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**Performing *that-which-will-become* Posthuman and Queer Bodies in the Works of Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde**

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**Performing *that-which-will-become* Posthuman and Queer Bodies in the  
Works of Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

For Koki

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**Performing *that-which-will-become* Posthuman and Queer Bodies in the  
Works of Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde**

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Douglas Everett Norman, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Elizabeth Richmond-Garza

This dissertation focuses on two playwrights, at either end of the nineteenth century, who engage problems of the human body as a site of legitimation and authentication of identity by staging inversions of the categories of natural and artificial. Against the backdrop of increasing mechanization and dematerialization of embodiment, Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde explore the transgressive possibilities of artificial bodies as reactions against the erasure of the diversity of actual bodies. I read in their works similar rejections of the body as a site that narrowly prescribes gender identity and sexual behavior according to mechanistic views of physiology. In doing so, I argue that their aesthetic theories and dramas evince a longing for more flexible and complex models of embodiment that do not prescribe or authenticate gender and sexuality as functions of a mechanistic physiological nature. This project, then, locates some roots of posthuman and queer theories of embodiment in the dramas and aesthetic theories of these two dramatists.

Kleist and Wilde use the dialogue form to explore the paradoxes produced by the distinction between the natural and the artificial and by the construction of the natural body as fundamentally mechanical. Kleist's *Penthesilea* and Wilde's *Salomé* resist the humanist naturalization of gender and sexuality via the mechanization of the body. As anti-humanist counter-discourse and performance, the *femme-fatales* of their dramas are virtual bodies or bodies yet-to-come. I examine how these virtually queer, posthuman bodies in the text are performatively actualized on stage to provoke audiences to imagine modes of embodiment yet-to-come, or to pretend them into existence. I read theatre theory and practice as part of the complex technical and philosophical tools, for imagining bodies, as well as defining and performing identities, that precede the concept of the virtual in the context of computer technology. I conclude by arguing for the importance of literature, dialogue, drama, and the embodied materialities of performance to *digital media* or *new media*, as an attempt to steer thinking away from the VR model to the MOO model, from readymade product to participatory, dialogic process.

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## **Performing *that-which-will-become* Posthuman and Queer Bodies in the Works of Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde**

This project takes as its starting point the distinction between the natural and the artificial as it appears in discourse on bodies in performance. It speaks to the current work surrounding the discursive constitution and performative materialization of bodies that propose anti-essentialist theories of embodiment; theories of queer and posthuman corporeality seek to denaturalize essentialist notions of gender of sexuality while insisting on the importance of actual, material embodiment to those identity categories.<sup>1</sup> This project focuses on two playwrights, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the nineteenth century, who engage with the problems of the human body as a site of legitimation and authentication of identity by staging inversions of the categories of natural and artificial. Against the backdrop of increasing mechanization and dematerialization of embodiment, Heinrich von Kleist and Oscar Wilde explore the transgressive possibilities of artificial bodies as reactions against the erasure of the diversity of actual bodies. I read in their works similar rejections of the humanist body or the body as a site of mechanistically determined gender and sexuality, as a site that narrowly prescribes gender identity and sexual behavior according to mechanistic views of physiology. In doing so, I argue that their aesthetic theories and dramas evince a longing for more flexible and complex models of embodiment that do not prescribe or authenticate gender and sexuality as functions of a mechanistic physiological nature. This project, then, locates some roots of posthuman and queer theories of embodiment in the dramas and aesthetic theories of Kleist and Wilde.

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<sup>1</sup> I take the distinction between “the body” and “embodiment” from Katherine Hayles. The body is “always normative” while embodiment is “inherently destabilizing with respect to the body, for at any time this tension [between them] can widen into a perceived disparity;” thus, embodiment “is inherently performative, [and] subject to individual enactments” (*Posthuman* 197).

In “Über das Marionettentheater,” Kleist presents the idea of an artificial body, the marionette, as capable of more natural performance than a human dancer. In “The Decay of Lying,” Wilde presents the idea of the artificial as superior to the natural, reversing the mimetic dictum that art imitates nature. In both these instances, the natural is obtained through the artificial; thus, both imply recognition of the artificial, cultural construction of nature and by extension the nature of the human body. Rather than simply advocating a transformation of fleshly bodies into mechanical objects, these two dramatists expose the construction of the bourgeois humanist body (at different points in its construction) as a dematerialization of actual bodies. By inverting the traditional hierarchy of nature and artifice they interrogate and critique the privileged category of nature itself as artificial construction, throwing any stable distinction between the natural and the artificial into question.

While their engagement with the human body as a site of authentication speaks to broader anxieties about the nature of bodies in relation to gender and sexuality, the focus of Kleist’s and Wilde’s works is aesthetic and concerns literature and theater. The distinction between natural and artificial has a long tradition in Western discourse on theater. Following received readings of Plato, early modern antitheatrical polemicists articulated their fears of potentially subversive or morally corrupting dramatic performance in terms of the binary of natural (good) versus artificial (bad). This binary also appears as evaluative criteria for theater theorists and practitioners as well. Such criteria are firmly based on the idea of theater as primarily mimetic art. Bad theater or acting is that which does not imitate nature accurately and good theater or acting is that which in some way does. For example, Goethe praises Shakespeare for the nature he sees in the bard’s characters, and the naturalists found their movement on a commitment to stage plays that depict the actual lives of the working classes. Thus, by presenting

theories of the stage that privilege the artificial over the natural, both Kleist and Wilde aim to provoke their readers to question the traditional hierarchy. It is vital to bear in mind that they present these ideas in dialogue form and do not simply assert, posit, or advocate them.

The dialogue is a form well suited to staging the inversions described above. Dialogue points to the disembodiment of the diegetic authorial voice; it splits that voice into (at least) two by putting statements into the mouths of the interlocutors, cousins of dramatic characters. As framing devices, they introduce an irreducible distance between the author of the text and the ideas presented by the speakers within the text. Rather than an authentic authorial voice, the ‘natural’ unified voice of the author is supplanted by the imitation (or artifice) of multiple voices. Rather than positing a unified argument, the dialogue depicts the movement or process of the argument. Hence, the dialogue is often associated with irony and paradox. As I will argue, both Kleist and Wilde are indeed using the dialogue form to explore the paradoxes produced by the distinction between the natural and the artificial and by the construction of the natural body as fundamentally mechanical.

This project also reads Kleist’s *Penthesilea* and Wilde’s *Salomé* as resisting the humanist naturalization of gender and sexuality via the mechanization of the body in scientific and legal discourse. In other words, as anti-humanist counter-discourse and performance, the *femme-fatale* figures of their dramas are virtual bodies or bodies “yet-to-come.”<sup>2</sup> They cite the artificial body<sup>3</sup>—the machine-like body, the marionette—to

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<sup>2</sup> “This concept of the virtual demonstrates how we can speak of the future, how we can speak of it and with it when it is *not yet*, when it has not yet arrived” (Roe). Roe describes this process in terms of Geoffrey Batchen’s *Desiring Production Itself: Notes on the Invention of Photography*: “Although photography involves the emergence of a particular technology, similar things could be said of any technology, or more broadly, of any cultural form... Batchen pursues a Foucauldian archaeology which, rather than searching for inventions, attempts 'to uncover the regularity of a discursive practice' (Foucault in Batchen, 1991: 15). Batchen shifts the emphasis from 1839 to what occurs prior to that date, where what he seeks is the 'appearance of a regular discursive practice for which photography is the desired object'. His

trouble the body as a site of solutions offered by the dominant aesthetic, medical, and legal discourses. Both dramatists point toward new kinds of performing bodies. The man-marionette problematic can be seen as one example of a regular discursive practice for which these new kinds of bodies are the desired objects. These new kinds of bodies are queer and posthuman bodies. Following Gilles Deleuze's concept of the virtual, this project opposes the virtual to the actual and not to the real.<sup>4</sup> The virtual in this project describes, "a movement towards... the object that is in the process of coming to presence" (Roe). Rather than imitations or expressions, this project reads these plays as performing virtually queer and posthuman corporealities.<sup>5</sup> In other words, they begin to imagine what will become queer and posthuman bodies.<sup>6</sup> By complicating the notion of corporeal integrity and coherence, they textually disarticulate the normative body, opening it up to potentially subversive, performative actualizations in literary texts and on stage. This project looks for some theatrical roots of queer and posthuman

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question, then, is not who invented photography and when, but rather 'at what moment in history did the discursive *desire* to photograph emerge and begin to insistently manifest itself?' (Batchen, 1991: 15). In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, Batchen finds increasing evidence of a desire that might be called photographic, a desire that is 'figured in the fields of literature, philosophy, and aesthetic criticism'... This desire is the imperative that produces, or rather actualises, the technology of photography. It is this period that we would in the first instance call photography's "virtual". It is real yet not actual: it is virtual." (Roe).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term *cite* in the Derridean sense of simultaneous invoking and displacing, or reframing of what is cited.

<sup>4</sup> As Brian Massumi points out, "To drive home that actuality is dynamic (Deleuze and Guattari) use the word 'becoming' in place of 'being'. A thing's actuality is its duration as a process – of genesis and annihilation, of movement across thresholds and toward the limit" (37). I understand actuality here as a dynamic process of becoming and as constantly in a process of being made out of virtual relations. As Derrida has said, "... actuality is indeed *made*: it is important to know what it is made of, but it is even more important to recognise that it is made. It is not given, but actively produced; it is sorted, invested and performatively interpreted by a range of hierarchising and selective procedures" ("The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida" in *Radical Philosophy* 68 [1994] 28-41).

<sup>5</sup> "When it is claimed that works of art are immersed in a virtuality, what is being invoked is not some confused determination but the completely determined structure formed by its genetic differential elements, its 'virtual' or 'embryonic' elements. The elements, varieties of relations and singular points coexist in the work or the object, in the virtual part of the work or object, without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a centre which would unify the other centres" (Deleuze 208-209).

<sup>6</sup> And by extension they begin to imagine what will become posthuman human bodies, by performatively rejecting the normative humanist body.

corporeality by reading these artificial bodies in dramatic texts and on stage as virtually queer and virtually posthuman. It takes the theatrical metaphors of performance and queer theory and turns them back on dramatic theater to ask how these artificial bodies might perform gender and sexuality in dramatic texts and on stage. It examines how these virtually queer, posthuman bodies in the text are performatively actualized on stage to provoke audiences to imagine modes of embodiment yet-to-come, or to pretend them into existence.

The frame of the present project, the years around 1800 and 1900, serves as markers on either end of a century during which the human body and human nature are being vigorously redefined—as are the body and nature of literature and the performing arts. The distinction between natural and artificial circulates among all of these discourses as they delineate more and less natural gender roles, sexual types, dramatic characters, acting and staging styles. This project looks at ideas about the body as a site around which various notions of gender and sexuality are articulated. From the end of the eighteenth century, emerging scientific and medical discourses seek to justify traditional gender hierarchies and notions of ‘unnatural’ sexuality through empirical science.<sup>7</sup> The body serves a site in which the truth of these phenomena could be found. These discourses can be seen as part of the ‘regimes of heterosexual socialization’ in which traditional notions of gender and sexuality are naturalized. Kleist cites these ideas in the figures of the marionette and of Penthesilea in a way that works against dominant

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Order of Things*, Foucault points to years around 1800 as the period in which ‘man’ appears as a ‘recent invention.’ The ‘empirico-transcendental doublet’ called man appears “at the very moment that, according to Foucault, the source of all knowledge about humanity is sought within the structures of the human body. It might appear that this would give such knowledge the advantage of being ‘natural,’ but, as Foucault points out... even nature is from this point on seen as having a history ‘formed within the relations that are woven between men’” (Batchen 1991). Batchen points to a general “dissolution, in the years around 1800, of the Cartesian boundaries between observer and observed, subject and object, self and other, virtual and actual” as “one of the fundamental conditions of modernity” (Batchen 1991).

discourses. He denaturalizes what is being naturalized, the naturally graceful body and the body of the *femme fatale*.

