The Locus of Looking - Dissecting Visuality in the Theatre
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— Thinking does not take place in the head alone. This is a misunderstanding. I am beginning to believe more and more that ‘thinking’ first and foremost takes place in the body — (Jan Ritsema 1998: 345, my translation).

In 1996, theatre director Jan Ritsema, by then fifty-one years old, surprised friend and foe with a dance solo he performed himself. He explained his unexpected move saying that according to him dance is the purest way of sharing thoughts with an audience. He describes his experiences in rehearsing and performing his solo: how in dancing thought and movement get linked with one another; how this turns dancing into the expression of a kind of thinking in which mind and body are no longer opposed but instead seem to coincide, where it is the body that thinks. Therefore, according to Ritsema, dance is not only a means to make things happen or to represent something else. More than that, dance is an instance of thinking taking place through the body (Ritsema 1998).

Ritsema speaks of dancing and thinking from the point of view of a theatre maker. But what if we take his idea of dancing as thinking through the body as a metaphor to describe the way the spectator is moved by a performance, invited to step inside and to move along with what is presented? Thinking then would describe the active response of a body to the address it finds itself confronted with, a response which produces what we think we see. In the following, I will take this idea of thinking as movement in and through the body as a starting point for a further elaboration of the triangular model introduced in chapter 3.

This triangular model describes the relationship between see and seen in the theatre in terms of a series of subjective transactions that involve three ‘positions’: the subject seen on stage, the individual subject seeing and the subject of vision mediating in the relationship between the two. The model helps to understand see and seen in relation to one another and within a specific situation. The relationship between see, seen and cultural context, as I have already pointed out, is not always clearly visible. If visible at all, it is readily associated with subjective deviations in an otherwise objectively visible field. With my triangular model, I argue for the opposite, namely that objectivity – seeing it ‘as it is’ – is in fact a special case of subjectivity in the field of vision, one in which subjective mediation goes unnoticed.

In part I, I introduced perspective as a model, or cognitive metaphor, for understanding the different positions involved in the relationship between see and seen. The institution of perspective ‘theatricalizes’ the field of vision. It creates a ‘scenographic space’ in which all that is seen is in a sense staged for the viewer. At the same time, this staging aims at an effect that is quite the opposite of being theatrical; the promise presented by perspective is one of direct contact between see and seen and the fulfillment of a desire for immediateness and immediacy. This effect is often associated with the notion of ‘presence.’ I also introduced Michael Fried’s term ‘absorption’ in part I, to describe the effects of the seeming absence of
the seer/seen relationship, Fried relates this effect to historical practices of organizing the relationship between seer and seen in modern art.

Perspective shows the world according to a particular logic and as seen from a specific point of view. At the same time, the power of perspective to present an image of the world "as it is," requires that this logic goes unnoticed, or at least, is not visible as mediating in a vision that depends upon a subjective point of view. In chapter 1, I likewise proposed an understanding of this invisibility as the effect of automatic identification of the seer with the subjective point of view implied within perspectival logic. This point of view is part of the address to the seer and presents this seer with a position to take up in relation to what is seen. This position does not only mark a position in actual space but also in the symbolic spaces opened up by discourse. In chapter 2, I termed this position the subject of vision.

In part II, I showed how the model of perspective helps to relate what seems to be just there to be seen to such a subjective point of view. I brought in psychoanalysis to account for subjectivity as it is involved in how bodies on stage are seen. I also pointed out some of the limitations of the psychoanalytic model of the subject when it comes to understanding how bodies are seeing. Here, again, the model of perspective proves to be helpful as a conceptual metaphor.

Psychoanalytic theory understands the psyche as a projection of the body's form. This projection is not a veridical diagram or a representation of the anatomical body, nor is it a point-for-point projection of the body's surface. Instead, Freud describes it as a kind of bodily tracing, a cartography of the erotogenic intensity of the body, an internalized image of the degree of intensities of sensations of the body. Through these processes of mapping and tracing, the child acquires a sense of unity and identity. This is necessary not only to produce an awareness of the body one is, but also in order to produce cohesion in sensations without which the subject would simply be an aggregate of disconnected perceptual events. The ego that results from this mapping is an image of the body's significance or meaning for the subject and for the other. It is thus as much a function of fantasy and desire as it is of sensation and perception.

