

From one photograph to the next or how to touch the spectator – Avignon 2000, skin-deep

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This paper critically reviews seven productions at Avignon 2000. The first was 'Le chant perdu des petit riens'. This corresponds to visual and tactile perception bound to the hand and skin. 'Le Petit Köchel' is a story of Mozart devoured by the Heifetz sisters, two virtuoso violinists. The non-lyrical dry writing is made up of very dry statements that distance the observer; the result seems to resolve into an attractive 'skin effect' and a repulsive 'bone effect'. In the 'Ruines romaines' relations between people are a field of ruins; individuals are obsessed by bad feelings and disgust. Bones stick out to signify the excessive fixity of ideals. In 'Terres promises' the enigma of textual and scenic images overwhelms the spectator; the subject wants to be guided by an organizing principle, the resemblances are explored at multiple levels. In 'La Peau d'Elisa' the relationship of flesh and clothing is emphasized; the main character can only communicate after eye contact. 'Andromaque' is a modern interpretation of a great classic. Finally 'La Mouette' shows the heroine immersed in feathers from a disembowelled pillow; the ambiguity of meaning is emphasized and the production is maintained between intellectuality and sensuality.

Le chant perdu des petit riens (Figure 1)

This kind of thing is not so common. The two mimes speak. They say the alphabet¹. Each letter corresponds to an 'auto-contact'. Putting your finger across your mouth means, for example, to keep quiet. These are the auto-contacts of everyday life. We turn a part of our body towards ourselves.

The imitation of our tics in our gestures is perfect here: no deformation will disturb the message, as in the blurred reflected image, in the background. The Théâtre du Mouvement knows its attitudes and vocabulary very well. From Le Brun and his studies on the gestures



Figure 1. Often, theatre would like to tell us a thing or two, but it requires silence of us. We can be touched by theatre provided we keep silent about our discovery. And when it tells us too much, it renders us speechless and bored. Let it only show its skin, that would be enough! It likes to terrorize us by suggesting the most atrocious actions without showing them to us. We are faced with four cannibalistic shrews who enjoy frightening us, sending us defenceless to the basement of childhood. (Photo: François Figlarz)

of emotions up until ‘the system of postures’ by Decroux, one has always tried to categorize and codify the different expressions of the body.

This demonstration is both amusing and convincing. It speaks to me, but it does not touch me. Why? Maybe because it lacks flesh and skin, which beats it all for contact. One sees all too distinctly the idea, the series, the technique, the observation that these attitudes are trying to illustrate. One reads the ‘radiography’ of these bodies, the spatial geometry of bones, their precise and clinical design but one misses the flesh of the situation and, even more, the skin of a touch or of an unexpected or even ill-timed gaze. In this writing of contacts, one sees the writing too clearly and the body not sufficiently, as if it were imprisoned by a cold and bony drawing and did not tell an unusual story. Behind this moveable geometry of bones, one perceives too well the main idea or intention. The taste of classifying, legislating, establishing the principles of movement and behaviour becomes a research that is skeletally correct but aesthetically meaningless.

However, this bony abstraction, this codification that stems from Decroux has had a deep influence on the contemporary writing of the last 20 years. Indeed, writing, from Koltès to Minyana or Fichet, first of all sets its rules of functioning, its abstract principles, its mode of segmentation. Dramatic texts, as well as the Decroux-trained bodies must be unfolded, oriented in all directions, like a carpenter’s folding ruler in the old days. The gestural or textual sequence always has the same length. What changes is the order, the relief, the rising or falling of the episodes. What should we do with these articulations, these points of contact? In order to tell a story, the thread needs to be filled out. The skeleton needs flesh and skin, which will show

its limits and textures. The opposition between skin and bones is not quite the same as between body and soul, matter and spirit, substance and form, signifier and signified, visible and invisible, surface and depth. It is, rather, the opposition between what touches me and what speaks to me, between sensation and concept, soft skin and rigid bones. Above all, it is an opposition that becomes ternary as soon as one includes the flesh, which provides the missing link between bones and skin. According to Zeami's metaphor, the model of perception is ternary, more than dialectical and Hegelian²: the skin is linked to seeing, the flesh to hearing, the bones to the spirit. But this progressive model of Western texts and performances is difficult to follow, since they very often choose only one dimension – the skin or the bones – thus sealing themselves off to the mediation of the flesh and forgetting the sensitive hearing of the flesh that is also characteristic of voice and word. Even more delicate is the suggestion made for the spectator–reader to approach the performance object with its skin, flesh and bones. Aesthetic experience between the work of art and the spectator becomes, therefore, a confrontation of their skins, their flesh, their bones. It is one and the same question of contact, finger-touch, sensitive experience.