As W. B. Worthen notes about theatrical performances, “the meaning of the performance depends on the citation not of the text but of the regimes of heterosexual socialization, on the interplay among a specific text, individual performers... and the web of performance practices that constitute the performance as a meaningful citation” (Worthen 1097). This formulation can also be applied to texts themselves as they cite not only earlier texts and literary figures, but also what Worthen refers to as contemporary regimes of heterosexual socialization. Therefore, this project examines how *Penthesilea* cites not only the figure of the Amazon and its tradition but also contemporary ideas of the human body and its gender and sexuality. In doing so the play challenges the way in which gender and sexuality are inscribed as more or less natural or artificial. It then examines how Wilde’s *Salomé* cites the figure of the *femme fatale* in relation to both the literary tradition and contemporary theories of sexuality and gender at the end of the century. After considering how the texts cite these figures and alter or reframe them to trouble the distinctions between natural and artificial, this project examines how both plays are transformed into performance. By the time Max Reinhardt stages Wilde’s *Salomé* (1902) and Kleist’s *Penthesilea* (1911), both playwrights are already absorbed into the medical-psychiatric discourses on gender and sexuality. Both Kleist and Wilde and their heroines represent instances or paradigmatic cases of abnormal sexuality. Richard von Krafft-Ebing diagnoses Kleist as “beyond doubt mentally abnormal” in a footnote referring to *Penthesilea* as a “portrayal of complete feminine sadism” (419). *Penthesilea* has become a literary archetype of the female Sadist. Not quite two decades later, Max Nordau devotes a portion of his chapter on the decadent-aesthete type of ego-

maniac to Wilde, focusing primarily on his critical dialogues, but also on his dandyism and his tragedy *Salomé* as symptomatic of his degeneration.

Kleist and Wilde engage in the problematics of the body as a site, which determines gender and sexuality. Thus, I consider contemporary ideas of the body, gender, and sexuality, as well as the political milieus, to examine how they figure into the production of their dramatic texts and to get a sense of how their citations of the *femme fatale* work at the textual level in the contexts of their initial publications. What is equally as important to understanding the Reinhardt productions, and later twentieth century receptions, is how by the beginning of the twentieth century both authors and their works are themselves made into exemplary types of sexual pathology and deviance, so that in performing their plays, a whole cluster of associations are invoked and transformed on stage. This cluster of associations around the *femme-fatale* characters and their “perverse” authors plays out in terms of distinctions between the natural and the artificial. They are cited in the context of inventing new kinds of theater (and creating new types of audiences) and, most significantly for the present project, imagining new modes of embodiment yet-to-come.

## THE VISCERAL TURN OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The same forces that had brought eighteenth-century theorists to concentrate upon the evidence of the senses also brought them to see these senses as black holes within which one’s entire intellectual focus was put into question. In the last analysis, any authority derived from the testimony of the senses could be established only outside the body, through mechanical instruments, or inside the body, in imperceptible visceral processes that were the counterpart to those foreign instruments.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Cottom, *Cannibals and Philosophers* (88).

The body's status as the site of knowledge and identity served as a provocation inaugurating the visceral turn of the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> As Daniel Cottom argues in *Cannibals and Philosophers*, Enlightenment thinkers were vigorously engaged in the redefinition of the flesh as “a new sort of substance, a flesh of worms and webs and machinery” (Cottom 2). This visceral turn, in the “age of anatomical dissection and vivisection” placed a marked emphasis on corporeal understanding that “...ate away at the seeming universality of narratives put forth in the name of reason” (Cottom 3). But for Enlightenment thinkers, “the fleshly envelope that was privileged as the originary site of knowledge was simultaneously abstracted from itself” (Cottom 5). It had to be abstracted from itself, dematerialized, in order to function as a reliable site of mediation

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<sup>9</sup> Descartes defined the body as physical material extended in space and the mind as a purely spiritual thinking thing, not made of any physical material and not extended in space. In the wake of Descartes' *cogito*, the body became a central philosophical problem for theorists in a wide variety of disciplines and sciences and it remains one today. According to Descartes' rationalism, knowledge has its origin in reason alone. The activity of the non-material mind grounds the existence of the material body: “I think, therefore I am.” The senses are unreliable and deceptive; the body is reduced to an unthinking object unable to contribute to human knowledge. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empiricists, such as Locke, Hobbes, and the French Encyclopedists, turned the Cartesian model on its head positing the body as the origin of all knowledge. These thinkers favored an inductive approach allied with experimental sciences. For the empiricists, knowledge comes to the mind through the body from the world of sensory experience. With the materialist notion that the body is the primary sense organ through which the mind understands the outside world, Enlightenment thinkers recognized that the body needed to be defined as a stable and reliable foundation from which the rational mind could understand the world. Otherwise, the body, as the “black hole” Cottom describes, could threaten Enlightenment metaphysics by denying an ultimately rational basis for—and universal applicability of—reason. Without a theological appeal to the mind's divine origin, the materialist threat of viewing the mind as visceral, as part of the body, loomed menacingly on the horizon.

The relationship between the mind and body becomes increasingly problematic during the Enlightenment as philosophers, scientists, and aestheticians began to ask how these two substances, one extended in space and the other not, could interact with one another. Slavoj Žižek writes, “With Descartes, the Aristotelian organic unity in which form is immanent to matter, and soul to body, is broken: instead we get a cruel dualism, with the body reduced to the lifeless, old mechanism of *res extensa*” (Bozovic v-vi). Yet this lifeless, abstracted and subordinated, body-as-object refuses to be demoted to mere mechanical functions, returning to haunt post-Cartesian thought and providing a point of departure for Late-Enlightenment, Romantic, and scientific reevaluation of the body. That reevaluation helped to establish the discourses on the body that, as Michel Foucault has pointed out in relation to the sexuality of the body, provided further *incitement to discourse* throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that instead of “a massive censorship, beginning with the verbal proprieties imposed by the Age of Reason, what was involved was a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse” (39).

between the mind and world. Cottom continues: "... the symbolic conflict between Cartesian tradition and the tradition of Newton has long been seen as marking a general advance from deductive to inductive reasoning or from metaphysical speculation to empiricist demonstration" (6). This move from metaphysical deduction to empirical induction established the sense perceptions, i.e. the body, as the site of knowledge and, thus, as a site for locating the truth of gender and sexual identity.<sup>10</sup>

However, the visceral turn demanded a consideration of actual living bodies; those diverse and fluctuating bodies confounded the body as a reliable site of mediation. In the face of this problem, many thinkers, such as Newton and Locke, continued to appeal to the divine origins of the mind to avoid a purely materialist atheism, like that of Hobbes and La Mettrie. But, as Cottom suggests, "The conjunction of the ground of universality with the diversity of bodies, species, and customs simply could not be stabilized even if one invoked, in the manner of Newton, an unquestionable divinity" (22). The theological safeguard that sought to immobilize and petrify the body as a universally divine ground for knowledge that defined humanity was crumbling under the gradually amassing weight of empirical materialism.<sup>11</sup> Thus, humanity had to be defined, to a great extent, by the human body. If cognition was *the* distinguishing feature separating humans from other animals, and if cognition was based on sensory experience,

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<sup>10</sup> "As Emma Spary points out, 'increasingly, toward the end of the century, justifications for social, racial and gender hierarchies were located within the fabric of the body itself' ('Political, Natural, and Bodily Economies' 195). The conviction that a material basis for the traditional social order would be found to reside in the body survived, or was in fact motivated by, discoveries which radically upset the gendered conception of the world" (Engelstein 10).

<sup>11</sup> "What Locke's nominalism, Charles Bonnet's gradualism, La Mettrie's materialism, Diderot's transformationalism, and Sade's eroticism had in common was a recognition that the determination of species was the compelling cultural problem of this age in which empiricism was being established as the basis of knowledge. In order to settle anything else, one had to establish how to delineate and comprehend the nature of identity in the terms of sense perception" (Cottom 24).

then the identity of the human species would have to be located in the human body, the site of that sensory experience.

These developments posed fundamental epistemological and ontological problems for Enlightenment thinkers. One cannot know the flesh while being that same flesh from which the experiences comprising knowledge arise. In order to claim that knowledge, one would have to become something else in that moment, because that knowledge would be based on the senses of the very body one sought to know. One would either have to be disembodied, or, as it were, the body would have to be imagined as reliable, stable and mechanical, as in the case of the machine model. Kant recognized this state of affairs when he sought to map out a secure passage for human reason between the two extremes of Locke's "fanaticism" and Hume's "skepticism" (Cottom 11). As Cottom reads it, "this figure makes evident how the senses that are supposed to ground representation are yet bound to disrupt their own representation and thus drive reason into contradictions" (11). Michael O'Donovan-Anderson states the case aptly:

... it is precisely the body's intrusion between knowledge and reality which philosophical reason abhors, for it credits the mind with the certainty of access to eternal truths and charges the body with momentary and unreliable flux; the body is a source of betrayal, a cause of the senses' deception. (2)

The "body's intrusion between knowledge and reality" represented the makings of an epistemological crisis precipitated by post-Cartesian empirical materialism. If the mind gets all its knowledge from the body, then that knowledge must be specific to that embodied mind; the mind has access to the world solely through the fluctuating, (moving, changing) body, instead of having unmediated access to eternal truths. The Romantic notion of perspective comes to play a pivotal role in resisting the Enlightenment construction of the body as machine.

The body becomes the site of mediation, the passage of sensory experience from the outside world into the mind. Fluctuating, physical bodies offered only unstable sites for this mediation.<sup>12</sup> The body as physical object, Descartes' *res extensa*, had to be a "mere known" or risk infecting the mediation between world and mind with unpredictable fluctuations and desires of the flesh. This site of mediation had to be "defined in abstraction from the body" to provide a reliable conduit between mind and world and to function as the site governing the production of knowledge and identity. The question of human identity is central here. To what does one appeal to articulate the distinguishing characteristic of human beings? Namely, *cogitans*, or thinking. If the body is the site of this thinking, yet as a physical, fleshly object functions like those of animals, how does one define what sets humans apart? The mediating function of the body between the mind and the world had to be abstracted from unreliable flesh into a mechanical model that could account for knowledge and re-legitimize the traditional social order in scientific, empirical terms.

## **FROM THE VISCERAL TO THE MECHANICAL**

This visceral turn coincides with the appearance of mechanical models of the physical human body and a deep fascination with artificial or constructed bodies such as machine-men, automatons, marionettes, and (technological) monsters.<sup>13</sup> While Hobbes

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<sup>12</sup> As O'Donovan-Anderson argues "... that which mediates between the sensation-causing world and the information-processing mind begins to be defined in abstraction from the body; for the body itself is a source of sensation, is a part of the sensibly known world, and must, therefore, be mediated in its contact with the mind by that in which the sensation is caused (and by which the unreliable physicality of sense can be removed). In order to account for the mediation, and ensure the objective validity of information about the body itself, we need to posit as mediator something which has no sensible effect of its own; this something stands between, driving apart, mind and body, transforming the body into mere known. (2)

<sup>13</sup> See Liselotte Sauer's *Marionetten, Maschinen, Automaten: der künstliche Mensch in der deutschen und englischen Romantik*, Rudolf Drux's *Marionette Mensch: ein Metapherncomplex und sein Kontext von Hoffmann bis Büchner*, and Peter Gendolla's *Die lebenden Maschinen: zur Geschichte der Maschinenmenschen bei Jean Paul, E. T. A. Hoffmann, und Villier de l'Isle Adam*.

gives new life to the Aristotelian maxim *nihil intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu*, Leibniz added *nisi ipse intellectu* as a theological safeguard (1949 111). For Leibniz, the mind itself could not be located in the fleshly body. Here we see the theological appeal I refer to above, in which the ultimate origin of all things is God who has pre-established universal harmony of all substances; this is how Leibniz gets around the problem of the body as mediator of sensory experience. For Leibniz, the body and the mind are substances like two perfectly accurate clocks that run according to a divinely pre-established harmony (1998 192). Even with God as the origin, the rationalist Leibniz cannot resist the descriptive efficacy of the (materialist) machine; thus, he makes God a master-craftsman and both body and mind machines. He simultaneously invokes the abstract model of the machine and anxiously tries to prohibit the extension of that model to explain the mind or soul in purely materialist terms.<sup>14</sup>

The anxiety around this fundamental contradiction for Enlightenment thinkers arose out of the “...failure in Descartes’ attempt to forbid the image of the machine, once it was identified with animals and the workings of bodies, from trespassing into the image of human nature proper” (Cottom 72). The workings of plants and animals were increasingly understood in mechanistic terms by natural scientists such as Albrecht von Haller and Herrmann Boerhaave. Hence, it was not a huge leap for thinkers like Julien Offray de la Mettrie to define the human body itself as a machine. O’Donovan-Anderson observes, “The science of mechanics would do much to temper this image of the unreliability of the physical [body], thus making possible the philosophical promise of

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<sup>14</sup> Conversely, almost a century later, “When Diderot cited this [Aristotelian] maxim, he did so in conjunction with a reference to Locke, whom he characterized as arguing that man ‘would have remained like a brute beast, an automaton, a machine in movement, if the use of his material senses had not set the faculties of his spirit to work’” (Cottom 4). Diderot characterizes Locke’s empiricism as allowing for the view of the body as beast, machine, and automaton, yet ultimately safeguarding the spirit (or mind) as stimulated by but not originating in the physical body (Goodden 12).

materialistic determinism” (7). So widespread was this idea that by the “mid-eighteenth century the word *machine* had become an idiom synonymous with *body* in both French and English, as if faithfully trailing after the philosophical usage...” (Cottom 76). Whatever the views of Enlightenment thinkers on mechanism, “the machine was obviously felt so fully to compel one’s attention as to define the very substance of all contemporary thought” (Cottom 80). Thus, in the midst of the visceral turn of the Enlightenment, as the body warrants ever-closer scrutiny and threatens to destabilize rational philosophical systems, unreliable fleshly bodies get displaced by increasingly abstract models based in the emerging empirical sciences.