In his essay on the mirror stage, Lacan describes how this bodily mapping takes place through introjection of an image of a body seen (Lacan 1977: 1–7). For Lacan too, the ego is not an outline or projection of the anatomical and physiological body. Instead it is an imaginary outline or projection of the body. It is the body insofar as it is imagined and represented for the subject by the image of others (including its own reflection in a mirror). In the mirror stage, the child seeing assumes the image of the body seen in the mirror to 'become' the more ideal body seen. This conflation of body seeing and body seen obscures the perspective that is part of Lacan's account of the mirror stage. That is, the conflation obscures the consideration that identification with a body seen in the mirror not only means to identify with another body seen as being ones own, but also to identify the body as other.
This identification with the image of a body seen, provides, the child in front of the mirror with an imaginary identity. Assuming the coherent and unitary image of the body seen in the mirror helps to stabilize the turmoil of the body experienced from the inside, while at the same time it presents the child with an identity separate from its surroundings. For the first time, the child is not absorbed into its environment, but becomes aware of itself as different from it. Thus, the mirror stage not only invites the child to identify with a body seen, it also mediates in the way the child gets constituted as seer of this body. The mirror stage also mediates in how the child becomes constituted as a body seeing in relation to what is seen. This perspective is what is at stake in this third part of my study.

**Assuming the Image** — In the previous chapter, I introduced Kaja Silverman’s (1996) reading of Lacan to explain identification with an image of a body seen as always already taking place under the pressure of a cultural gaze that determines which image appears as a suitable object for identification, and which not. Silverman’s rereading turns Lacan’s mirror stage model, from an explanation of the origin of subjectivity, into a model that describes how the see as subject and the visible world come into being in relation to one another in an ongoing process. In her view, stabilizing the self by means of assuming the image of a body seen is not something accomplished once and for all but has to be negotiated time and time again. This process of negotiation happens largely unconsciously and is mediated by culture.

In Lacan, the mirror stage precedes subjectivity and symbolic positioning. It takes place when the child is between six and eighteen months of age and ends with what he describes as “a jubilant assumption of the specular image” (Lacan 1977: 3). Lacan does acknowledge that the relation of imaginary identification is fraught with tensions and contradictions insofar as the child identifies with an image that both is, and is not, itself. Although Lacan speaks of “a jubilant assumption of the specular image,” and in this way suggests a resolving of these tensions once and for all, at other moments he makes it clear that the stability of the unified body image, even in the so-called normal subject, is always precarious. Unity cannot be taken for granted as an accomplished fact, for it must be continually renewed.3

Silverman expands on this ambiguity in Lacan and proposes to of the ‘assuming of an image’ in terms of a process of laboriously stitching together two ego-components: on the one hand, there is the visual imago and, on the other, what she calls the proprioceptive or sensational ego. A successful integration of these two ego-components results in a sense of ‘presence.’ Neither visual imago nor proprioceptive ego are naturally given but both are ‘always already’ the product of cultural mediation. Furthermore, their conflation requires the support of the cultural gaze. Conflation can come into play only when the representations through which the gaze ‘photographs’ the subject provide him or her with an idealized image of self.
Silverman’s reading of Lacan offers a model that can account for how images of bodies seen, play a part in the ongoing life-long process of stabilizing the self. Her model also accounts for how this stabilization is mediated by culturally specific body images. Silverman is then able to point out the relation between the Lacanian account of the formation of the I in the mirror stage and the cultural context from which this ‘story’ emanates.

In the previous chapter, I used Silverman’s reading of Lacan to expand on a critical move performed on stage by a dancer in *The Path of the Dancer’s Soul*. With this move, the dancer evoked a reversal of attention from the body that was object of vision, towards the body seeing it. In my reading of the performance, I elaborated on his move with a ‘look back at Lacan’ and read his account of the mirror stage as a story emanating from a subject. In this third part of my study, I will use my triangular model to continue the critical move started by the dancer. I will discuss two performances, *Holoman: Digital Cadaver* (Mike Tyler, 1997/98) in this chapter and *Double Track* (Beppie Blankert, 1986/99) in the next. These performances will serve as examples of the relationship between bodies seeing and bodies seen as accounted for in the Lacanian mirror stage model in relation to discursive practices which defined the historical moment from which the Lacanian model emanates.