The idea, then, is not to analyse stage and text in themselves, which are always isolated or ungraspable, but to put two skins in contact with each other, the skin of the aesthetic object, which closes and covers itself with a sensitive skin, and the skin of the spectator, which opens itself and puts itself in danger with its very mode of perception. This corresponds, more or less, to two modes of perception: a visual perception, for instance, at a distance, bony and geometric and a tactile, or even haptic perception, bound to the hand and foremost to the skin, that avant-guard post of the body.

Open to each other in such a manner, bone against bone at worst, or skin against skin at best, the work of art and its receptor can be lived within a given continuum. There is also a continuity, an uninterrupted contact between author, director, actor, spectator or reader. It allows us to embrace contemporary theatre production, that of Avignon 2000 for instance, as one and the same corpus, a continuum of classical, modern and contemporary works, for these are similar or distinct according to their own experience and to the experience of the link between the bones and the skin, as much within them as within ourselves.

Le Petit Köchel (Figure 2)

Often, it is a question of bones and human flesh in this strange cannibalistic play³. Little Köchel, having devoured the Heifetz sisters, two virtuoso violinists, has just committed suicide after he had obtained the promise from his 'mothers' (one pair of sisters who are interpreters and another pair of sisters who are musicologists, the four of them consumed by the cult of Mozart and the cataloguing of his works) that they would eat his flesh. But this son might only be an invention of the mothers, since he never leaves his basement and continuous musicological allusions that hint at a possible ritual game with no consequence, or a repetition: both a rehearsal and a repetition, repetition as the exhaustion of form.

There is, in any case, a bone that we cannot swallow: the bone of a dark and horrible story we cannot really believe. The play and its staging, are 'bony' in the sense that they are made of sharp edges, a splitting of characters into two, dry statements, cold remarks on art and life. What is frightening, in the text as well as on the stage, is the lack of skin, of blood, the rejection

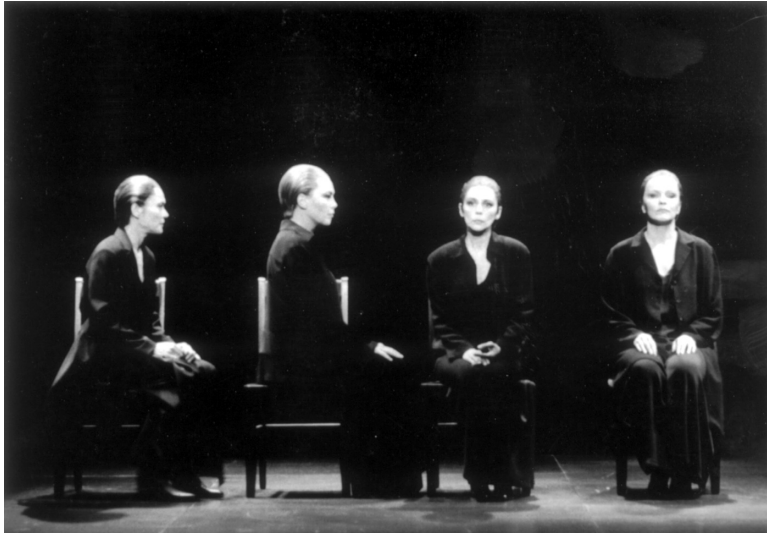


Figure 2. Photo: Marlene G lineau Payette. It likes to frighten us by suggesting the most atrocious actions without showing them. We are always faced with four cannibalistic shrews who take pleasure in frightening us, sending us back to the basement of our childhood

of any sensuality and the ‘animal’ senses such as touch and smell, the refusal to show bestiality, and therefore of the weakness of human flesh. Short, cutting cues, as if carved with a knife or a scalpel, black humour without any trace of catharsis, are arranged with the demonical precision of a detective or gothic novel, never solving the riddle. In this kind of non-lyrical, very dry writing, made of biting understatements, the reader as well as the spectator must keep the work at a distance, must see it as a game, a repetition, but also as a Chinese *Koan*, for example, as a logical impossibility, a riddle that cannot be solved by rational thinking. How can absolute beauty, Mozart’s music for instance, lead its notators, the servants of his work, to leave their child rotting in the basement, before eating him up, the only offering and punishment being a page of the K chel catalogue offered in sacrifice by fire? This barbaric action, the suicide of the son, reminds us of a famous Koan: ‘Prince Nata, tearing himself to pieces, gave the flesh back to his mother and his bones to his father and then, manifesting his own original body and by virtues of his own miraculous powers, preached the Dharma for the good of his parents’⁴. Little K chel gives his bones back to his artistic father, Mozart, and he offers in sacrifice to his devouring mother, the servant of his work, any pleasure of the flesh.