The huge leap for La Mettrie was, in fact, to insist on the materiality of the soul/mind and “to provide detailed explanations of how matter can explain all natural phenomena, including intellectual activity” (La Mettrie xvii). As Leonora Rosenfield puts it, “Like Descartes, La Mettrie thought that the body operates in accordance with mechanical laws. Unlike Descartes, however, he denied the existence of any soul whose essence is entirely distinct from extended matter” (143-4). La Mettrie attacks rationalists for further mystifying the relationship between mind and body: “The Leibnizians... have spiritualised matter rather than materialising the soul. How can we define a being whose nature is absolutely unknown to us?” (3). Again, the central issue is defining the human being. In an appropriately materialist manner, La Mettrie rejects Cartesian metaphysical speculation based on intuition and faith. He rejects deductive reasoning and calls for an inductive disentangling of the soul/mind from the body. Instead of assuring his readers that this will lead to secure knowledge about the nature of mankind, he proposes that this limitation of reason is built into the machine:

Man is a machine constructed in such a way that it is impossible first of all to have a clear idea of it and consequently to define it. That is why all the greatest philosophers’ *a priori* research, in which they tried, as it were, to use the wings of

the mind, have failed. Hence it is only *a posteriori*, or by trying as it were to disentangle the soul from the body's organs, that we can, not necessarily discover with certainty the true nature of man, but reach the greatest possible degree of probability on the subject. (5)

Although he sets limits to this sort of inductive reasoning, providing a disclaimer that it may not lead to the discovery of true human nature, the critical method he proposes opens the door for the materialist determinism that would come to define how nineteenth-century European thinkers viewed the body and its relation to the mind. He moves from viewing the man-machine as directed by culture to viewing it as determined by nature and oppressed by culture (Campbell 559). Again, this sets the stage for nineteenth-century scientific ideas about the body, its gender and sexuality, i.e. biological determinism, pathology, etc. Paradoxically, the machine-man is constructed to address and define its fleshly original.

Even as it was caught up in the complex ideological dramas of this age, the artificial machine was an organic image, a visceral image, of the inner sensibilities and transformative paroxysms at the very core of any imaginable human nature. (Cottom 86)

The discursive site of the artificial body is animated by a dialectical tension between the organic-visceral and the artificial-mechanical, between an original and a copy through which the original is imagined. With the 'invention' of man around 1800 that Foucault theorizes, we encounter an already paradoxical understanding of the human body as an organic machine, a nature deeply inscribed as artificial.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In a summary of her book *Impossible Bodies*, Bojana Kunst writes, "With the dichotomy of the physical and the artificial (most often manifested in the shape of an automaton, a machine) we are thus following the footsteps of the modes of production of bodily images, the shaping of the body's visibility, predictability, transparency and understanding of the operational. In this book, my intention is primarily to reveal how deeply the artificial is inscribed within our understanding of the physical and how - for quite some time now - it serves as a grounding of different modes of production of bodily images, forming strategies of bodily representation, which are just as present today (however, with different technological means) as they were in the past. Exploring the production of bodily images, I pay special attention to theatre; theatre is namely the art form, which throughout the history most consistently pursued the desire for impossible bodies."

## **SEXUALITY AND ENLIGHTENED LEGAL REFORM**

As philosophers moved away from metaphysical speculation and theology towards empirical materialism, and physiologists moved towards viewing the body as a machine, liberal legal reformers were moving away from older legal codes based on cannon law and towards codes based on reason, functionality, and the rights of free citizens. In their effort to control bodies and sexuality, they dematerialize bodies into mechanical objects designed to function efficiently within the state. As the Enlightenment became increasingly politicized, liberalism became its political expression (Hull 299). For Immanuel Kant, the subject-citizen could act morally only if he freely chose to do so. Individuals had to have the freedom to act morally or not; hence, external pressure to control immoral behavior does not make men act morally since conformity to the law would be a matter of compulsion. Moral action, for Kant, requires free conformity to the law. Those liberal reformers who took Kant's formulation of morality seriously sought to create a more lenient criminal code that addressed criminal activity as distinct from immoral activity. "In striking contrast to the old teleology of the body as male, liberal theory begins with a neuter body, sexed but without gender... The body is regarded simply as the bearer of the rational subject, which itself constitutes the person" (Laqueur 19). For Kant, the implicit male sexual model grounds the rights of citizens; according to this conventional model, the male is by nature strong and active while the female is by nature weak and passive. Following this assumption, Kant associated the sexual drive with the impulse to independence, autonomy, and freedom (Hull 302). In their machine-like passive role, "Women ... launched men on the spiral of desire-need-activity-fulfillment and then more desire, which characterized cultural progress" (Hull 303). Thus, while liberal theory assumes a neuter body as the bearer of the rational

subject, that unmarked body is still implicitly sexed male in the framework of male-dominated Enlightenment culture.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment tolerance was replacing Absolutist regulation. In Prussia, Frederick the Great's decree of 1765 abolished "all shaming penalties for women [*Hurenstrafen*], regardless of type... [and proclaiming further that] the women are not to receive any punishment for this slip [*Fehltritt*], nor any recrimination, nor any shame" (Hull 127). Frederick's enlightened tolerance culminated, after his death, in the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (1794) which stressed societal and familial control of children's sexuality but did not penalize men and women for consensual sexual acts formerly considered crimes.

By the [eighteenth] century's end, sex-crime laws were significantly milder... [and] by the 1790s officials had silently abandoned many of the central tenets of absolutist regulation and found themselves following the reform initiatives of the extra-governmental voices of civil society. (Hull 107)

Enlightened thinkers were generally successful in the reform efforts as they enjoyed the support of lower courts and 'public opinion' and "by the mid-nineteenth century, fornication was decriminalized in virtually all German states" (Hull 115).

With this growing disengagement from criminal prosecution of heterosexual misconduct such as fornication and adultery, one might expect a greater tolerance for same-sex infractions and a greater equality between the sexes. But, that was not the case.<sup>16</sup> It was not until the completion of the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (1794) that Prussia joined Austria and France in repealing the death penalty for sodomy, which was now punishable by a minimal one year prison sentence, flogging, and banishment after serving

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<sup>16</sup> Had Frederick actually granted the freedoms he so provocatively proclaimed, he would have made Prussia into Europe's first truly modern state by anticipating the French Revolution's creation of a private sexual sphere, a hallmark of the bourgeois state. But Prussia remained absolutist: torture was reintroduced after a short time and the law against sodomy was neither repealed nor even revised during Frederick's forty-six-year reign (Steakley 166).

the sentence (Steakley 171). The Napoleonic Code imposed on Bavaria, Baden, the Hansa cities, Hessen-Darmstadt, and Westphalia by 1807 and on Prussia in 1810 would have removed all laws against consensual homosexual acts (Steakley 173). However, the code was frequently modified and sexual delicts including those concerning sodomy were often re-inserted (Hull 371-5). One can see a similar pattern in the reevaluation of women's role in society or women's rights.

Immanuel Kant was one of enlightened liberalism's most influential proponents; his system of citizen's rights implies the male sexual model as I briefly mentioned above. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant subscribed to the conventional dichotomous view of gender in which men were the active principle and women the passive. As Hull notes, for Kant, "[t]he drive to freedom and the sexual drive were the two, basic, innate passions (*Leidenschaften*) defining mankind" (302). These passions were the inherently male characteristics of autonomy and sexual assertiveness. Kant saw sexual desire as potentially civilizing as long as it was kept under control and within the confines of marriage. It was sexual objectification that was immoral because it treated a person as a means and not end in itself. Sexual desire, for Kant, is not desire for another being, but a desire for their sex (males or females in general) or a claim to ownership of parts of the body, namely the sexual organs (Hull 307). As Hull explains:

Either alternative clashed with the moral principle of means and ends. The second was also pernicious because it suggested that the body was disposable property which the 'owner' might alienate, in whole or in part. But 'a human being cannot dispose over oneself, because the human being is not a thing. The human being is not one's own property,' since one could not be a willing subject and an object, a person and a thing at the same time. (307)

Here we return to the familiar problem of the body's status as object. A human, for Kant, cannot simultaneously be a human subject and an objective thing. If a human is used as a means to sexual ends, s/he is debased, made less than human, an object of sexual desire.

Here, Kant offers an injunction against objectifying the body as a sexual thing. If the body were fundamentally a sexual thing, it would certainly not be suitable as the site of all possible knowledge, because the disruptive, distorting force of fleshly desires would throw any objective mediation into question. For empiricists, the body had to be a reliable mediator of sense perception rather than the site of sensual pleasures and desires, which would only disrupt and imperil that mediation between the mind and the outside world. *Bodies* had to be dematerialized into *the body* in order to conform to a mechanistic functionality.

In terms of same-sex acts, still deemed immoral if not illegal, and inline with the ‘out-of-sight out-of-mind’ tack taken in regards to potential offenders, Kant condemned such behavior as unnatural but seemed to believe silence was the best approach.

All other possible sexual arrangements [outside of matrimony] Kant condemned as immoral, ‘for the end of humanity in respect of sexual attraction is to preserve the species without debasing the person’ (170). He specifically named concubinage, prostitution, polygamy, incest between parents and children, masturbation, homosexual relations, and bestiality. (307)

The latter three were deemed immoral because they didn’t preserve the species. “Kant censured the last group, the ‘crimes against nature,’ as ‘the most despicable [*Verächtlichste*] a person can commit’ and wondered whether they should even be discussed publicly” (307). Although great changes had been made in reconceptualizing and mapping the body and liberalizing absolutist laws, same-sex desire was still so beyond the pale that Kant didn’t think it belonged in public discussion. Perhaps he feared a Pandora’s box of problematic issues, a “polymorphous incitement to discourse” that would move the topic from unspeakable crime against nature to (biologically determined) type of person by the end of the century.

For such “unnatural” sex acts the laws were severe but enforcement of punishment was rare in the era preceding liberal legal reform. From the sixteenth into the

eighteenth century in German-speaking territories the standard penalty for sodomy was “execution by sword, to be followed by burning the corpse” (Steakley 164). In Prussia between 1700 and 1730 nine people were executed for bestiality and three for homosexual acts (Steakley 164). Both Steakley (166) and Hull (75) point out that very few records of sodomy prosecutions have survived.<sup>17</sup> Because there were few if any discernable traces resulting from such acts, they were assumed uncommon and thus unworthy of much attention. Executions of sodomites appear as isolated instances; for example, records indicate that four such executions took place over the course of the seventeenth century in Frankfurt and in Nuremberg (Hull 73). Although there may be many more undiscovered cases, Hull argues that “in no sense did either cities or territories direct their energy against these delicts as happened in the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries” (75).

