of 'presence' prove to be particularly instructive. With a Lacanian model of the construction of the field of vision, it is possible to understand the feeling of intense closeness to bodies directly 'present' on stage, not in terms of the characteristics of the object, nor as the result of the immediateness of the presentation, but as the effect of a culturally mediated way of looking.

Even before we become conscious of having seen something, perception has been processed in all kinds of ways. The look is exhorted from many sides to perceive and affirm only what generally passes for 'reality.' In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), Silverman proposes to replace 'reality' with dominant fiction. The 'fiction' in 'dominant fiction' foregrounds the constructed nature of what passes for reality. The 'dominant' points to the fact that there is more than one fiction possible and, also, that these different possibilities do not have equal access to the 'reality' status.
Calling reality a fiction undermines its ontological claims on truth, and opens it up to change and cultural difference. Here again, however, it is important to notice that this does not imply unlimited freedom. The dominant fiction is not a story told by the self, nor can it be changed by an individual. It is the story within which both world and the self are produced, and it is at work at levels we do not consciously control.

The ‘mirror stage moment’ in Von Kleist’s text can be read as a demonstration of the dominant fiction at work. What is needed in order to expose this fiction at work, is to redirect attention analogous to the critical move performed by the dancer in *The Path of the Dancer’s Soul*. Von Kleist’s narrator tells a story about a boy in front of a mirror. Yet, this story is not that of, nor that told by, the boy: it is the story of the older man observing the boy. It is as much about him as about the boy observed. Interesting in this respect is the account the narrator gives of his own reaction to what happens to the boy. Recalling the moment the boy pointed out that he looked like the Spinario, the man says:

> I indeed had noticed it too in the very same instant, but either to test the self-assurance of the grace with which he was endowed, or to challenge his vanity in a salutary way, I laughed and said he was seeing phantoms (Von Kleist 1982: 215).

His denial of the boy’s discovery is not the correction of a mistake. It is not an exposure of ‘how it is,’ confronting the boy’s subjective point of view with the objective truth seen from a transcendental point of view. On the contrary, it is a denial of what he, too, has seen, but does not or cannot believe. His response is a subjective reaction dictated by cultural values and psychic pressure, dictated perhaps by the same cultural presupposition that was already at stake in the first story, namely that a living and self-conscious being can never approach the beauty and grace of a marionette. Seen this way, the older man’s reaction is an aggressive one toward someone who seems capable of approximating what he himself cannot. His reaction demonstrates how he translates a threat to his own ego into a disorder perceived in the boy.

In the same way, to expose the audience as a desiring subject, what is needed is an explanation of the appearance of bodies on stage as the product of a cultural and psychological determined look, rather than as simply being there to be seen. Here again, moments of ‘presence’ can provide a point of entrance for they present a kind of audience variant of the constative gesture of ‘this is how it is.’ ‘Presence’ – understood in terms of Silverman/Wallon as a successful stitching together of an image of a body seen and the proprioceptive ego of the body seeing – can function as a meaningful pointer, indicating that the body seen appeals to a desire of the body seeing. This desire is not a deformation of reality, but constitutive of what is perceived as reality. To demonstrate what such an exposure of the subject of vision could mean, I will end this chapter with a little thought experiment, and conceive of the mirror stage as described by Lacan as a
staged situation like the Rijnders/De Châtel performance. In order to ‘look back’ at the subject of vision, I will perform a move analogous to the one proposed by the performance, and expand Bal’s analysis of the act of exposure as a discursive gesture to this academic demonstration of ‘how it is.’

**Looking back at Lacan** — Like Von Kleist’s story about the boy in front of the mirror, the Lacanian account of the mirror stage is a story about a child and not that of, or by, this child. It is the story of Lacan seeing and observing the child, and it is therefore, as much about the subject ‘Lacan’ as it is about the child. By ‘the subject Lacan,’ I do not mean Jacques Lacan as a historical person, but the subject of vision as it is produced in his text. I wonder what his text about the mirror stage can tell me about this subject of vision as a body. What could it mean to understand Lacan’s observations as the product of an embodied look under cultural pressure to perceive the world from a pre-assigned point of view? As I will show, especially the jubilant recognition is telling in this respect, provided that it is approached as proposed by the performance, that is, starting from the question of to whom this bodily image appears as more ideal, and what desire this image appeals to.

According to Lacan, it is the organic disturbance and discord of the body as experienced from the inside that prompts the child to assume whole body-image perceived in the mirror. Lacan acknowledges the possibility of moments of collapse of the alignment with the ideal image, moments that result in what he calls the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces. Silverman points out that this explanation in terms of disintegration and failure is only one way of apprehending the heterogeneity of the corporeal ego, and a very particular one, too. It is a way of apprehending that is inextricably tied to aspirations concerning wholeness and unity. Silverman proposes to reverse Lacan’s argument, and argues that the opposite is actually true. It is not that the child seeks wholeness because it experiences itself as fragmented. According to Silverman “it is the cultural premium placed on the notion of a coherent bodily ego that results in such a dystopic apprehension of corporeal multiplicity” (Silverman 1996: 21). It is because of the cultural appreciation of bodily wholeness that the child experiences its bodily fragmentation as dystopic. Both the identification with the unitary image of a body in the mirror, and the fantasy of the body in bits and pieces, are the result of the cultural premium placed on unity that informs the Lacanian subject.