For the spectator, as well as for the reader, this signifies a ‘bone-effect’. He feels rejected from the text, from any cutaneous contact, frightened and repelled by the darkness of the situation and the stabbing of the merciless cues. He appreciates the structure, the mastered technique, the cynical verbal exchanges, the black humour, the ritual of a game cut off from reality. He admires the spotless mastering of Marleau’s *mise-en-sc ne*, its rigour, his rejection of illustration or explanation, his icy formalism. Every effort is made to avoid the realistic representation of a cannibalistic action behind closed doors. There is no putrifying odour coming from the basement, no emotional coloration whatsoever in these pale faces, these tow-heads, these hands, with a plate like a fan, hiding their faces and their hearts. The acting



Figure 3. It locks us in our fears or in prisons with solid bars where the adults play repulsive characters. (Photo: Philippe André)

style, extremely spare and formalistic, is close to Japanese No or a quartet of voices. We perceive the forms, the rules of the game, the musical structure, the aesthetic choices, the drawing of the sentences, the construction of figures and scenes, in short the whole structure of the verbal work and of the performance.

The skin-effect of the spectator, which consists of approaching the work in as delicate a manner as possible, has no chance of happening here, or only if we consider terror, horror and sadism as a sensual and regenerating pleasure, as a theatrical cruelty that can shake up civilized mankind.

Bone-effect – when we feel rejected by the visible and closed form of the text, by its distance, its coldness, its solidity, its carapace; when we get the impression it will eat us raw.

Skin-effect – when the text attracts us, absorbs us, obliges us to identify with it, to submit ourselves to it, in the same manner that we become infatuated with somebody, they ‘get under our skin’.

There are two types of performance, perhaps, the bone-performance, where matter is form, and the skin-performance, where form is matter.

Ruines romaines (Figure 3)

The woman’s face is blurred – or is it dirty?⁵ Clinging to the bars, she does not get out of herself, while the man, with his slick and focused face, his hand relaxed and strangely linked to the body, seems to be ‘elsewhere’, as if he were planning a terrible blow.

We spectators are also constantly refocusing. We focus on this face rather than on that one. Our gaze is only partially set by the object viewed, we therefore have the choice of the point-of-view. This is why the skin of the other person becomes finer or uglier, gets closer or moves off. The only thing that remains are the gestural contact points (the bars, the body

attitudes) or the vocal contact points (the very loud, almost shouted, way of speaking prevents any nuance, any subtle subtext). In Philippe Minyana's play, relationships between the people are a field of ruins because the human beings are no longer able to get close to each other. They are too obsessed by their bad smells, the physical disgust for each other, their instability, their sexual identity. The art of the play and its staging consists of making us feel this unsettling feeling, in maintaining the enigma up to the last sequence (male homosexuality) and, above all, in dealing with the enigma and the uneasy feeling as if it were a rigid structure. These are the bones of the structure or fixed relationships, the bars of the prison that are all the more solid as they have become our inner bone structure and carapace. The skin, theirs as well as ours, freezes, retracts and erases itself, so the bones appear. The dramaturgy and the acting adequately render the stiffness of the social or erotic game, rhythmic or thematic counter-points, echoes, juxtapositions or points-of-view and monologues. All this gives the impression of a perfect construction but also of a coldness since there is no more contact between words than between human beings. Such coldness stems from a writing of disgust. What Minyana, the author, and Michel Boy, the director, do not want to address directly and naturalistically, by showing and making us smell sordidness and dirt as bad-smelling skin and an unhealthy situation, is signified by the formal means: overacting and stiffness of bodies, abstract and 'cut' montage of its sequences, clash-clash writing and the 'non-said', which comes from Chekhov and is reconsidered by Vinaver. Bones stick out of the body to signify that our ideals are too fixed and to build a stable reality, although too starchy and lacking the softness of the skin.

Terres promises (Figure 4)

Everything is skin, on the other hand, in Roland Fichet's 'Terres promises'⁶— the swollen skin of Lazarus' face in the foreground, the bright and idealized skin of the painter in his immaculate smock, the rosy and fresh skin of the Breton peasant girl and the skin of the centenary vaults of the Chartreuse cloisters that Oudiou's lighting makes vibrate and breathe from within. The skin of Fichet's text's epic lyricism sustains the trajectory of the five travellers without situating them in a real dramatic action. We have the impression of immense skin and accumulated flesh, viewed from above by the painter and the 'natural' girl.