As legal reforms got underway in the early nineteenth century, reformers like Anselm Feuerbach, wanted to remove sexual delicts from the criminal code altogether. Following a Kantian liberalism, Feuerbach saw these acts not as criminal but as immoral as they used humans as means to an end; furthermore, citizens had to be free to act morally, not forced to do so by the state (Hull 344-5). He and his liberal contemporaries still saw sodomy as dangerous and as a proper object for local police control, but not as deserving the death penalty (Hull 340). Sodomy was often used as a case-in-point for the general argument for removing sexual delicts from the criminal code and putting them under police supervision because it offered a less complex, abstract, stripped-down model of other delicts (Hull 363). As these reformers saw it, sodomy did not involve pregnancy,

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<sup>17</sup> Hull describes why very few people seem to have been condemned and executed in the early modern era: “... consensual homosexual acts or bestiality would usually have left no traces, such as pregnancy, to attract official attention. Apparently, whatever threat these acts posed was adequately addressed by the promise of draconian punishment and its occasional execution, and thus they were left in silence until a projected redrafting of the entire criminal code put them on the agenda again” (70).

inheritance, social obligations, or issues of commerce and public health. It was a liminal delict, a useful marker as the epitome of social danger which if unchecked could have deleterious effects for the state, but it seemed considerably less widespread than other consensual sex acts (Hull 363). Thus, it was less connected to actual social issues and less likely to be an object of identification.

Therefore, its [sodomy's] consensus-creating possibilities were greater at a moment when self-conscious heterosexuality was being elevated to a modern social principle. In short, sodomy was, while not quite an empty signifier, still a relatively open one that could be more easily shaped to guide the discussion of how state and society should relate to one another. Hence its appearance in Feuerbach's argumentation at the border where state and society should have separated, but did not. (Hull 364)

Although, as Robert Tobin argues, sodomy was beginning to be equated with male homosexuality (12-15), it was still a relatively empty signifier, an abstract notion marshaled to delegate regulatory power and negatively define sexual normativity in general.

In Feuerbach's reforms one can see the beginning of a trend to take up same-sex issues seen as aberrant acts on the fringe to help define central attitudes towards the purportedly more common heterosexual behaviors. The scientific reasons Feuerbach used to illustrate the perils of same-sex acts, especially the seduction of boys or adolescents by older men, which threatened the health of both parties with a potentially fatal enervation or weakening, eventually "became the stock litany of the nineteenth century and the main justification for criminalizing male homosexuality" (Hull 362).

### **THE VISCERAL TURN: FROM LAW TO MEDICINE AND SCIENTIA SEXUALIS**

The construction of same-sex desire as a pathology, and the homosexual as a type of person, took place in earnest over the course of the long nineteenth century, as its characterizations moved from 'moral folly' to 'genital neurosis' and degeneration

(Foucault 40). Although many of the more progressive German states rewrote their penal codes in line with Feuerbach's reforms and the Napoleonic Code, that comparative institutional leniency was swept away when, in 1871, Germany was united under Wilhelm I and the more conservative Prussian code was imposed on all of the German states. Still, paragraph 143, later to become the notorious paragraph 175, mandated a six-month to four-year prison sentence for same-sex sexual activity, a far cry from the death penalty. Severity of punishment diminished for a fleeting period of liberal reform, but ultimately regulation of (non-normative) sexuality increased even as law deferred more to medicine to diagnose and remedy such 'perversions.' Nineteenth-century medicine devised pathologies of 'incomplete' or lacking sexual 'natures' based on notions of disturbances in development of the body, now an organism like a transformative machine that can break down or get stuck but can be fixed or tuned up.

At the heart of this medicalization of sexuality was the reconceptualization of the human body I have been discussing. This reconceptualization involved a thoroughgoing reformulation of the relationships between sex and gender identities. For the most part the binary stereotypes of active male and passive female remained in place, but the models on which those stereotypes were based had to be changed in order to fit neatly with rational Enlightenment ideas. The older homological model of sexual difference—that women's sex organs were essentially the same as men's sex organs merely turned inside out—did not provide a satisfactorily rational explanation for the differences between women and men:

Thus the old model, in which men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis whose telos was male, gave way by the late eighteenth century to a new model of difference, of biological divergence. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of women in relation to men. (Laqueur 3)

This model of incommensurability of the sexes, as Laqueur notes, was embraced by antifeminists and feminists alike, to argue not only for the traditional second-class status of women but also for the emancipation of women (18). Reproductive biology defined women in terms of their sexual organs, what Cottom refers to as “the imperceptible visceral processes that were the counterpart to those foreign [mechanical] instruments,” and, in doing so, radically naturalized their gender:

The silent workings of a tiny organ weighing on the average seven grams in humans, some two to four centimeters long, and the swelling and subsequent rupture of the follicles within it, came to represent synechdochically what it was to be a woman. (Laqueur 28)

Women were seen as more susceptible to the dictates of their physical bodies; their biology, specifically their reproductive organs, defined what they were to a greater extent than men whose naturally more rational minds were not as subject to the fluctuations and desires of the body. Paradoxically, the synechdochal representation of woman as essentially ovary is at once a reduction to corporeal nature and to the mechanics of the reproductive organ, at once natural flesh and artificial machine. Here, if the body is generally understood as a machine and the ovary is the essential component of the *femme-machine*, woman is both closer to nature and defined to a greater degree by the mechanical or artificial. This naturalized view of essential sexual difference aligned woman with nature, materiality, and the body, and aligned man with culture, spirituality, and the mind. Thus the female body comes to be inscribed with a deviant artificiality that encompasses anxieties both about technology and also about animalistic “nature” of the flesh.

Later in the nineteenth century, women were often compared more explicitly with beasts and their passions and the new models of menstruation made it analogous to a

mammal in heat. Words formerly applied only to animals such as *rut*, *heat*, and *estrous*, were routinely applied to women and their reproductive biology (Laqueur 33).

In a world in which science was increasingly viewed as providing insight into the fundamental truths of creation, in which nature as manifested in the unassailable reality of bones and organs was taken to be the only foundation of moral order, a biology of incommensurability became the means by which such differences could be authoritatively represented. (Laqueur 35)

This biology of incommensurability helped to install a foundational sexual difference on the authority of empirical science, on the ‘solid’ evidence of internal organs. Descartes had long since identified the image of the machine with animals and their pure physicality. Physiologists, such as Haller, Boerhaave, and La Mettrie, took up that image and developed mechanical descriptions of the workings of plants and animals. To be closer to nature—as woman was thought to be—was also to be more fully determined and defined by mechanical processes.

Sexual difference and the mechanics of reproduction were the focus of this science. Sexual desires and practices that did not fit into that schema were to be regulated more than scientifically investigated. For all this reformulation and re-evaluation of the body and the construction of absolute sexual difference based in empirical observation, medical theories of sexuality, as Foucault insists, did not follow the same positivist, scientific course:

Underlying the difference between the physiology of reproduction and the medical theories of sexuality, we would have to see something other and something more than an uneven scientific development or a disparity in the forms of rationality; the one would partake of that immense will to knowledge which has sustained the establishment of scientific discourse in the West, whereas the other would derive from a stubborn will to nonknowledge. (55)

This discourse on sex imbued with a systematic blindness “... a refusal of the very thing that was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited” (Foucault 55). According to Foucault, science did not seek to know sexual desires and sexualities so

much as it sought to control them, to bring them under surveillance, diagnosis and treatment. “Medicine thus assumed final responsibility, according to the rules of a specific knowledge, for a sexuality which it had in fact urged families to concern themselves with as an essential task and a major danger” (Foucault 112). By the turn of the nineteenth century, medical science, and its model of healthy normality replacing or coextending the religious model of morality, had altered the fundamental questions concerning sexuality; “the technology of sex was ordered in relation to the medical institution, the exigency of normality, and—instead of the question of death and everlasting punishment—the problem of life and illness. The flesh was brought down to the level of the organism” (Foucault 117). Heinrich Kaan’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1846) is one example of the establishment of sex science and the conversion of the concepts of debauchery and excess to the concepts of ‘perversion’ and ‘inversion,’ terms that were to enjoy extraordinary popularity by the fin-de-siècle.<sup>18</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, as the human sciences seek to discover the underlying principles and inner workings of the human body among other natural phenomena, “Nature, caught in a perpetual and linguistic representational scheme... [loses] its privileged ontological status” (Donato 40). Romantic writers—German, French, and English—deal in depth with this loss of a privileged “Natural Object.” Eugenio Donato argues, “If the romantics required elaborate and baroque philosophical mythologies to arrive at a privileged conception of the self or nature or society, it was because these entities had already lost their privileged status” (40). In his work on Romanticism, Paul de Man shows that the Romantic poets work at allegorizing the loss

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<sup>18</sup> Not to be confused with Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1879), in which Kleist’s Penthesilea is offered as “complete” or paradigmatic case of Sadism in Woman.

of this privileged “Natural Object” with a certain stable ontology as foundation or origin, here the site or location of the material body.<sup>19</sup>

In comparison with the eighteenth century, a shift in perspective has taken place. The body as a mechanical object has been replaced by the machine as bodily object. If in the *homme-machine* the image of the machine was identical with that of the human body, then the consequences of this objectification become manifest in the image of the living machine: the separation of the body from the subject. In the description of the machine is to be seen the return of what was believed to have been lost—nature—in the form of a woman, a savage, or an animal. That rationality of the machine world is transformed into a mythology. The fear of reification becomes legible in this transformation. (Asendorf 44-45)

The severing of the subject from the body in the image of the living machine is, for Asendorf, the consequence of the earlier objectification of the body as fundamentally mechanical. The loss of the Natural Object is a loss that produces that which it mourns as lost and what was believed to have been lost is Nature, a state of harmonic being with nature. According to this view, explains Kojève, “an ‘animal that is *in harmony* with Nature or given Being’ is a *living* being that is in no way human. To remain human, Man must remain a ‘Subject *opposed* to the Object,’” (Kojève 162). The image of the living machine, then, is bound up in this modern notion of humanity as inherently fallen and tragically alienated from nature by consciousness. The nature (the natural state of grace) that is lost returns in the description of the machine “in the form of a woman, a savage, or an animal.” And, often all three are invoked, implicitly or quite explicitly, and woven

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<sup>19</sup> Many Romantics respond to this crisis or trauma with compensation strategies of mysticism or transcendentalism, but not Kleist as I have argued. This refusal of compensation strategies sets Kleist apart from his Romantic contemporaries and is part of what has been decribed as his presciently modern outlook. Part of what makes him hard to classify is his insistent engagement in imagining new modes of thought and expression that might avoid the pitfalls of Idealist and of positivist models for understanding gender and sexual desire. More important than distinguishing him as a specific type of Romantic or proto-modernist is to understand his focus on pretending or fictionalizing such new modes of thought yet-to-come. This is not to set him up as a hero who recognized or solved problems earlier or better than other thinkers. But it is to recognize that he grappled deeply, critically, and creatively—against the grain of contemporary thought—with problems of identity and desire for which there were no certain terms and names.

together in the *femme fatale* figures of the *fin de siècle*. This is haunted figure, a spectral other of humanity as defined in opposition to this lost nature.

The writings of Arthur Schopenhauer provide an instance of blending aesthetics and social philosophy with pseudoscientific evidence of the incommensurable, absolute physical difference between women and men. In “Über die Weiber” [“Of Women”] (1851), Schopenhauer defines the very nature of woman, specifically the female adolescent, as residing in her beauty and charm, which as the essence of female nature is merely artifice, the affected effects of the stage.<sup>20</sup> The natural force of charm (*Reiz*) is marked as inherently stagey or artificial. Nature itself, in the form of woman, deceives and undermines rational thought with illusory appearances combined with woman’s natural instinct for artifice. Schopenhauer defines woman as naturally deceptive and childlike, qualities to be understood as empirically verifiable and as necessarily constituent to female physiology.

Schopenhauer writes that women are merely ‘big children their whole lives long.’<sup>21</sup> Women are also natural liars for Schopenhauer; it is built into their weaker bodies as a hard-wired, corporeally determined defense mechanism:

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<sup>20</sup> “Mit den Mädchen hat es die Natur auf Das, was man, im dramaturgischen Sinne, einen Knalleffekt nennt, abgesehen, indem sie dieselben, auf wenige Jahre, mit überreichlicher Schönheit, Reiz und Fülle austattete, auf Kosten ihrer ganzen übrigen Lebenszeit; damit sie nämlich, während jener Jahre, der Phantasie eines Mannes sich in dem Maaße bemächtigen könnten, daß er hingerissen wird, die Sorge für sie auf Zeit Lebens, in irgend einer Form, ehrlich zu übernehmen; zu welchem Schritte ihn zu vermögen, die bloße vernünftige Ueberlegung keine hinlänglich sichere Bürgschaft zu geben schien” (Schopenhauer 668-669).

‘In the girl nature has had in view what could in theatrical terms be called a stage-effect: it has provided her with superabundant beauty and charm for a few years at the expense of the whole remainder of her life, so that during these years she may so capture the imagination of a man that he is carried away into undertaking to support her honorably in some form or another for the rest of her life, a step he would seem hardly likely to take for purely rational consideration.’