It is not my intention to deem the mirror stage model outmoded. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the Lacanian model proves to be most helpful in understanding how bodies are seen in the present context. Awareness of the relationship between the model and its historical context only increases its explanatory power. Such awareness can also help to denaturalize the Lacanian model and in this way, to open it to change. This will be the subject of the final chapter. Here, I take up the suggestion presented by Jan Ritsema, and propose an articulation of the seer in the theatre as a thinking body who moves along with the address presented to him or her. This account of the relation between seer and seen is no less subjective than the Lacanian model, however, it is informed by different subjective needs and convictions.

**A Convenient Cadaver** — *Holoman: Digital Cadaver* draws attention to how, in both visualizations of the body produced by anatomical and medical science and in the theatre, strategies of de-theatricalization are used to bring the seer closer to bodies seen. It also emphasizes how these strategies can be seen to alienate the seer from his or her body as the locus of looking. Doing so, *Holoman: Digital Cadaver* makes us aware of what might be called the ‘other side’ of Silverman’s rereading of Lacanian model. Our awareness of self as body seen, is mediated by the repertoire of images that make up the visual unconscious, and these images of bodies seen, also mediate in a specific awareness of ourselves as (disembodied) seers of these bodies.
In his performance, Tyler confronts state of the art anatomical visualizations of the human body with the body of an actor representing the human body that was used to produce them. His protagonist is a fictional character whose life and death parallel that of real-life murderer J. P. Jernigan. Jernigan was executed in Texas in 1993, but not before donating his body to science, or more precisely, to the Visible Human Project. The goal of this project initiated by the National Library of Medicine (USA) is to create an information resource which will make possible highly detailed 3D navigations of what is called “a representative male and female cadaver.”

The researchers working on the Visible Human Project speak of a “renewable cadaver, a standarized patient, and a basis for digital populations of the future. Not only can we dissect it, we can put it back together again and start all over” (Spitzer and Whitlock, quoted in Thacker 2001).

To become such a convenient cadaver, Jernigan’s body underwent MRI (Magnetic Resonance Interferometrie) and CT (Computerized Tomography) scanning. Subsequently, it was frozen to minus 70 degrees Celsius and cut into 1mm-thick slices. Digital photographs of each of the 1871 slices, together with the scans – a total of 15 gigabytes of electronic information – were processed in a computer to produce a digital resurrection of the cadaver, a ghost on the Net representing “universal human meat” (Tyler 1998).

J. P. Jernigan was a white man. The representatives of the Visible Human Project selected a white man to represent the universal human meat. Although his makers did plan right from the start to ‘do’ more bodies, and have started to do so, the choice for a white man to be the first can hardly be called incidental. It is a choice, furthermore that, taking into consideration the average population of death row, testifies to a certain determination. Tyler in his performance commented on this choice in a way that was literally spectacular. Actor Frank Sheppard, an African American man, played Holoman in ‘white face,’ or, in this case it is better to say, in ‘white body.’ Prior to each show, his entire body was painted white with ‘glow in the dark’ make up, turning him into what seemed to be the uncanny re-appearance of the repressed other in the guise of the same. And Holoman presented an uncanny reappearance in more way than this.

The Anatomical Theatre — The mise en scène of Holoman: Digital Cadaver recalled of the historical anatomical theatre combined with the secrecy and cleanliness of the modern morgue. The audience, sitting on a stand, looked down on a bare stage. There, they could see a simple metal stretcher on wheels and next to the stretcher a big white projection screen. On the stretcher, the outline of a human body was covered with a white sheet.

A voice-over reminded the audience that cadaver dissection has been illegal for centuries, forbidden by the church. The audience was reminded of how curious anatomists had to work in secrecy and steal bodies from the gallows. Eventually however, during the Renaissance, dissection became legalized and turned into a public spectacle attracting much attention.
Special theatres were built in many European cities, one of which was Amsterdam. The room is still there, in the Waag building on the Nieuwmarkt, although most of its interior structure is gone.