Skin-poetry relies on the enigma of textual and scenic images that overwhelm the spectator with the beauty of words and lights, without giving the spectator the chance to analyse them, without allowing their trajectories to meet in a place where everything would become clear.

The character, as well as the reader or spectator, dwells on the sensation, not so much on the flow of words and the multiplicity of view-points as on the profusion of narrative matter or the difficulty of shaping, like the painter in front of his easel. 'Pile of loving flesh, of living flesh raised. It is from an absence of matter that I suffered' (p. 54). This theatrical matter lacks a frame, the frame of an empty easel in a corner of the cloister, the frame of the living statues of the five characters and, above all, that of a plot that would bring together these very different destinies. The painter insists that his subjects will appear in their main structure, will become solid. 'Uncover the bones one must uncover the bones in Europe we do not see the bones enough too much flesh' (p. 55). Such advice applies, partly, to the play and its performance. The spectator wants to be guided more, oriented by an organizing principle. The production,

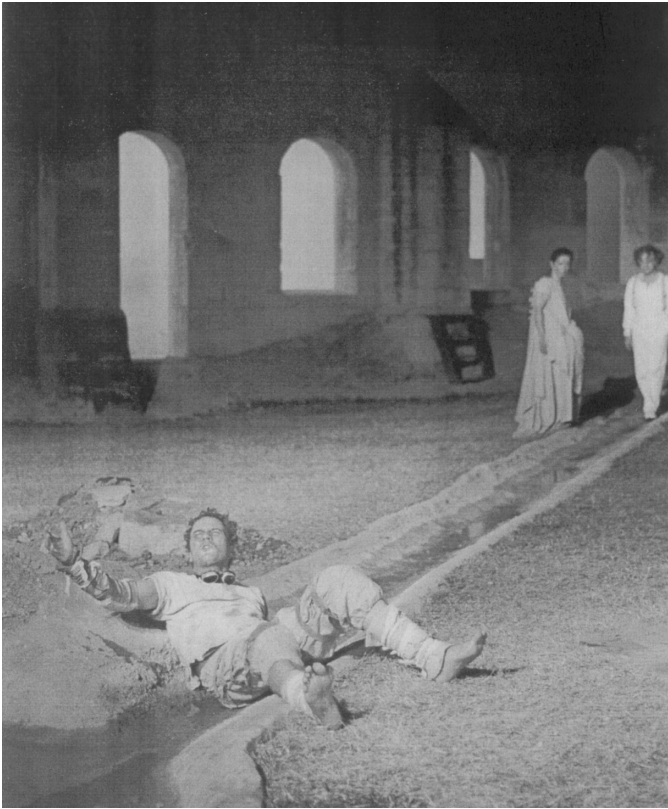


Figure 4. Death appears to us as a promised yet undiscoverable land, an abstract painter's idea, a way of organizing matter from a point-of-view within the subject, of organizing these heaps of flesh in a picture which absolves them. (Photo: Philippe Delacroix)

by its very nature, offers a framework and a context, but it keeps or even deepens the poetic enigma, the blurred outline of the historical destinies. No boundary, no nervous system, no ossification illustrates the central metaphor of the play. The gardens that open on other gardens that open on other gardens (p. 11). Each image can be read on three different levels of the body. For instance, on the surface of the skin of his face, Lazarus' suffering is obscure, but physical. In the flesh of the text, one grasps the figurative sense of the character: his irrepressible desire for Loume (p. 51). At a deeper level, it refers to all the interpretations suggested by the dialogue and the didascalía: 'Loume and Lazarus sing with their body a cruel song they like' (p. 51). This invisible level of the didascalía is the last poetic mask and refuge. Only the skin finally makes sense or, rather, sensation. There is a hysteria of theatrical, pictorial representation when it refuses to be put into form.

The writing, as well as the *mis-en-scène*, have chosen not to limit the lyricism and the 'absent presence of the word', but to let them flow in the performance space like water suddenly flowing down the drain between the painter and his subjects. Neither the writing nor the performance stress the special status of the painter, an exterior gaze sent out into the heart of lyricism. The

performance eliminates the part of the other marginal actor, Pierre, who wanders, ‘invisible and visible’ (p. 11). Having lost these two centres of the frame, Fichet’s poetry gives up any dramaturgical proposition. It becomes a skin that breathes, shimmers, sputters, enjoys life with the same breathing rhythm as the spectator who rediscovers the curative virtues of the pleasure of the text, that moment where my body will follow its own ideas since my body does not have the same ideas as me⁷. The skin takes care of the ideas of the body and transmits them. Maybe that is what the promised land is all about?