<sup>21</sup> “Zu Pflegerinnen und Erzieherinnen unserer ersten Kindheit eignen die die Weiber sich gerade dadurch, daß sie selbst kindisch, läppisch und kurzsichtig, mit Einem Worte, Zeit Lebens große Kinder sind: eine Art mittelstufe, zwischen dem Kinde und dem Manne, als welcher der eigentliche Mensch ist. Man betrachte nur ein Mädchen, wie sie, Tage lang, mit einem Kinde tändelt, herumtanzt und singt, und denke sich, was ein Mann, beim besten Willen, an ihrer Stelle leisten könnte” (668).

Denn, wie den Löwen mit Klauen und Gebiß, den Elephanten mit Stoßzähnen, den Eber mit Hauern den Stier mit Hörnern, und die Sepia mit der wassertrübenden Tinte, so hat die Natur das Weib mit Verstellungskunst ausgerüstet, zu seinem Schutz und Wehr, und hat alle die Kraft, die sie dem Manne also körperliche Stärke und Vernunft verlieh, dem Weibe in Gestalt jener Gabe zugewendet. (671)

‘As nature has equipped the lion with claws and teeth, the elephant with tusks, the wild boar with fangs, the bull with horns and the cuttlefish with ink, so it has equipped woman with the power of dissimulation as her means of attack and defence.’

Woman’s supposed predilection for lying, the source of their artifice—their artificiality—is analagous to the most dangerous of bestial body parts, fangs, claws, tusks, and to the black ejaculations of a—presumably loathsome for Schopenhauer—seacreature, a moment that crystallizes the rabid gynophobia of the essay into a vaginophobic image that reduces woman to a deceptive, tentacled menace. The inky fish is an image of woman synecdochally reduced to reproductive organs (Laqueur 28), via associations of cuttlefish and female genitalia, represented by her very essence, the core of her human identity, is abjectly other than human, of an alien nature and artificial. He performs a further othering (if not complete abjection) of woman as incomensurable inhuman organ. Also in this passage is evident the fear of the woman writer, the squirming multi-tentacled squid with her nefarious ink, a fear of female phallic power (like Medusa, not one monolithic appendage but multiple moving ones, not logocentric but polyvocal, a-linear, contradictory writing). Her ink, unlike man’s seminal fluid, clouds clear vision, disguises, conceals, artifies. The point of this small excursus is to show how appeals to biological sciences permeate non-scientific discourse on gender and sexuality and to show how the very nature of woman is figured in the discourse on social gender difference. Schopenhauer’s choice of the squid seems inspired by naturalist scientific observations such as Darwin’s, and bears similarity to how those theories and

observations were applied to human society as in the work of Herbert Spencer who, whether or not he was aware of this short essay, shared many of Schopenhauer's ideas about women.

Spencer's social Darwinism instances a more thoroughgoing application of physiological/biological theories to social phenomena. Schopenhauer's essay appears almost a decade before Darwin publishes his *Origin of Species* (1859), but Darwin's work was quickly and routinely deployed to uphold and justify already established views about the inferiority of women, non-white people, and sexual "perverts." Spencer believed that social 'organisms' reflected the same evolutionary principles as biological organisms and that one could deduce moral science from natural laws, a science that could dictate moral behaviour based in scientific observation and analysis. Since women represented a different stage in evolutionary development, their biology required a different set of moral rules drawn from the natural laws governing female physiology. At the end of the century, Paul Möbius, appealing to the authority of the biological sciences, expanded on Schopenhauer's philosophy of women in his "On the Physiological Debility of Woman" (1898). Möbius argued that women should be protected from education and intellectual activity because it was unhealthy to natural femininity; in other words, education worked like a disease, endangering the naturally weaker female physiology. For Möbius, "woman could never be anything but a breeding machine," a feeble-minded "animal-like" creature, who "just like the animals, since time immemorial, has done nothing but ceaselessly repeat herself" (quoted in Dijkstra 172). Woman is more fully determined by natural forces and simultaneously more machine-like, artificial, incessantly repetitive, her nature determined by the unconscious repetition of the flesh and the mechanisms of reproduction.

In the context of these scientific refortifications of the incommensurability of the sexes, those growing groups on the margins are seen as aberrations of nature. The rhetoric of healthiness and naturalness are deployed against various enervating influences of such marginalized groups as single, working women, Jews, and homosexuals. Over the course of the nineteenth century in England, the penalties for same-sex sexual contact between men came under increasing scrutiny and scientific (medical) judgement. The laws against same-sex sexual contact focused exclusively on anal penetration and by the eighteenth century the only same sex act deemed criminal by the courts was ejaculation during penetration. The new sodomy law of 1828 lessened the standard of proof and made the crime of buggery easier to prosecute. However, after 1838, no further death sentences were handed down for the crime, and the death penalty for sodomy was rescinded in 1861. Same-sex sex acts other than anal penetration were not punishable until the passage of the Labouchere Amendment to the “Offenses against the Person Act” in 1885. In Germany, despite the liberal penal code reforms of the early part of the nineteenth century, in 1871 the new Empire adopted a penal code based on the Prussian model, including Paragraph 143, the law that made sexual contact between members of the same sex punishable by a short prison term.

In both Germany and England, the medical experts increasingly intervened to diagnose sexual perversions as diseases to be cured rather than crimes to be punished. Following French colleagues such as Tardieu and Morel, German doctors like Karl Westphal and Richard von Krafft-Ebing sought physical and congenital explanations for the wide variety of sexual “pathologies” they catalogued. Ulrichs, Westphal, and Krafft-Ebing adopted the inversion model of same-sex desire conflating it with gender identification: male who desire males are feminine and females who desire females are masculine. All of the above opposed the strict criminalization of same-sex sexual

activity. Whereas Ulrichs sought to justify and destigmatize same-sex desire as natural, Westphal and Krafft-Ebing sought to naturalize sexual pathologies as mental illness. Unlike their predecessors who looked for signs of sexual perversion on or in the body, the source of perversions for these thinkers was the diseased mind. Krafft-Ebing advocated decriminalization for the mentally ill pervert and reforming the law was part of the purpose in devising these diagnostic systems. In his Preface to the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing specifically mentions the application of his work in sexual pathologies to the law, as a means to avoid injustices by discovering the disease behind the crime.<sup>22</sup> Krafft-Ebing distinguishes between the perverse and the pervert, one a sick individual in need of treatment and the other a criminal in need of punishment. For Max Nordau as well, the natural pervert needed treatment rather than punishment, but the perverse—those who cultivated or intentionally sought out perverse sexual pleasures—still deserved punishment. Nevertheless, Krafft-Ebing thought that the laws were unfair, and, identical to the objections lodged against the Labouchere amendment, he argued that whether or not the accused was guilty of the crimes, the accusations permanently ruined those accused.

As legal discourse derived evermore authority from medical science as it sought to define and regulate bodies and their sexualities, the model of the man-machine became firmly ensconced as a paradigm to functionally delineate and taxonomize gender and sexuality. The body as machine, at once dissected organism and man-made object, sets up a paradoxical tension in thinking about the body, a tension between organic and mechanical and between natural and artificial that will be played out in literary texts and

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<sup>22</sup> “The importance of the subject, however, demands the scientific research on account of its forensic bearing and its deep influence upon the common weal. The medical barrister only then finds out how sad the lack of our knowledge is in the domain of sexuality when he is called upon to express an opinion as to the responsibility of the accused whose life, liberty and honour are at stake. He then begins to appreciate the efforts that have been made to bring light into darkness” (Krafft-Ebing xiv).

on stage. While the problem-solving models of legal and scientific discourse sought to stabilize the body (as did Classical aesthetics) naturalizing it through mechanical models, the theater texts examined here problematize those solutions by working the paradoxical tensions and throwing those mechanical models of naturalized gender and sexuality into question. This project, then, looks for theatrical roots of queer and posthuman corporealities by reading the artificial bodies presented in the works of Kleist and Wilde as virtually queer and posthuman. These virtually queer and posthuman bodies in the text are performatively actualized on stage potentially inciting spectators to imagine different modes of embodiment, to pretend them into existence.

### **THE THEATRICAL ROOTS OF QUEER CORPOREALITY**

Against such a background, the present project defines queer corporeality as a theory of embodiment that rejects the humanist notion that the sexed body expresses its gender. Queer theory maintains that the presence of a sexed body is an effect constituted or materialized through performative acts rather than being an essential, natural foundation from which performances of gender issue. Judith Butler contests the notion that sexual categories have a given ontological integrity, that sexed—male or female—bodies pre-exist the linguistic and social realm. The manner in which the body bears meaning is dramatic for Butler.<sup>23</sup> This assertion has been popularly misread as attributing unfettered agency to a pre-given subject who willfully performs gender so that gender itself is reduced to a sort of improvisational theater (Osborne & Segal). Butler wants to avoid positing a subject—a doer behind the deed—who makes her or his sex and gender; thus, there is no “choosing or constituting agent prior to language” (“Performative Acts”

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<sup>23</sup> She argues that “The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic” (“Performative Acts” 272). This argument suggests that the body is already semiotized off stage.

270). Conversely, many critics of *Gender Trouble* are troubled by the lack of agency for these discursively constructed bodies. Butler wants to strike a path between these extremes.<sup>24</sup> Neither completely passive nor completely autonomous, embodied selves are “always already on the stage.” The passages I quote here also serve as examples of Butler’s appeal to the theatrical metaphor to clarify her theories of gender performativity. The persistence of this metaphor and her transferal of a notion of performance from theatrical to discursive contexts in her work beg the question of the relationship of performativity to theatrical text and performance. The example she provides in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” is that of the transvestite on the stage versus the transvestite on the bus; the transvestite on the bus, radically less bound by interpretive expectations than the one on stage, is more threatening and risky as “gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions” (278). Butler admits the borders between the theatrical and the social are not easily drawn but stops short of offering strategies to articulate how the performativity functions in theatrical performance.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (“Performative Acts” 277).

<sup>25</sup> Branislav Jakoljevic explores this tempting and forbidden territory in his examination of performatives in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. In defining the performative speech act, J. L. Austin attempts to exclude literature and theater from the theory. The performative speech act of the actor on stage, with its implied quotation marks, are hollow, void, not serious, and “*parasitic* upon its normal use” (Austin 22). This ‘etiolated’ language lacks the power or virtue of ‘plain language’ for Austin. Jakoljevic dismisses Austin’s exclusion of literature and insists that the theory of performative speech acts “establishes powerful connections between literature and its surroundings” (431). To explore those connections, Jakoljevic poses the following questions: “How do the theater and the performative act upon each other? What is the role of performatives in a dramatic text and in a theatrical performance? Is there a critical approach to theater that is not concerned only with its formal and aesthetic properties but also with its performativity (in Austin’s sense of the word)?” (432). I include them here, because this project applies some of them to the plays considered in this project.

This project proceeds from the queer theories of Butler for whom performance and theatrical metaphors are of central importance in articulating how gender and sexuality are performatively constituted and returns those metaphors to actual moments of theatrical performance. In the collection *The Queerest Art: Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theater*, Lawrence Senelick looks for “The Queer Root of Theater,” arguing that theater “is most truly itself when it is most queer. The more the theater tries to conform with some illusionistic norm of reproducing external reality and with some societal norm of behavioral morality, the less faithful it is to its own nature” (37).<sup>26</sup> If, as Senelick convincingly argues, the very theater-ness of theater involves a queering (a refusal to conform with illusionistic and societal norms), we need also to pay attention to the theatrical root of queerness, or more specifically for this project, queer corporeality. For Butler this metaphor of dramatic performance functions to maintain ambiguity and productive tension between universal claims and specific historical contexts. This project looks into that ambiguity as provocation to examine the ways in which the institutional reinforcements of the bus and the stage are mutually co-structuring and to better locate possible sites of resistance to normative discourse and theatrical performance. This project argues, then, that artificial bodies on stage comprise such sites of possible resistance. It asserts a need for a closer examination of the status of the theatrical performance metaphors in contemporary critical discourse, not only in the sense that theater scholars have proposed we apply these theoretical tools to theatrical performances themselves, but to suggest an alternate account of the materialization of the body through its artificialization in dramatic texts and on stage.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Senelick also argues that theater is truly itself when it rejects mimetic and social-moral imperatives. For Senelick, *true* theater is more about bodies than mind and it is fundamentally irreverent (or *fumiste*).