The bodies used in public dissections were usually the cadavers of convicted criminals so that the spectacle of the dissected body could also function as an instrument for moral education. Dissection could be imposed as an extra punishment in addition to the death penalty; it was considered a humiliation and it meant the denial of a last resting place. The horrible fate of the criminals on the dissection table served as a frightening example of what misbehavior could lead to. Inscriptions on the walls of the former anatomical theatre in de Waag in Amsterdam still remind one of this function. Given this then, Jernigan's digitalization continues an old tradition of disciplining the living body through the dead.

But more is at stake. The anatomical theatre has its place in a theatrical economy in which the body is marked as the Other and encapsulated in a structure designed to neutralize its supposed threat. Public dissection then, was part and parcel of the development of the Cartesian paradigm in which the body is marked as something we have instead of something we are. A body furthermore, that we look at rather than look from.

Descartes' Scheme —

when one knows how much the souls of beasts differ from our souls, one understands very much better the reasons that prove that our soul is of nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it isn't subjected to die with the body; then, inasmuch as one doesn't see other causes that would destroy it, one is naturally inclined to judge that it is immortal (Descartes 1977: 152).

In proving that the body is a mechanical, mathematical entity, free of all soul attributes, Descartes laid the groundwork for modern scientific medicine. He hoped to discover ways to prolong embodied life. However, since life cannot go on forever, he also felt the need to prove the immaterial nature of the rational soul, and thereby its immortality. Descartes' scheme serves to combat death on all fronts. His strategy for overcoming death is precisely to capture the body fully in the third person. It is the body of the other that Descartes anatomizes, his own body is then reconstructed on such a model.

I do not want to suggest that Descartes is to be held personally responsible for what has come to be known as the Cartesian paradigm, nor that the mind-body dualism characteristic of this paradigm has to be understood as the product of his personal intentions. But I do think that observations like the one quoted above can serve as an indicator of the subjective perspective at work in visions of the world 'as it is' according to Cartesian world view. They can serve as an indicator as well of the kind of subjective desires and fears involved in the willing identification with this point of view.
Descartes' scheme turns the body into another, which is then dissected and turned into a body of knowledge offered to us for identification. This perspective is clearly visible in the set up of the historical anatomical theatre. The anatomical theatre presents a gesture of exposure not unlike the one performed in The Path of the Dancer's Soul discussed in the previous chapter. It is a constative gesture that, as Mieke Bal (1996) observes, involves three different positions. In the first place, there is the anatomist, who provides a 'first person' exposure of the corpse. Importantly in this respect, the historical anatomical dissections were not so much investigations as they were demonstrations of the authority of the anatomist.

The anatomist demonstrated his knowledge to the audience, representing the second person involved in the gesture of exposure. The audience was invited to take up the position of subject of vision as represented by the anatomist and to recognize what is shown as being the truth about the body and, therefore, about themselves as bodies. The audience was invited to understand their own bodies through the parameters presented by the body seen over there. This body is the third person, literally subjected to the dissection performed on it, turned into a mute object, there to prove authority of anatomist.

Constative gestures are always also performative in the sense that they are acts of making meaning. In the anatomy theatres too, the body was not only demonstrated, but also performed. On the one hand there was the material body, cut open and falling apart, transformed by rigor mortis, lifeless, smelly, chaotic. On the other hand, as a kind of guide for the dissectionist, there was the anatomical text, usually a classical source: descriptive, organized, classificatory. The difference between them is according to Jonathan Sawday one of the central tensions in early modern anatomy (The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture, 1995).

In the Renaissance anatomical theatre, the space between the anatomical body and the body of anatomical knowledge is constantly negotiated. Sawday shows how this process of negotiation can be seen reflected the development of a range of representational strategies that produce the body as machine body in the 17th century. He describes how, during the period which opened with the publication of Vesalius De Humani Corporis Fabrica in 1543 and continued roughly to 1640, scientists like Columbian explorers dotted their names, like place names on a map, over the terrain which they encountered (Sawday 1995: 23). Natural philosophers of the early 17th century conceived of the body in terms of territory, a yet undiscovered country that was to be explored and charted in an anatomical atlas. This process was truly colonial, in that it appeared to reproduce the stages of discovery and exploitation which were, at that moment, taking place within the European encounter with the new world. First the body was mapped, named and the new terrain observed. The second phase was to harness this new terrain for the use of the discoverer.
Intrinsic to such a project was the creation of the body's interior as a form of property. Like property, the body's bounds needed to be fixed, its dimensions properly measured, its resources charted. Its 'new' owner – which would eventually become the thinking process of the Cartesian cogito – had to know what it was that was owned before use could be made of it (Sawday 1995: 26).