La peau d’Elisa (Figure 5)

This skin, which we just catch a glimpse of, is between the top and the bottom of this strange wedding-dress. We immediately notice this ‘skin which sparkles between two pieces’, ‘at the most erotic part of the body (...) there where the garment is half open’⁸. On a bed that might be in a boarding-school, or hospital or lunatic asylum, Elise tells and re-lives the love stories told to her in confidence. The bed – and not the table in a café as in Carole Frichette’s text – is the common ground of all these stories about first encounters: reconstructing the body piece by piece, and the flesh, until the skin offers itself to the caress of the gaze of the other person. The skin is the place where a substance runs as a tingling, a desire to tell, to hear, to touch the other. The actress only seems able to speak after she has established eye contact with the spectators, because the ones who listen and the ones who tell share the same shivering (p. 19). It is therefore crucial not to break the contact, in telling as well as in listening. No matter if one mixes memories, if one goes imperceptibly from man to woman, the only important issue is the effect of memories on the skin, ‘the little things of the body, sweat, quivering, pulsing blood’ (p. 19).

Such writing of skin does not need the character, the action, the super-objective, the plot and all other notions of classical and modern dramaturgy. It only needs to hold the listener breathless and excited by the intimate story of how skin can be touched, reconstituted or, in another way, how it grows within the body, falling everywhere in thousands of little folds (p. 24). The growth and outgrowth of this skin, the caress or the contact it needs, the absence it signals if it is not touched, correspond to the almost organic process of growth of the sentence and narrative, or their repetition and rhythm, of their unfolding without any previous plan. The memory and its most direct and intimate evocation bring the next memory. Everything that could be reconstructed in a classical narrative, is given here in bulk, delivered in the enumeration of the memories and sensations.

The sentence is not written and then performed in the real time of utterance in the present tense, but in the time of multiple relationships to others, an instance in which the narrative is being constructed that very moment. This is how theatre is born again: as an intimate narrative addressed to a visible and invisible partner, precisely the immediate reader or distant spectator. Meaning arrives from under the skin, under the words.

No bone-structure appears under this skin, no classical or post-modern dramaturgy shows through such writing. Skin and poetry have one thing in common. They do not have to cover and disguise an already solidly constituted organism. Hence, the extreme fragility of the beautiful performance. The actress pretends to invent her memories for each of us and the (phatic) contact with the spectators must never be interrupted. And for the spectator, that is



Figure 5. We do not always dare to come so close to the skin to rub up against it, whilst telling it what we miss in its narrative – or in ours. (Photo: Justine Junius)

also what ‘rushing his skin’ (his life) is about—to get closer but at the risk of being troubled, of not understanding, of embarking on a journey without goal or end.

The second time I was about to taste ‘the Skin of Elisa’, the usher told me that the actress was disturbed by my taking notes only a few steps from her hospital bed. I suddenly felt caught in the wrong, as if I had scribbled my notes directly on the actress’ skin, thereby refusing to return her gaze, which her narrative explicitly calls to the attention of the spectators. I therefore experienced this second exhibition of the skin with the words formulated mentally or scripturally by a commentary, by the congealing of language. Even so, the second time the skin of the text and the acting made a big impression: skin-deep.

Andromaque (Figure 6)

In the centre, Oreste: head shaved, crouched down, gaze turned on himself, arms bent in an arc with nobody to embrace⁹. He is supported with gestures and words by the three other actors who build a chorus in charge of the role and text of his confident, Pylade, whose text they share.

The whole tragic universe of the play can be experienced in this living tableau, in these ‘auto-contacts’, in the way each one touches the other, literally or emotionally, with a specific body tension. Oreste, sitting on his heels, seems ready to leap towards other hopes and other crimes. Hermione (on the right) is confidently expecting some news, ready to welcome Pyrrhus. Andromaque is tensed up in a painful effort to get away. Pyrrhus has the best of the situation as a kind of superego for Oreste. He lends him more than support, in order to put him back on track.

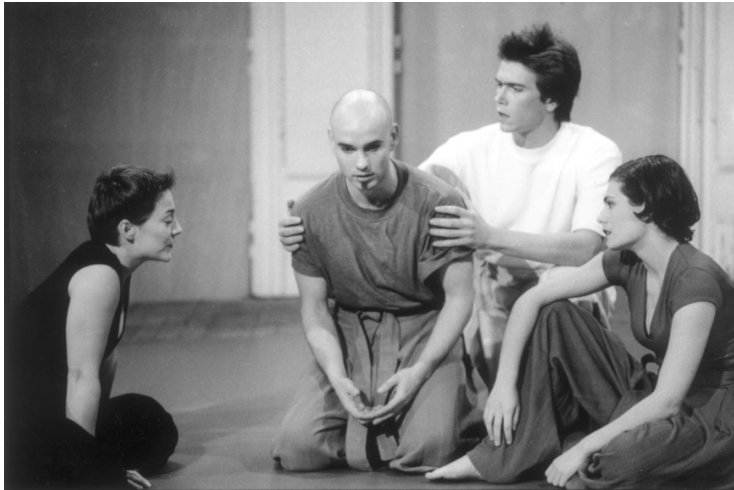


Figure 6. We still prefer to support the failing characters, to reassure them while they confront their own histories, to come closer to them in order to listen to them or console them. (Photo: Vincent Jacques)