<sup>27</sup> In “Geographies of Learning: Theater Studies, Performance, and the ‘Performative’,” Jill Dolan proposes that theories of performance and performativity should be borrowed back from their various disciplines and

Queer theory rejects an unproblematized, stable notion of identity while emphasizing the importance of the particulars of embodied positionality.<sup>28</sup> As Elin Diamond has argued “Performativity... must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance” (5). This project attempts to follow a few possible roots of queer and posthuman theories of corporeality in the materiality and historical density of drama and theater. Although some of the “historical density” proposed here comes from extraliterary texts on artificial and mechanical bodies in legal and medical discourse, the intent of this project is to examine the performativity of artificial bodies in dramatic texts

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applied to theatrical performance. In a related vein, Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker point out the inherent antitheatrical prejudice in Austin’s performance theory, which denies any performative power to theatrical performance due to its ‘etiolated’ language (Reinelt 204). Further, Emily Apter writes, “though Butler’s reservations towards theatricality make perfect sense in the context of a rigorous argument seeking to avoid the ‘adopt-a-gender’ model of identity that has become the bane of 1990s gender theory, I am nonetheless struck by what seems to be her almost phobic disinterest in theater history and dramatic art. Part of my concern... will be to try to assert a place for performance within the theory of gender performativity without resorting to philosophies of reified truth-value (enshrined within the culture of compulsory heterosexuality)” (16).

<sup>28</sup> Queer theory has been criticized for reinscribing the patriarchal, hegemonic elision of embodied specificities. For example, Mary McIntosh criticizes the all-encompassing status of queer theory as an extension of gay male theories of social constructionism, which has gained prominence at the expense of the libratory and humanist project of feminism (Pausch 8). Although there is a risk that queer can be understood as an umbrella term that subordinates gendered specificities to an all-encompassing and still male view, much of the exciting work in the field works at accomplishing just the opposite. The work of critics such as José Muñoz, Alisa Arrizón, Jay Plum, Judith Halberstam, Siobhan B. Somerville, David L. Eng and many others have focused on the articulation of situated non-normative identities around models of intersectionality and hybridity. See Muñoz’s *Disidentifications*; Arrizón’s *Latina Performance Traversing the Stage*; Plum’s “Pleasure, Politics, and the Performance of Community: Pomo Afro Homos’s *Dark Fruit* in *Modern Drama*, 39 (1996); Halberstam’s “Mackdaddy, Superfly, Rapper: Gender, Race, and Masculinity in the Drag King Scene” in *Social Text*, 52/53, Vol. 15, Nos. 3 and 4 (Fall/Winter 1997); Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line*; and Eng’s “Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies in *Social Text* 52/53, Vol. 15, Nos. 3 and 4 (Fall/Winter 1997). Here, I’ve pointed to critical writings; there is also a growing body of performance pieces that provide the artistic complement to this criticism, including various works by the following artists: Luis Alfaro, Pomo Afro Homos, Deb Margolin, Carmelita Tropicana, the queer hip hop ensemble Deep Dickcollective, and the list could go on. In considering issues of race, class, and nationality alongside those of gender and sexuality, queer critics have opened up new sites with increasingly complex configurations of identification and desire. Its concentration on performativity and embodiment has imparted a greater richness and more nuanced texture to contemporary understanding of non-normative sexualities and gender-identifications and opened provisional spaces from which to contest normative hegemony without a necessary ontological integrity (authenticity) of identity categories.

and on stage to chart how artificial bodies in performance can resist the normative body and point towards more nuanced theories of embodiment.

### **PERFORMING POSTHUMAN BODIES YET-TO-COME**

In their refusal of humanist notions of stable and unified identity based on dimorphically sexed bodies, queer bodies are posthuman bodies.<sup>29</sup> As Derrida has argued, the *post* signals something (here a body) “as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so... only under the species of non-species, in the formless... and terrifying form of monstrosity.”<sup>30</sup> This project argues that a desire for a less rigid and more complex model of embodiment coincides with the construction of the scientifically normatized body; both are reactions to the dissolution of Cartesian boundaries between subject and object, mind and body, etc.<sup>31</sup> Monstrosity is a key term for the bodies of Penthesilea and Salomé. Monstrous bodies are dis-integrated, disfigured, outside the normative configurations of sex and gender; they are grotesque, abnormal, deviant, and excessive in their merging with beasts both worldly and mythological. Posthuman bodies transgress the boundaries between male and female, human and animal, confounding any stable distinctions between natural and artificial. Transgressing the boundaries of the body, posthuman bodies are liminal in that they appear at the limits of the human body;<sup>32</sup> they are monstrous bodies that function as Other to the normative corporeality of the

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<sup>29</sup> “The posthuman body is... a contaminated body, a deadly body; a techno-body... a queer body” (*Posthuman Bodies* 3).

<sup>30</sup> *Writing and Difference* (293).

<sup>31</sup> A parallel point could be made about performance emerging within and opposed to theater. Josette Féral describes the role of the disintegrated body in late twentieth century performance art: “The body is made conspicuous: a body in pieces, fragmented and yet one, a body perceived and rendered as a *place of desire*, displacement, and fluctuation, a body the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free—even at the cost of greater violence” (“Performance and Theatricality” 290).

<sup>32</sup> Liminality is “a mode of embodied activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic ‘betweenness’ allows for dominant social norms to be suspended, questioned, played with, transformed” (Mckenzie 218).

human body, but as hybrid entities they disrupt the normal body understood in terms of binary distinctions.

Both heroines are described as monstrous by readers of both plays at the time of their publication. They both transgress the boundaries of sexual difference and can thus be understood as part of Donna Haraway's genealogy of boundary creatures in which she places the cyborg.

Haraway projects the cyborg in the genealogical line of other boundary creatures, monsters, who have always policed and disrupted the borders of civilisation and identity, refusing containment and limitation. Like ancient Amazons or hermaphrodites, cyborgs are seen to dislodge 'natural' assumptions of gendered behaviour from the 'organic holism' of the body. (Bujdei)

As unnatural boundary creatures, Salomé and Penthesilea perform that-which-will-become the cyborg, one of the central figures of the posthuman. This project takes posthuman corporeality as 'posthumanist' or as anti-humanist counter-discourse that threatens the stability of the normative (white, straight, male) 'human' body.

By not signifying woman, but rather something in excess of woman, Penthesilea and Salomé are hybrid, both man and woman, both human and beast. In their hybridity, they are not strictly Other, and so threaten the normative body with contamination and disintegration. These two figures disturb the binary of male-female by performing both femininity and masculinity, so that they are not simply opposed to their would-be male counterparts. That transgression dismantles their own identities as women and thereby threatens the coherence of the male identities opposed to them, the normative masculinity embodied by Achilles and Jokanaan. Penthesilea and Salomé violently dismantle the bodies of Achilles and Jokanaan; the desires of their monstrous bodies result in the fatal disintegration of the normative male body. In dramatic texts and on stage, such hybrid bodies performatively problematize the concept of the body as stabilized organic-mechanical foundation for identity by undermining—through this corporeal

ambiguation—the disciplined functioning of the physiological machine constructed to secure stable gender identities. This project reads these two plays as performances of corporeal ambiguation and disintegration in dramatic texts and on stage as prefiguring queer and posthuman bodies.

### **PERFORMANCE, PERFORMATIVITY, AND THEATER**

This project takes up issues of gender performativity alongside theater theory and practice; it does not simply equate performativity with performance, but investigates the movements between them.<sup>33</sup> For Butler, performance, as a fabrication of a performer's will or choice, is something much less than the reiterative power of performativity (or performative citation as a modality of power). Performance on stage is “less” because it is intentional, chosen, more or less scripted and bound by explicit rules, whereas performativity is seemingly all encompassing and its rules are cast as nature's own. The recognizable, reiterated norms “which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer” are partly made up by theater, literature, art, as well as extra-literary discourses such as law and medicine to name only two.<sup>34</sup> Part of what precedes and exceeds the performer

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<sup>33</sup> Butler addresses the difference between them in *Bodies that Matter*: “...performance as bounded ‘act’ is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's ‘will’ or ‘choice’; further, what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake” (234).

<sup>34</sup> The theater, of course, has had its own sets of institutional constraints especially concerning what types of bodies, character-roles, and subject matters could be staged. The received Aristotelian imperatives, for example, prohibited lowly despicable characters, who might corrupt rather than edify audiences, from taking center stage. Such constraints were challenged by *Sturm und Drang* dramas such as H. L. Wagner's *Kindermörderin* and, in the following century, by the Naturalists such as Zola and Hauptmann who sought to portray the plight of the lower classes populating the stage with outcasts, alcoholics, criminals and the like. The constraints on such character and subject matter issues also extended to the formal qualities such as act structure. Both the plays examined here challenge the stage conventions of their times and were deemed unstagable by many of Kleist's and Wilde's contemporaries. Both plays reject the three-act structure and present figures and plots unacceptable if not deeply offensive to conventional societies of their day. In this sense, both plays were textually and aesthetically non-normative; the respective readings of these plays in later chapters will take this up in further detail.

comprises historical images and literary figures and celebrities that help construct such notions as how a proper woman should—or, indeed should *not*<sup>35</sup>—behave or how a man should walk or dance gracefully.

Theater is fundamentally caught up in this tension between the normative textualized body (the role) and actual bodies (the actors); its potentially disruptive force and political power—the perceived threats it posed to those who crusaded against it and sought to restrict and outlaw it—is the power of actual human bodies to disrupt concepts of the normative body. This tension can be seen in the semiotic formulation of body onstage as at once an actual body and a sign: “The metaphorical quotation marks placed around the stage object [such as ‘table’ or ‘man’] mark its primary condition as representative of its class, so that the audience is able to infer from it the presence of another member of the same class of objects in the represented dramatic world” (Elam 8). Hence, the tension between the object or body that represents a class and the actors’ material bodies, between the normative, generic body and actual bodies.

Although the stage divides the fictional from the everyday world, Butler recognizes that “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (“Performative Acts” 272). Richard Schechner defines performance as “twice-behaved behavior,” which “gets to be called behavior because it is performed much more than twice” (Phelan 10). Peggy Phelan argues, “This mimicry and iteration is the place where performance and performativity intersect” (10). Phelan proposes a double-helix model for the interaction of the two terms in question:

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<sup>35</sup> As N. Katherine Hayles points out in *How We Became Posthuman*, “The body produces culture at the same time that culture produces the body. Posture and the extension of limbs in the space around the body, for example, convey to children the gendered ways in which men and women occupy space. These nonverbal lessons are frequently reinforced verbally... It is significant that verbal injunctions often take a negative form... for the positive content is much more effectively conveyed through incorporating rather than inscribing practices” (200). Hayles aligns inscription with the normative body and incorporation with embodiment, where the body is a normative, abstract form and embodiment is the inherently destabilizing, performative, and specific instantiation (196-97).

“Performance and performativity are braided together by virtue of iteration; the copy renders performance authentic and allows the spectator to find in the performer ‘presence’” (10). For performativity, the copy or reiterated citation of gender creates the illusion of a present sexed body, which is posited as an origin rather than an effect, a corporeal origin of sexual difference that is expressed as gender. Those performances or copies allow us to see a body there, a presence with particular contours, a presupposed, naturally sexed, material body that acts accordingly, rather than a gendered body as an effect of discursive sedimentation.<sup>36</sup> Iteration, common to both performance and performativity, proliferates copies, which, once ubiquitous, project a specular ontological foundation for the ‘presence’ of the theater-performer’s body onstage and the life-performer’s gendered body in the world. The main difference between the two is a matter of will; the former is performed by choice according to a more or less explicit script, the latter is to a large extent compulsory and denies any script beyond what is ‘right,’ ‘proper,’ ‘natural,’ and essentially human.