The reduction of the body to a mechanical entity, 'owned' and controlled by an immaterial cogito, did perhaps not begin with Descartes, but the Cartesian thinking that suggests that the operations of the body have to be analyzed in terms of *automata* or moving machines can, according to Sawday, serve as a summation of half a century of voyages into the interior of which Descartes was the heir:

Mechanism offered the prospect of a radically reconstituted body. Forged into a working machine, the mechanical body appeared fundamentally different from the geographic body whose contours expressed a static landscape without dynamic interconnection. More than that, the body as a machine, as a clock, as an automation, was understood as having no intellect of its own. Instead it silently operated according to the laws of mechanics. [...] As a machine, the body became objectified: a focus of intense curiosity, but entirely divorced from the world of the speaking and thinking subject. The division between Cartesian subject and corporeal object, between an 'I' that thinks and an 'it' in which we reside, had become absolute (Sawday 1995: 29).

Descartes' scheme turns the human cadaver, torn apart and transformed into a body of knowledge, into a metaphor for the Enlightenment project, and Visible Humans into its personifications. This is not just because of Descartes' fearful contempt for bodily matters. Nor is it only because anatomy as an 'opening up' in order to see deeper or hidden parts is deep in the heart of the Enlightenment project. It is also because, ironically, the destroyed and disappeared body, repressed by the Cartesian enterprise, can be seen to return in the metaphors of science itself. At the heart of the scientific project of the Enlightenment, Barbara Maria Stafford (1991) observes a remarkable set of body metaphors. The sensual body, rejected as being sense/less, returns in the images the mind uses to make sense of knowledge, to literally embody abstract ideas in order to grasp them and to sense their implications. In the Visible Human Project this knowledge literally takes the shape of a human body.

With the Visible Human Project, man created a body of knowledge after his own image, or so it seems. A body that is literally enlightened, consisting of sheer energy. But this mirror image appears to be marked by lack. Struggling with the gap between his disembodied psyche and the senses that connect his body to the world, the protagonist of *Holoman: Digital Cadaver* points to some of the controversies and dilemmas that haunt the Cartesian subject disconnected from his objectified body.
Carried Away on a Data Stream — In *Holoman; Digital Cadaver* the mute object of scientific examination rises from the dead and talks back. While ‘his’ digital body is downloaded from the Internet, he speaks to us as a disembodied psyche, trapped within the computer. He tells us how he was persuaded to give his body to science. His confessions testify to how this noble deed was motivated by fears not unlike the ones that drove Descartes to the dissection table.

The representatives of the Visible Human Project took advantage of Holoman’s fear of death and finiteness, primal fears that must become especially poignant on death row. Unlike his predecessors in the historical anatomical theatre, Holoman never thought of his dissection as an extra punishment or as a denial of a last resting place. To him, it sounded like an opportunity to escape the finitude of his body and to remain forever present.

Holoman grew up in a modern Western society typified by a certain ‘disembodied’ lifestyle. Protected from direct corporeal engagement with the outer world in many ways, it is easy to forget the material basis of our existence. Technologies of communication and transportation allow us to transcend what used to be the natural limits imposed by the body. Now that we are becoming increasingly familiar with images of people, with artificial persons existing as bytes and bits of optical and aural messages, the distinction between physical and digital reality seems to be fading. Painfully aware of the limitations of his material existence, Holoman is extra sensitive to this suggestive aura of the digital reality. To him, digitalization appears as a survival technique, a way to transcend the limitations of his vulnerable and mortal body. This survival technique seems to offer him something similar to what religion previously provided.

At first sight, Holoman’s strategy to overcome death may seem to be the opposite of the one put forward by Descartes. Descartes distances ‘himself’ (where ‘himself can be understood as essentially a thinking and seeing entity) from his body as mere matter. As a result, he is able to grasp the body through the metaphor of the machine. Or, the other way round, his conception of the body in terms of a mechanical entity, presents him with a position for the subject of vision at a certain distance from the body seen as such. It allows him a perspective on the body rather than a perspective from the body.