This tableau, and Michel Liard's production as a whole, reconciles the bones (classical dramaturgy, for example, in its solid coherence) and the skin (of an Artaudian theatre that wakes us up, nerves and heart, in order 'to address not only the spirit but the sense'¹⁰). The members of the chorus and Oreste support each other. Their gestural contact points (hands, attitudes, gazes, postures) correspond to the vocal, rhetorical, rhythmic anchors of the Alexandrine. They do not coincide exactly. The body does not have the same needs as language and one does not rhythmically duplicate the other. However, they help and support each other. Physical work, its postures and points of contact, is used to anchor the language of passion, and, inversely, the expression of passions and the diction of verses find corresponding points of orientation and rhythmic confirmation in the different stops of the postures. By utilizing the techniques of floor work (kneeling, lying, covering), the actors physically explore the different contact points, tensions, impulses, rebounds, rejections of their own bodies and of the imagined body of the group. They concretely experience the drives of the whole body not only of the skeleton with its constricted or liberated postures, but also of the skin and the flesh, which glow in the game of language and seduction.

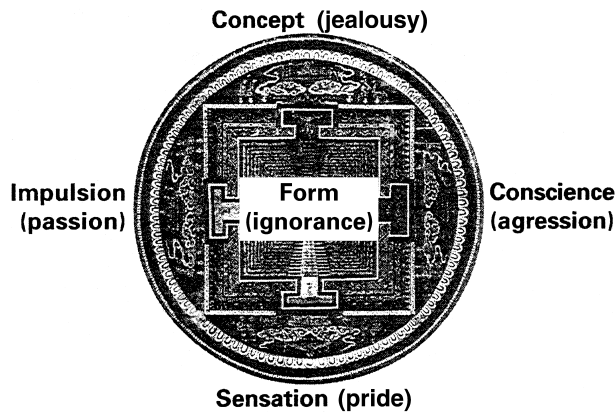
This alliance of bony stiffness and glowing skin, of body rigor and rumbling of language becomes the very flesh of the Racinian word with the regularity of the Alexandrine and its rhythmic surprises. It also builds up the palpating heart of this physical and vocal universe, the place of passion and drives.

Does this control the flesh, the skin or the bones? No way to cut it short! The flesh is here, luminous and rumbling. Skins burn and hearts blaze up. When they touch lightly, the hands transmit imperceptible order, conscious or unconscious. It all happens in the struggle between darkness and sun, the end of the dialectics of subject and object, interior and exterior.

The actors of Michel Liard say the Alexandrine is a perfect medium, always anticipating

the right articulation for the gestural contact points. And their bodies are strictly contemporary. They no longer indulge in the languishing or overexcited body language of the 1960s and 1970s, nor the clean, cool and branché of the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, they are bodies in a state of variable balance and intensity, replacing the straight-jacket verse with certain moments of crisis where the straight-jacket bursts out of its seams, under the influence of passion and of language upset for a moment.

In this way, Racine's *Mandala*¹¹ is performed: a world with opposed forces, sometimes positive, sometimes negative; a world which this production illustrates unknowingly, sublimely ignorant of the following forms:



Passions (here: love, jealousy, rage) are (emotional and muscular) impulses. They are each a will-to-seize that are immediately countered by the intellect, the analytical consciousness that seeks to know who is attacking so violently and to what end in order to better counter-attack.

The sensation, that 'mixture of affects and precepts' (Deleuze), which expresses itself here in a kind of pride of the skin exposing itself, is countered by a logic of comparison, by a strict use of the concepts, which are very jealous of their prerogatives.

In their intersection, the four contrasting elements produce an empty, unselfconscious form, the form of tragedy, of the tragic universe. This form is the place of miraculous balance of all the instances, particularly between bones and skin (such as a perfectly organized dramaturgy and a perfectly breathed textuality).