Iteration and repetition, key concepts for performativity and performance, link theatricality to virtuality. In his critique of Austin, Derrida contends that the condition of language is iteration or iterability “which makes theatrical utterances not an exception but an instance of the general condition of all utterances insofar as they are an iteration of a prior linguistic structure” (Reinelt 204). Rather than ‘etiolated’ utterances they are utterances repeated differently, necessarily reframed, but not simply voided, by the

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<sup>36</sup> In other words, performative acts do not express gender; they constitute gender. As Butler states in an interview, “performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established” (Osborne & Segal). For Butler, “Bodily contours and morphology are not merely implicated in an irreducible tension between the psychic and the material but *are* that tension” (*Bodies* 66). The tension between the imagined or linguistic body and the material one is what shapes the body or defines its contours.

stage.<sup>37</sup> Josette Féral distinguishes performativity from theatricality in terms of iterability: “Performativity is at the heart of what makes any performance unique each time it is performed; theatricality is what makes it recognizable and meaningful within in a certain set of references and codes” (“Foreword” 5). For example, how Penthesilea’s body performs gender and sexuality on stage depends in part on the theatrical style or codes in which the play is presented: on the late nineteenth-century stage she will be presented in line with the tragic heroine, while on the expressionist stage she will perform the ‘hysteria’ of the oriental *femme fatale*. Performativity, then, is a reenactment that transforms what it cites and theatricality is the set of stage practices and conventions that make each unique iteration recognizable as a repetition.<sup>38</sup>

For example, one could imagine the very different contexts in which the utterance “I desire your body” might occur. Although perhaps not a performative in Austin’s strict sense, it does *do* something, namely it constitutes the speaker as some type of desiring subject and propositions the person to whom it is addressed. When Salomé speaks those lines, in the text or on stage, she performs a sexuality that is not in accord with gender expectations of the play’s time and so is constituted, if only as a character, as a sexually aggressive woman. The utterance does not lose its performative force, but will perform differently as it is framed by different contexts (read from a silk-bound first edition, performed on stages in different countries, and in different production styles, etc). Those contexts constitute the theatricality of Salomé’s performative utterance cueing the reader or spectator to interpret the line in particular ways. Wilde’s iteration of Salomé is the

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<sup>37</sup> “Iteration means that in the space between the context and the utterance, there is no guarantee of a realization of prior conditions, but rather a deviance from them, which constitutes its performative force” (Reinelt 204).

<sup>38</sup> As Worthen asserts, “the meaning of the performance depends on the citation... of the regimes of heterosexual socialization, on the interplay among a specific text, individual performers... and the web of performance practices that constitute the performance as a meaningful citation” (1097).

first to speak such a line; in the context of *fin-de-siècle* “Salomania,” Wilde’s citation of the *femme fatale* is recognizable as such and yet transformed into something else, into a queer, posthuman body yet-to-come.<sup>39</sup>

## THE VIRTUALITY OF ARTIFICIAL BODIES ON STAGE

This project suggests that theatrical performance, as an instance of the virtual-actual circuit, operates as a continuous iterative structure tending towards desired objects (Roe). This repeated process of actualization or *becoming* generates different specific iterations. Following Derrida, the performative force of performance derives from a necessary deviance in the act of repetition. Yet, some dramatic utterances tend towards securing the same or the normative (even though ultimately failing to do so) while others attempt to repeat in a radically deviant or subversive way and intensify their performative force.<sup>40</sup> The virtual designates a multiplicity, which radically excludes the identical as a prior condition and is, therefore, not about resemblance, identity, simulation, or representation (Roe). Actualization of the virtual occurs by difference and divergence. Performance on stage has the potential to intervene in the performative constitution or materialization of bodies off stage by confronting the audience with virtual-actual bodies that throw conventional gender expectations into question. In terms of theater, and the

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida asserts that “iteration alters, something new takes place” (*Ltd. Inc.* 175), and that “iterability supposes a minimal remainder (as well as a minimum of idealization) in order that the identity of the selfsame be repeatable and identifiable *in, through, and even in view of* its alteration” (*Ltd. Inc.* 190)

<sup>40</sup> While Butler argues the (normative) law is produced through citation, that “the norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is ‘cited’ as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels” (*Bodies* 13), Cohen insists that “the normativity compelled by the law is also historically situated and specified in particular cases... by legal interventions... but only after they have been brought to bear on the body of an individuated, sexed, legal subject” (39). Cohen considers how “Wilde’s subversive repetitions, that is, his multiple, self-conscious, and self-marketing ‘poses,’ interrupted prevailing ideological patternings of masculinity or ‘manliness’ to such a degree that they provoked a legal struggle orchestrated precisely to ‘fix’ male gender by ‘fixing’ him” (39). Here, I consider Wilde’s *Salomé* as a subversive repetition (or citation) of a literary figure, one more often cited to reinforce a misogynistic norm.

plays examined here, tropes or dramatic figures can be cited in the text and performed on stage to performatively produce and reinforce social roles or, conversely, to performatively interrupt those roles thereby provoking spectators to imagine something yet-to-come.<sup>41</sup>

The artificial bodies that this project examines—the marionette, the dandy, the *femme fatale*, the avatar—can potentially open up a virtual space, a relational space of a dialectical tension between imagined (fictional, textual, staged) body and actual bodies (or ‘everyday’ embodiment). That displacement or substitution and the resulting virtuality can effect a space for imagining a different sort of embodiment outside the ontological foundations of identity categories or for materializing bodies subversively (or queerly); but, it also runs the risk of provoking a radically essentialist naturalization of bodies (i.e. the artificial body as perverse, and its performance as symptom of a ‘natural’ degenerescence). Citations of recognizable types (or stereotypes) such as the *femme fatale* invoke those types and displace them. Here I want to suggest they introduce a multiplicity through their suspension in quotations marks and through an accentuated distance from the natural and the actual. As citations that are markedly artificial (pointedly not natural) they can open up spaces for imagining embodiment anew. Therein lie the power and the riskiness of such dramatic writing and theatrical performance.

Dialogues and playtexts are open forms that can put forward a more embodied narrative. They represent more embodied narrative because alternating characters speak lines, so that no one utterance can be finally attributed to the position of the author. Dialogues impose a dramatic frame of conversation as opposed to the linear monolithic

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<sup>41</sup> In his discussion of Wilde’s poses, Cohen argues such subversive repetition also provokes attempts to reassert the conventional roles or “prevailing ideological patternings” that have been disrupted.

voice of exposition. Words are put into characters' mouths signaling that they may not be simply assigned to the author. The loss of hermeneutic control is inherent in the (written) dialogue form and even more so in playwriting; virtuality is formally heightened because the varieties of relations are multiplied "without it being possible to designate a point of view privileged over others, a centre which would unify other centres" (Deleuze 209). A stable meaning or halt in the oscillating virtual-actual motion of the dialogue or drama is impossible until the reader or the performer (and subsequently the spectator) comes into the equation to actualize meanings from virtual bodies in the text.

The virtual-actual bodies onstage are similarly actualized by spectators and this is where the performativity of performance occurs. By virtual-actual bodies I mean the actual bodies of the actors joined with the virtual bodies of the roles they perform on stage. The naturalized machine of the normative body can be performatively virtualized by embodied repetition on the stage, reintroducing a multiplicity to supposedly fixed identities, and foregrounding the artificiality of the supposed natural status of the actual bodies. Actualization of the virtual is, then, a continual reading/interpretive process and never comes to a full stop regardless of the direction, normative or resistant, it takes (or the desired object toward which it tends). The virtual always remains as an irreducible alterity, even on the bus; but it can be heightened by the theatricality of the stage and the relative artificiality of the bodies on it.

Theatrical performances present virtual-actual bodies, which get cited performatively (or repeated and actualized) off stage; the performance onstage is cited, re-iterating an already doubly split performance. If bodies bear meaning in a fundamentally dramatic way, is it not because they materialize through a relational process of virtual-actual? Marionettes and artificial (hyper-stylized, unnatural) bodies resist this process of identificatory citation because they are more ambiguously

performative than actual bodies; they have no presupposed present, deep, underlying, sex according to which they express a gendered identity. On the other hand, when the female performer takes the stage there is an assumed sexed body present there doing the acting.<sup>42</sup>

This project reads *Penthesilea* and *Salomé* as plays that repeat and revise bodies of earlier texts and extraliterary discourses on the human body rather than imitate worldly bodies and actions. They mimic the naturalized figure of the *femme-fatale* (in its anxious fixing of woman as *femme-machine*) and introduce subversive excess.<sup>43</sup> Rather than representing actual women, their bodies perform a multiplicity of gender identities that destabilize the binary of gender norms. *Penthesilea* and *Salomé* are virtual, for Kleist and Wilde (and for the queers and feminists who appropriate them); through mimicry they re-virtualize previously actualized figures to resist normativity in opposition to more ‘natural’ female types (gender types that express the supposed nature of their sex) such as Juliet (and Iphigenie)—precisely because these vampiric-cannibalizing heroines are something in excess of woman understood in terms of absolute sexual difference. Yet, they are read as exactly such by critics who expect mimesis and see them as immoral and radically naturalize their violent sexuality as essentially/naturally female, the misogynistic view that constructs woman as pathological, as degenerative and perverse.

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<sup>42</sup> For example, it is said that Ellen Terry embodied the Victorian ideal of woman on the English stage by performing roles that demonstrated those ideal qualities and in a style that demonstrated those qualities. Ellen Terry, the actress and celebrity, as Juliet or Ophelia acts a certain feminine way, a staged ideal way that gets translated into a normative social way through a process of mimicry and imitation. Not a straightforward citation, but a citation nonetheless that works through identification, or in the case of a more dangerous female performer, one not to be imitated, repudiation. Perhaps this can be seen in the transference of literary fashion into street fashion, or the dynamic exchange between the two; certain types of characters (played by appropriate actresses) wear certain types of gowns to place and distinguish them socially, to render them recognizable social types; those gowns and personas feed back into the fashionable world. Like the dandy’s carnation, and perhaps even like Werther’s yellow sash. These aesthetic formations get cited (mimicked and reiterated) offstage, on the street, and they are performative of certain types of identity. To better understand how the artificial bodies of *Salomé* and *Penthesilea* perform (more or less natural or artificial) gender and sexuality, this project focuses on both literary and extraliterary discourse reading it alongside the play texts primarily at the textual level and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the stage.

<sup>43</sup> “Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents; it is a repetition that is non-reproductive” (L. Hart 49).

These “idols of perversity” can serve to reify those naturalized notions of sexual difference in which woman is seductive and hence essentially evil, on a metaphysical level as in the biblical notion of woman as origin of evil and on a biological level as a threatening sexual organ. Or, they can resist that reification by disrupting or inverting those metaphysical hierarchies and biological foundations. Clearly, a lot depends on the audience and their expectations of/assumptions about what dramatic performance is *doing*. For some spectators such subversion of conventional gender roles can be pleasurable and provide a space for imagining less limiting, possibly liberating, forms of embodiment. For others it provokes a fearful reaction and provokes a reinscription of the normative roles subverted. The latter tend to take the form of interpreting the ‘perverted’ figures on stage as symptoms of the diseased artist who creates them. Thus, the receptions of Kleist’s and Wilde’s works are important to this project as their biographies have much to do with determining those receptions.

### **WORLDLINESS AND BIOGRAPHY**

The issue of biography is especially tricky given the poststructuralist project of queer theory and of performance theory, methods often predicated on the decentering of textual authority. Hence, my interest in or concern for biography and historical context is not about securing a coherent identity from which one may interpret the work of art as an expression of that identity. But, rather, it is about addressing the ‘worldliness’ of these texts.<sup>44</sup> This project examines the specific situation of Kleist’s dialogue and play, to more accurately understand how the processes of critical reception help shape the figure

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<sup>44</sup> In “The World, the Text, and the Critic” Edward Said writes that ‘worldliness’ of a text “means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself” (1215).

of the author (playwright) and in doing so determine particular types of reading. To be sure, the author is dead and we cannot ultimately reconstruct their intentions into stable unified—noncontradictory—meanings. But, in a certain sense, the “authors” of such repeatedly revisited works never quite die. The literary figures of Kleist and Wilde are indeed undead, largely because their biographies play such a pronounced role in their multiple receptions. The fascination with biography is underscored with writers who die young or tragically or both; Kleist’s suicide friend and Wilde’s imprisonment and subsequent exile and death are two exemplary cases in point. The lives of these authors are part and parcel of their literary claims to fame. Their premature deaths imbue their works with a haunting, seductive aura, as do their intense and eccentric lives. From the early twentieth century, the lives of both playwrights serve as a medical or psychological ground from which to read their works as expressing their sexual identity. While some critics read their plays as products of perverse or degenerate minds, others celebrate them as homosexual victims of patriarchal oppression; in both cases their putative homosexuality is invoked. For Wilde the necessity of biography and literary context is more clearly encoded, if not demanded, in his critical works and plays which teasingly invite reading his life into his works; in the context of dandyism, in which the boundaries of life and art are intentionally blurred in a way that both invites and frustrates reading his works in a biographical context.