Holoman, on the other hand, identifies with his own dead body. He identifies with a digitally produced image of his own corpse, an image that he does not seem to perceive as an image at all but, instead, as a digitally produced continuation of his physical body. He identifies with this digitally produced image and begins to think that the image will secure his eternal presence. Like the child in the Lacanian mirror stage, Holoman identifies with an image of his body seen from a point of view outside of it. To him, the digital image of his body is literally a means of stabilizing and counteracting the disturbing awareness of his sensitive and sensible body. Poor Holoman. His digitally produced mirror image appears to be marked by lack indeed.
With his performance, Tyler shows the identification with an image of a dead body to be not the opposite of the Cartesian paradigm but to be its ultimate implication. His performance suggests that the Lacanian mirror stage based on identification with the image of another body seen, might be symptomatic of the de-corporealized Cartesian subject and the effect of internalization of the perspective on the body presented by the anatomical theatre.

**Come to your Senses!** — Descartes' scheme invites us to take up the position of the anatomist (from where the body appears as other) and to look at the body from there. But he also invites us to understand our own body as similar to the body seen over there. That is, he invites us to identify ourselves as bodies with the body seen. This position presented to us, therefore, is complicated and taking it up involves both a conflation of the image of the body presented by this knowledge with one's own body, and the taking up of a position from where this body appears as other.

In the anatomical theatre, this perspective is clearly visible. The explicit gesture of exposure performed by the anatomical theatre sets up a relationship between body seeing (the audience) and body seen (the body dissected/the corpse) mediated by the subjective point of view represented by the anatomist. The de-theatricalized visualizations of the Visible Human project on the other hand, suggest the absence of such a subjective perspective. The explicit theatricality of the historical anatomical theatre is replaced by a seemingly objective showing 'how it is.' This suggestive aura of the images presented to him by the new media, make Holoman forget the distance between himself and the digitally produced images of his body. No wonder he decides to put his faith in digitalization as a man-made afterlife.

During the performance, however, Holoman comes to his senses again, and in more ways than one. Firstly, he comes to his senses in the usual figurative sense of coming out of unconsciousness or folly as he wakes up and begins to sense the implications of his 'transubstantiation'. Secondly, it is also possible to read the expression 'Come to your senses' in a more literal sense, as an invitation or perhaps even an order to come towards the place where his senses are. Or, in his case, used to be.

In his case, identification with a perspective on his body rather than from his body, has literally resulted in the erasure of his body from the field of vision. With Holoman's entrance into cyberspace, his body has ceased to exist as a place or locus. His transformation into a body of knowledge reduced his body to zero. Its fate is not unlike that of an archeological site, where the quest for invisible origins results in a complete destruction of the location itself. Holoman's body is reduced to bits and pieces, the pieces are brushed aside and the bits are used to produce a digital image.

During the performance, Holoman comes back to what he left behind, which is his sensible and sensing body. This suggests that he first must have
left this body and somehow stepped outside of it. Usually, experiences of being outside the body are considered to be paranormal phenomena. Drew Leder (The Absent Body, 1990), however, argues for the opposite. A careful rereading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology leads Leder to conclude that the experience of being outside one's body is in fact a normal condition. Although in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence. My own body is rarely the thematic object of my experience. My attention is directed intentionally towards the outside world and rarely dwells on my own embodiment. According to Leder it is precisely this phenomenological condition of our bodies that plays a crucial role in encouraging and supporting Cartesian mind-body dualism. He therefore proposes an analysis of the experience of bodily absence as a tool for understanding concepts of self.

The body, Leder observes, tends to disappear from our attention as long as it functions unproblematically. Largely taken for granted as the place of life, well-being and growth, the body is most manifest at times of dysfunction. At those moments, we experience the body as the very absence of a desired or ordinary state. The body appears as a force that stands opposed to the self. This leads Leder to propose a new concept as a tool for investigating the tension between the disappearing body and its troubling reappearance. He introduces the term dys-appearance to denote a mode through which the body appears to explicit awareness.