Silverman likewise draws attention to the constructed nature of what can appear as an ideal image. Again, she points to the fact that the relation between the image the subject identifies with, and the body as felt, has to be understood as a product of culture, rather than naturally given. Yet at this point, Silverman’s elaboration on Lacan seems to open onto a more profound critique as well. A further implication of her reading seems to be that the specific relationship of body image and body as felt, as observed by Lacan might be culturally informed.
Susan Buck-Morss (1992) offers a further possibility for thinking in this direction. Lacan characterizes the coherence to which the classical subject aspires as “the armor of an always alienating identity” (Lacan 1977: 4). It is the result of a cultural logic in which ‘wholeness’ – a coherent bodily ego – signifies psychic health. Susan Buck-Morss suggests however, that this cultural imperative has to be understood in the context of sensory alienation typical of modernity. According to her, the significance of Lacan’s theory emerges in the historical context of modernity as precisely the experience of the fragile body and the dangers of fragmentation. She presents her critique of Lacan as part of a re-reading of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which appeared in 1936, the year that Lacan first presented his ideas on the mirror stage.

Buck-Morss describes how, according to Benjamin, the very essence of the modern experience is shock. The technologically altered environment of modern city life, the factory, and modern warfare, expose the human sensorium to physical shocks that have their correspondence in psychic shock. It is against this cultural background of this kind of Western, big city modernity that the unitary, well outlined body-as-image in the mirror appears desirable, argues Buck-Morss.

The mirror image is a body as seen from the point of view German writer Ernst Jünger describes as ‘second consciousness.’ Jünger calls the technological order dominating modern life a mirror that reflects back an image of the body that alters our awareness of ourselves as embodied beings. In the great mirror of technology, the image that returns is displaced, reflected onto a different plane, where one sees oneself as a physical body divorced from sensory vulnerability – a statistical body, the behavior of which can be calculated; a performing body, actions of which can be measured up against the norm; a virtual body, one can endure the shocks of modernity without pain (Buck-Morss 1992: 33).

In modern Western big city life, war causalities, as well as industrial and traffic accidents, have become accepted as a feature of existence, and have forced modern man to develop a second consciousness that is indicated in the ever-more sharply developed capacity to see oneself as an object. Jünger writes: “It almost seems as if the human being possessed a striving to create a space in which pain [....] can be regarded as an illusion” (Jünger quoted in Buck-Morss 1992: 33).

The construction of a second consciousness that manifests itself as the result of identification with an image of the body, divorced from the sensory vulnerability of the body felt from the inside, reacts against the shocks that make up modern life. Benjamin – relying on the Freudian insight that consciousness is a shield protecting the organism against stimuli – comes up with a neurological explanation pointing in the same direction. To protect itself against the constant bombardment of shocks, the ego employs consciousness as a shield, blocking the openness of the synaesthetic system.
of the body, thereby isolating present consciousness from past memory. As a result, experience becomes impoverished.

Being ‘cheated out of experience’ has become the general state, as the synaesthetic system is marshalled to parry technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from the trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perceptual shock. As a result, the system reverses its role. Its goal is to numb the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of anaesthetics (Buck-Morss 192: 16, italics in the text).

Buck-Morss suggests that the cultural imperative of assuming the image of the unitary body in the mirror is a symptom of the threat imposed on the subject as a vulnerable body under the pressure of modern life and a technologically altered environment. Furthermore, this cultural premium not only informs the subject to identify with a particular bodily image, but also the specific relationship of body image, and body as felt, that makes up the very foundations of the Lacanian model of ego formation. His conceptualization of subject formation resonates with the ‘disembodied’ character typical of the modern understanding of vision, as well as the vigorous privileging of vision over the other senses. It is through looking that modern individuals are understood to gain insight into themselves and the world, to such an extent that the ‘I’ of the looker and his or her eye almost become conflated. Elements of this fable can still be seen at work in today’s understanding of ourselves as embodied subjects, and in how we experience our relationship to the world around us.

Buck-Morss’ reading suggests the possibility of understanding the Lacanian model as the product of a particular historical moment, as a conceptualization that appeals to a desire at work within the dominant fiction of modernity. At the same time, her historization of the Lacanian model invites one to think beyond Lacan, and to undo the simultaneity of over-stimulation and numbness. These have become the characteristics of the synaesthetic organization of the modern subject, now that the ‘grand narratives’ of modernity have started to break down and become visible as ‘dominant fictions’ rather than natural gives.

Such rethinking might also grant new actuality to Martin’s concept of inner mimicry. Inner mimicry seems to offer the option of regarding not only the bodily image as constitutive of the embodied self but also, vice versa, the embodied self as constitutive of the image of a body perceived. This would imply a slightly different reading of proprioception as a combination of proprius and capere. That is, proprioception meaning to grasp, conceive, or catch what is seen through a process of bodily responsiveness. Inner mimicry, then, would not mean feeling what the other body seen is feeling, but using one’s own bodily feelings and kinesthetic responses to make sense of a body seen. Understood in this way, inner mimicry does not present a link to an original universality, but describes a bodily process of culturally specific
meaning-making. It would come to mean a way of making things one's own through a process of non-visual mapping of what is seen on a culturally inflected body. Inner mimicry as the process of mapping of a body seen onto the body seeing as a means to make sense of the body seen, might help to overcome the mono-directionality implied in the Lacanian model, and to call attention to the ways in which reactions of bodily responsiveness contribute to the construction of what is perceived as 'just looking.'

1 — *De Zielweg van de Danser* (The Path of the Dancer's Soul) was first presented at the International Theaterschool Festival 1997 in Amsterdam. Director: Gerardjan Rijnders. Choreography: Krisztina de Châtel. Performed by: Mimouna Oaïssa and Wen-Cheng Lee.


6 — "Assailed at various points, [my pre-existing] corporeal schema crumbles[...]." he recounts. "I [subject] myself to an objective examination, [I] discover[...], my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I [am] battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [sic]. racial defects, slave ships, and above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin’" (Fanon, quoted in Silverman 1996: 28).