This production of *Andromaque* requires from the actors (as from the spectators) that they situate themselves at once in the middle of things and outside them, that they overcome the Western dualism of expressivity which, before Barthes' 'Dire Racine'¹² and other Barthesian directors such as Vitez, Villégier or Mesguich, was still spoiling the interpretation of Racine. It carries them through verses and bodies, mobilizing their sense of solid, bony structure as much as the fugitive and cutaneous sensations. It implies a delicate balance between depth and surface, bone and skin, which contemporary dramatic texts rarely find, because they are carried away by a burning inferiority or, contrarily, a cold formalism. Where Racine today is so magnificently performed, the deepest spirit and the bones of our unconscious are directly articulated on the delicate skin of the Alexandrines and the actors' bodies, at any given point, always somewhat secret, which the actors must find by doing and the spectators must guess at on the surface of things. On the other hand, a well-placed voice,



Figure 7. For we do not want to trample the innocence of seagulls, the white of feathers and softness of down, the beauty of art. (Photo: Sylvain Guichard)

a correctly placed contact point, an assumed tactility will always lead to a profound knowledge of the text.

Therefore, the whole Racinian universe, its intricate interdependence of the contact points, the closeness of blows and caresses, drives and words, and seems to be on the verge of rising, all in one block, as if it were no longer necessary to differentiate between the three levels of the body as well as the various degrees of meaning.

La Mouette (Figure 7)

No bones, no skin, just feathers. Seagull feathers coming out of a disembowelled pillow which Trepler tears out in front of Nina to force her to take an interest in him, to love him. It is a very violent scene, suggesting a rape to very loud rock music in which Trepler attacks Nina physically in a frenzy unforetold by his previous coldness and inertia.

Feathers fly, where Trepler will finally kill himself and Trigorine will wallow, as if calling for a white death in a swirl of snow. The feathers are also the object of a global choreography that overshadows the characters who earlier were gauze-like, languishing, and underlines the broken principle structure of their relationships, the repetition, the effects of symmetry or splitting into two, archetypes and tics of behaviour, the Decrousian asceticism of attitudes and

figures. However, the *mise-en-scène* would only be schematic and skeletal without the moments of cathartic explosion and emotional colouring. Then, bones and skin are no longer in opposition. They are visible in the open wound. This flesh is also the dramatist's alliance of depth and superficiality, emotion and coldness. This is why this production of the *Seagull* does not remain a dramaturgical actor's exercise (as in, and magnificently so, in the rough sketch of the *Three Sisters* in their *Family Circle*). It gives a mixture of stiffness and grace to the sketch. The ambiguity of meanings and motivations, of the non-said and the subtext makes a visible comeback. Particularly in the fourth act, which is a little slow and underlit; one can hear Phillip Glass' music which Wilson used for his video *Molière's Death*. The production maintains a fragile balance between form and expressivity, pen stroke and blood stain.

Should we wonder that contemporary writing, in its search for its organic identity, goes such a long way round Racine and Chekhov that it hesitates and oscillates between intellectuality and sensuality? One runs the risk, albeit a delicious one, of writing only with one skin (Fréchette, Fichet) without the guard-rails of narrative or of dramaturgy. There is an equal danger of building only a fleshless framework without the emotional coloration of blood (Minyana, Chaurette).

There are very few contemporary examples where dramaturgy and writing compete with each other, and finally balance, leaving the reader with the choice between being steeped in fiction or touching lightly on verbal sensations, stylistic, literary and theatrical organisation.

Novarina – at least the one of Avignon 2000 – is the exception that proves the rule. He plays with two images, the skin/poetry and bone/structure. He knows how to play on the sounds and signifiers of the words with (sometimes tiring) virtuosity, but he also claims to set up the whole world in a philosophical system; at least in a philosophy of language, where Wittgenstein, the Talmud and Lacan are logical partners. Sometimes – and it is indeed a moment of grace – it is no longer possible to distinguish between his poetry and his philosophy as in 'La Chair de l'homme'.¹³

It is no easy matter, however, to overcome the old Judeo-Christian dualism and find, beyond bones and skin, an incarnated word or speakable flesh, relieved of the religious or mystical disguises simultaneously. Bones and skin begin a timid reconciliation, and when they finally meet, the flesh is no longer opposed to the spirit, or vice versa¹⁴. Rather, one desires the other. When drifting towards the Mandala or towards Zeami's ternary model, one gives the flesh not only the word, but above all the ability to hear, where music and language are still undifferentiated. The flesh is not so much a thing that feels as that which listens and speaks, a sensitive hearing between effect and concept.