In dys-appearance, the prefix dys evokes several levels of meaning. In Greek, dys signifies 'bad,' 'hard,' or 'ill,' a sense of meaning preserved in such English words as 'dysfunction,' as well as in many terms for illnesses, such as 'dysentery,' and 'dyslexia.' Dys can also be understood as a variant, now somewhat archaic spelling of the Latin root dis, which originally had the meaning 'away,' 'apart,' or 'asunder.' Dys-appearance, therefore, effects an attentional reversal of disappearance. The words dys-appearance and disappearance have an antonymic significance, while at the same time the homonimity of the words is meant to suggest the deep relation between these modes (Leder 1990: 86-87).

**A Place of Intertwining** — In Holoman; Digital Cadaver, Mike Tyler uses the hypertext anatomical atlas on the Net for what seems to be a postmodern re-valuation of the old meaning of the aesthetic experience as that which is perceptive by feeling; a form of cognition achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing and smell – the whole corporeal sensorium. In waking the digital cadaver from its condition of anesthesia, Tyler's performance can be read as a response to Walter Benjamin's demand (discussed in the previous chapter) to undo the condition of sensory alienation that he sees threatening modern man, to restore the power of the human bodily senses.

Benjamin explains this condition of sensory alienation as the effect of the pressure put on human beings by modern city life and factory work.
With *Holoman; Digital Cadaver*, Tyler suggests a different way of reading instances of sensory alienation in modern times. Holoman's identification with an image of his own corpse points to the centrality of other bodies and the body as other in our notions of self and of subjectivity, and draws attention to how this goes at the cost of the absence or disappearance of the body as sensing and thinking being. Holoman's state of sensory deprivation is the direct result of his identification with an image of his body as other, as corpse. This identification has turned him into a disembodied psyche, alienated from his body as a sensing and sensible being.

In *Holoman; Digital Cadaver*, the character acts as an internal focalizer who presents the seer with a position to take up, a position from which the implications of this identification become apparent in a most compelling way. The audience is invited to assume the position presented by Holoman, who presents an invitation to the audience to step into his shoes and see it as if from there. Taking up this position turns the dys-appearance of the body as represented on stage into a sense of *dys-placement*, i.e. it makes evident the usual absence of the body as location of sensory involvement with the world, precisely by making this body appear in unexpected ways.

In Tyler's performance the digitally constructed dys-appearance is confronted with the physical body that disappeared in its making. In an attempt to make a direct connection with his digital *Doppelgänger*, actor Frank Sheppard looks straight into a digital camera placed in front of him. Then he quickly turns his head towards the projection screen behind him to look himself in the eyes. Before he can make a connection, however, the image turns its head as well and slowly recedes into the background, disappearing into the multidimensional hollows of Jernigan's digital body.

Holoman's condition recalls the psychotic condition called *autoscopy*. This is an extreme form of depersonalization in which the subject's ego is no longer centered in its own body. In this condition, the subject may see itself as if it were from the outside (Grosz 1994: 43). *Holoman; Digital Cadaver* suggests this pathological condition might be not so much a strange aberration from some 'natural condition,' as a consequence of a culturally produced self-awareness through images of bodies seen.

The images of Sheppard playing Holoman, manipulated on the spot by computer artist Isabelle Jenniches, are like an electronic echo showing the paradoxical distance at the heart of the immediateness of the digital inscriptions. Holoman's digital resurrection is a mere reflection. He can only look at (t)his digitalized body; he can no longer look from it. It is exactly this intertwining of seeing and being seen that is of crucial importance to Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Cartesian mind-body opposition.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the presence of a body implies a particular reversibility. It is a 'place' that both sees and can be seen, that both touches and can be touched. Seeing and touching are each recorded on what Merleau-Ponty calls a map. These two maps are complete, but not superposable. To paraphrase him, it is a marvel too little noticed that every
movement of my eyes and every displacement of my body has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, and that, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in tactile space. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 134). The tangible is not completely reducible to the visible, and vice versa. Nevertheless, we experience what we see and what we feel as referring to the same world. This is because it is the same body that both sees and touches. It is therefore not consciousness but the body that creates the unity of the world. Just as it is the difference between the two that can be used to make one aware of the synthesizing activities of the body and the limitations of unitary perspective based uniquely on vision.

In Holoman; Digital Cadaver a computer screen prevents the connection between the visible and the tangible from taking place. When Holoman reaches out to touch his own body he feels the cold screen. But were there no screen, there would still be no spark generated between electronic image and tangible body. Instead, there would be a destructive flash terminating the actor as a living locus. It is only within the embodied look of the audience that the visible and the tangible body refer to the same world, yet in a way that disrupts the unity of this world.

Unlike the historical anatomical theatre, Holoman; Digital Cadaver does not confirm the truth of the Cartesian paradigm, but instead asks for the undoing of the modern transmutation. It presents an invitation to the audience as well to ‘come to your senses,’ that is, to leave the Cartesian world of shadows and to study the double and crossed situation of the visible and the tangible (and the other senses as well, I would add) starting from a multi-sensuous engagement with an object that is not ‘over there’ behind the proscenium arch, but takes place in a situation of intertwining with a body over here, which is me.


In “Denken in het Openbaar” (Ritsema 1998), Jan Ritsema explains his ideas behind his dance solo and describes his experiences in rehearsing and performing it. In “Becoming Jan Ritsema” (Ritsema 2002) he goes further into his ideas about dance, performing and philosophy.

2 — See Freud (1961): “The ego and the id.” Freud backs up his ideas with reference to the ‘cortical homunculus’:

The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego: it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface. If we wish to find an anatomical analogy for it we can best identify it with the ‘cortical homunculus’ of the anatomists, which stands on the head in the cortex, sticks up his heels, faces backwards and as we know, has its speech-area on the left hand side (Freud 1961: 26).
In a footnote added to the text in 1927, he states that:

The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides, as we have seen above, representing the superficies of the mental apparatus (1961: 26).

Grosz (1994: 31–39) offers a very helpful explanation of the bodily ego as corporeal projection.

3 — In his mirror stage essay Lacan refers to how the fragmented body can manifest itself in dreams.

It then appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of in those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions – the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch has fixed, for all time, in painting, in their ascent from the 15th-century to the imaginary zenith of modern man (Lacan 1977: 4–5).


4 — A first version of Holoman: Digital Cadaver was presented at the Festival a/d Werf (Utrecht, May 1997). In this text, I refer to the second version of the show performed in De Balie, Amsterdam, May 26 and 27, 1998. Performed by Frank Sheppard (Holoman); Concept/director/music (electronics, bass): Mike Tyler; Guitars: Meindert Meindertsma; Percussion: Peter Kuitwaard; Choreography: Frank van de Ven; Animations, video: Isabelle Jenniches.
For more information and images, see: http://www.media-gn.nl/mfa/isabelle/HOLOMAN

5 — The name of the person used to produce these images was not officially disclosed. However, since the date of his execution was released it has not been very difficult for journalists to discover that the person in question was Joseph Paul Jernigan, found guilty of robbing and murder and executed on August 26, 1993.

6 — This quote is taken from the The Visible Human Fact Sheet (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/visible_human.html)

7 — For more information on the technical aspects of the Visible Human Project see: http://www.dlib.org/dlib/october95/10ackerman.html
See also the website of the Visible Human Project: (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible)

8 — The Visible Human Female data set was released in November 1995 and has the same characteristics as the human male, with one exception. Due to new techniques, it was possible to cut the female cadaver into even thinner slices. This time no less than 39 gigabite of information found its way to cyberspace.

9 — “Zij die bij hun leven als booodoener schadden, worden van nut na hun dood en gezondheid ontleent aan den dood zelf haar bevordering.”
“Voorhoofd, vinger, nier, tong, hoofd, long, hersens, handen, geven u levenden waarschuwend voorbeeld.”
“Hoorder neemt u ter harte, en terwijl u gaat langs de verschillende dingen van het leven. Wees er van overtuigd dat ook in het nietigste de Godheid nog verborgen is.”

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10 — These similarities between the Visible Human Project and the historical anatomical dissection were pointed out by José van Dijck in a lecture presented in De Balie in Amsterdam (December 18, 1997. See also my review of this lecture in relation to the performance *Holoman: Digital Cadaver*; “Het Visible Human Project als Schouwtoneel van de 21ste Eeuw.” in: *Etcetera* XIV (64) 1998, 19–23. See van Dijck (2000).