The establishment of the skin–flesh–bone triad remains the creative fantasy of all these authors and actors: to make us see, hear, grasp a human action in all its dimensions, from its conception to its ultimate consequences. Who has not entertained the fantasy of a cathartic, physical and/or mental action, felt and conceived by the author, reframed and recentred by the director, carried (more than re-lived) by the actor and finally welcomed as is, by a spectator walking on air? As if pure movement could transmit itself from one pole to the other, without any loss of energy! A physical, as well as psychological and hermeneutical (?) coming together. Pure pleasure of skin to skin.

It is up to the spectator to decide in what way we want to expose ourselves to the text and the performance. The examples of Racine and Chekhov show that our attitudes can be at once

superficial, as in bound to the immediate confrontation with words and bodies, and deeply structured, by taking into account patterns of our perception, our ways of thinking cognitively, using logic and imagination.

Contemporary writing must be unfolded. It must not remain locked in the confined universe of its fictional (discursive, narrative, actual, ideological) structures. It must be incarnated in the actor's presence, be taken over by the haptic and concupiscent gaze of the spectator, and find its body again as well as an opacity of the skin.

It is a good occasion to reconsider the relationship between the different instances of identification and distance, which are no longer mutually exclusive, surface and depth, since 'the deepest thing in man is his skin,' (Valéry: 'L'Idée Fixe') and abstraction and figuration, since the drawing does not exclude the volume.

Praise of the skin becomes a theme but even more a way of being for a text. Writing, be it classical, modern or contemporary is that affectionate skin, that palm-pressed parchment, that inexhaustible source of tactile pleasure which theatre gives a prominent role to by showing and/or hiding it in the clothes of the stage. The spectator must also know which body he or she is rubbing against theatre. He or she must regulate and deregulate constantly this organic constellation of skin–flesh–bone. It is a question of education, availability and desire, that is transmitted from generation to generation, skin to skin, over which we have some degree of authority and responsibility. Thus, the spectator is the one who not only permits himself to be touched by theatre, but above all the one who consents to touch it in return, serving as a conducting body and returning something other than what he or she has received. From Racine and Chekhov to Novarina and Fréchette, the living theatre continues to make us shiver, and that is as it should be. It is no longer the body bundled up in etiquette or declamation, nor the hysterics of body expression, nor trained in the Tarzan or Grotowski style, but the body vectorized, carried away, drawn from one location to the next, from one time to another. The skin touches all texts, but some are afraid, as if they feared writing without end and instead preferred the certainties of dramaturgical calcification. Sometimes, bones and flesh cover themselves with naked skin. This is our best approach and way to touch, skin on skin.

Notes

1. Par le Théâtre du Mouvement, avec Claire Heggen et Claude Bokhbza et Dany Kanashiro. Conception et mise en scène: Yves Marc
2. Zéami, (1960) *La Tradition Secrète du Nô* (Paris: Gallimard) 1960, p. 146.
3. N. Chaurette (2000) *Le Petit Köchel* (Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers). Misc en scène de Denis Marleau. Assisté de Sophie Proust et Alain Roy. Avec Louise Bombardier, Christiane Pasquer. Ginette Morin et Louise Laprade, Salle Benoît XII.
4. Cited in D.T. Suzuki (1972) *Essais sur le Bouddhisme Zen. Deuxième série, 1940 et 1943* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel) pp. 115–116.
5. (1986) *Ruines Romaines* de Philippe Minyana (Paris: Edilig). Mise en scène de Michel Boy, avec Michel Boy. Marie-Do Fival, Jean Pierre Granet. Au Théâtre de l'escalier des Doms.
6. Mise en scène de Philippe Lanton, Grand Cloître de la Chartreuse. Texte publié aux Editions Théâtrales, Paris 2000.
7. R. Barthes (1994 [1973]) *Le Plaisir du texte, en Oeuvres complètes, tome II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil) p. 1502.

8. R. Barthes (1994 [1973]) *Le Plaisir du texte*, en *Oeuvres complètes, tome II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil) p. 1498.
9. Mise en scène de Michel Liard, avec Florence Dannhoffer, Karine Madrid, Yves Arcaix, Dominique Delavigne. Théâtre du Fol Ordinaire. Au Théâtre du Grenier Sel.
10. A. Artaud (1964) *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: NRF).
11. Voir notamment: Chögyam Trungpa. Mandala. *Un chaos ordonné* (Paris: Editions du seuil) pp. 41–52.
12. R. Barthes (1993 [1963]) *Dire Racine, Sur Racine, Oeuvres Complètes, tome I*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil) pp. 883–1103.
13. V. Novarina (1995) *La Chair de l'homme* (Paris: POL).
14. Selon le mot de Paul Claudel: 'La chair (...) désire contre l'esprit, l'esprit désire contre la chair' (Préface du *Partage de Midi*).

About the author

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