Over the last thirty years both Wilde and Kleist have been (reappropriated and) read as radically feminist, as homosexual, as gay, and as queer and postcolonial subjects. Biography has played a key role in all of these readings and it is around the issues of bodies, identities, and desires that these rediscoveries entail. In this context, critics have noted Kleist’s problems with his own body, his stammering speech and nervous collapses, and Wilde’s dandyist, and later monstrously decadent, body. These are indeed

interesting studies. But rather than looking for ways in which the authors' relationships to their own embodiment influences their works, this project looks at the artificiality of the bodies they introduce to the stage. And it refers to biography to better understand the worldly situationality of the texts in which these artificial bodies are imagined.

Given this project's focus on performance and its intent to return performance theories to theater studies by applying performativity to theatrical performance, it is perhaps perverse to choose two plays so notoriously "unperformable." Both plays are staged in the absence of their authors. Kleist's play is first staged over a half century after his death. Wilde's play is performed only once during his lifetime, but in another country while the playwright languished in prison. Neither ever saw or oversaw the staging of their virtually queer, posthuman heroines. By the time *Penthesilea* and *Salomé* get staged for a wider public, both authors are literally dead. And, yet, undead in the way described above. They haunt these stagings, sometimes framing production strategies and styles and quite often informing interpretations and reactions to the performances. Therefore, following the chapters on Kleist and Wilde, this project examines a few productions of the plays to consider how these figures might perform virtually queer and posthuman corporealities on the early twentieth century German stage.

## **Virtually Queer and Posthuman Bodies in Heinrich von Kleist's**

### **“Über das Marionettentheater” and *Penthesilea***

This chapter analyzes Kleist's narrated dialogue “Über das Marionettentheater” and his tragedy *Penthesilea* and attempts to demonstrate that these works dramatize the transgressive possibilities of artificial bodies as reactions against the erasure of the diversity of actual bodies. The dialogue and the play implicitly reject the notion of the body as a site of mechanistically determined gender and sexuality, as a site that narrowly prescribes gender identity and sexual behavior according to mechanistic views of physiology. In “Über das Marionettentheater,” Kleist presents the idea of an artificial body, the marionette, as capable of more natural performance than a human dancer. I argue that Kleist satirizes such attempts at articulating abstract aesthetic theories as so much empty posturing and idealism disconnected from actual women and men whose physical reality in no way corresponds to those abstract aesthetic models. Rather than simply advocating a transformation of fleshly bodies into mechanical objects, Kleist exposes the emerging construction of the bourgeois humanist body as a dematerialization of actual bodies. By inverting the traditional hierarchy of nature and artifice he interrogates and critiques the privileged category of nature—a nature perceived to have been lost—itself as artificial construction, throwing any stable distinction between the natural and the artificial into question. By doing so he troubles gender norms and theories of perverse sexuality based upon the purportedly bedrock opposition between the natural and artificial and between the sexes.

In other words, as anti-humanist counter-discourse and performance, the *femme-fatale* figure of his drama is a virtual body or body “yet-to-come.” He cites the artificial

body—the machine-like body, the marionette—to trouble the body as a site for solutions offered by the dominant aesthetic, medical, and legal discourses. Kleist points toward new kinds of performing bodies. The man-marionette problematic can be seen as one example of a discursive practice for which queer and posthuman bodies are the desired objects. By complicating the notion of corporeal integrity and coherence, Kleist textually disarticulates the normative body, opening it up to potentially subversive, performative actualizations in literary texts and on stage.

### **GREEN LENSES: PERCEPTION, PERSPECTIVES, AND SPECTRES**

Kleist's 1801 "Kant-Crisis" plays a prominent role in most comprehensive interpretations of his work.<sup>45</sup> The crisis for Kleist is a crisis of the uncertainties of perception, of the body's mediating role between outside world and mind. According to this fundamental perspectivism, one can never be sure one sees things as they are or only as they appear through one's particular set of eyes. In a letter to his erstwhile fiancée, Wilhelmine von Zenge, Kleist writes:

Wenn alle Menschen statt der Augen grüne Gläser hätten, so würde sie urtheilen müssen, die Gegenstände, welche sie dadurch erblicken, *sind* grün—und nie würden sie entscheiden können, ob ihr Auge ihnen die Dinge zeigt, wie sie sind, oder ob es nicht etwas zu ihnen hinzuthut, was nicht ihnen, sondern dem Auge gehört. So ist es mit dem Verstande. Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so *ist* die Wahrheit, die wie heir sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr—u alles Bestreben ein Eigenthum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich— (*Briefe* 205).

If everyone saw the world through green lenses, they would be forced to judge that everything they saw was green, and could never be sure whether their eyes saw things as they really are, or did not add something of their own to what they saw. And so it is with our intellect. We can never be certain that what we call

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<sup>45</sup> See Brown, Wichmann, Kreutzer, Mehigan, Lubkoll, and Neumann.

Truth is really Truth, or whether it does not merely appear so to us. If the latter, then the Truth that we acquire here is not Truth after our death, and it is all in vain striving for a possession that may never follow us into the grave. [Trans. P. B. Miller]<sup>46</sup>

The relevance of the Kant crisis here lies in the inability to be sure of the sufficiency of one's perceptions as a basis for comprehending a thing in itself, and to accurately pass on the truths one collects through the written word. Kleist writes that one can't decide if that which we name truth is really the truth, or if it merely appears that way to us. Striving for universal truths through deductive reasoning is thus futile for Kleist, because one can never be sure if one's eyes show things as they really are or if some of what they show belongs to one's eyes rather than those things in the external world. Instead, all truth is inseparable from the material perceiver of that truth, inseparable from the flesh that has perceived it; in other words, any truth is always necessarily embodied.

In his essay, "Kleist, Kant und die Aufklärung" Tim Mehigan explains what this crisis meant for Kleist and his work. He writes, "was Kant ihm nun beibringt, ist der grundlegende Perspektivismus, der theoretisch jede Aufnahme der Erfahrungswelt affiziert" ('what Kant now teaches him, is the fundamental perspectivism, which theoretically affects every experience of the empirical world' [Mehigan 12]). In this reading, a fundamental perspectivism replaces a teleological search for metaphysical truth. Mehigan argues that consciousness is the moment that makes the experience of the world possible, and, at the same time, it is the medium or frame that estranges people from their "natural state," what Kleist equates with the reflexionlessness of the marionette. All truth is contextual, framed by different consciousnesses, perceptions, perspectives, media, genres, and, above all, bodies.

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<sup>46</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

Yet, Kleist is still very much concerned with moments that point to a way out from behind the potential solipsism of the green lenses. “Kleist inszeniert in seiner Dichtung immer wieder Momente, die auf diese Dilemma des kritischen Verstands rekurrieren, und zwar so, als suchte er jene Momente, die über die aus der kantischen Philosophie ergebenden Aporien des Bewusstseins hinausgehen könnten” (‘Again and again Kleist produces moments in his poetry that reoccur from this dilemma of critical reason, and indeed so, as he looked for those moments which could lead the way out of the aporias of consciousness resulting from Kantian philosophy’ [Mehigan 14]). Since we cannot know nor fully capture in language the objects in themselves, the static *Ding-an-sich*, he looks for dramatic moments of process in motion. Movement, like that provided by the dialogue form itself, is more important than any static proposition within it, because it reveals the perspectives from which propositions are issued and it dramatizes the process of critical perspective juggling:

Diese Positionen können unter den beiden kantischen Absoluten subsumiert werden: unter der bloßen Objektivität der Marionette einerseits, der Unendlichkeit des transzendentalen Bewusstseins andererseits—beide Aspekte werden von Kleist als mythische Auswüchse der Aufklärung entlarvt. (Mehigan 17)

These positions can be subsumed under both Kantian absolutes: under the sheer objectivity of the marionette on one side, the infinity of transcendental consciousness on the other side—both aspects are exposed by Kleist as mythical excesses of the Enlightenment.

Mehigan argues that Herr C.’s two ideals of grace—the marionette and the god—represent Kantian absolutes and that Kleist exposes these polar absolutes of pure objectivity and transcendental consciousness as mythical excesses of Enlightenment thought. But there is something in the movement between those excesses and the narrator’s romantic scepticism that he wants to portray, a set of problems for which there is no easy or final solution. Although he adopts a form popular with Romantic poets,

Kleist rejects the escapist side of Romanticism with its mystic reveries as he had abandoned the relatively politically passive, *l'art-pour-l'art* atmosphere of Dresden for the more politically active Berlin (Brown 28).

Walter Hinderer, addressing the same set of features in Kleist's work, sees the dramatist's treatment of opposites and contradictions (and by association his open-ended forms of paradox and dialogue) as a characteristic that distinguishes Kleist from the Romantics as well as Enlightenment Idealists:

Der entscheidende Unterschied von Kleists Texten zu denen von Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin und den Romantikern besteht um darin, daß die Gegensätze und Widersprüche in der Regel nicht aufgelöst oder durch entsprechende Angebote kompensiert werden. Die Strategie der Texte Kleists insistiert, so ließe sich thesenhaft behaupten, gerade auf der Suspension des Widerspruchs, auf dem Aushalten der Gegensätze. Die Grundkonzepte sowohl der Aufklärung als auch des philosophischen Idealismus werden abgestoßen oder in Frage gestellt und die Kompensationsstrategien der Romantik ausgespart. (43)

The deciding difference of Kleist's texts to those of Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin and the Romantics is that the opposites and contradictions do not as a rule get resolved or compensated by a corresponding proposal. The strategy of Kleist's texts insists on, one could assert as a thesis, the suspension of contradictions, on the endurance of opposites. The fundamental concepts of the Enlightenment as of philosophical Idealism are rejected or thrown into question and the compensation strategies of Romanticism are left out.

As Hinderer contends, Kleist's texts insist on letting contradictions remain suspended and letting opposites stand without resolution or synthesis. In doing so, continues Hinderer, he throws the fundamental concepts of Enlightenment reasoning and philosophical Idealism into question and leaves out the compensation strategies of Romanticism. This refusal to resolve oppositions and contradictions can be seen clearly in the *both/and* logic of the dialogue form discussed below.

As I will argue, given his growing mistrust of language, perception, and the collaborationist authorities, Kleist turns to a more embodied, dramatic form of writing.<sup>47</sup>

### **KLEIST'S MARIONETTE THEATER AND BERLIN CIRCA 1810**

In December of 1810, Heinrich von Kleist published his essay “Über Das Marionettentheater” in four sequential issues of the *Berliner Abendblätter*, Berlin’s first daily newspaper, of which he was the editor-in-chief (BA 317-331). The paper was printed in a tiny format, so space was limited; each issue consisted of two pages printed front and back, allowing for a total of four pages of text (Weigel 41). Each of the four sections of “Über das Marionettentheater” comprised half or more of each issue’s text. One could argue that he was so committed to this particular piece to devote over half of each of those four issues to it. But the fact that the censors restricted the types of news and opinion items he was allowed to publish suggest that he may not have had an abundance of material that was both newsworthy and censor-approved. Rather than viewing it as mere filler, this project reads “Über das Marionettentheater” as a sly and indirect approach by which Kleist had to shape his critique of contemporary performance aesthetics. The open, paradoxical form of the dialogue suggests that Kleist was engaged in thinking through and critiquing these aesthetics as opposed to offering concrete suggestions for improving German theater as he does elsewhere in the pages of the *Abendblätter*.

On October of 1806, Napoleon defeated Prussian forces at Jena and Auerstadt taking control Berlin and most of Prussia (McGlathery). Prussian leaders were installed who would cooperate with Napoleon to keep order amidst the ever-mounting anti-French

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<sup>47</sup> This use of the dialogue form is in line with Plato’s insistence that philosophy could not be written down as doctrine and, hence, his use of dialogue to present philosophy in action or to stimulate philosophizing in his readers (Richter 18).

sentiment. Fearing revolt, these leaders sought to maintain tight control over publishing and theater lest disgruntled, patriotic artist-intellectuals disseminate anti-government criticism and rouse anti-French fervour. Under this regime, only one *festes* or “permanent” theater operated in Berlin, The Königliches Nationaltheater. Although there were many small Privattheatern or Gesellschaftstheatern, they typically staged only a few Winter-season productions and did not remain in operation for long (Weigel 45). These theaters each also had to obtain permission from the director of the Königliches Nationaltheater for each production. During this period, August Wilhelm Iffland held that directorship and, in accordance with both royal Prussian and French tastes, primarily staged bourgeois melodramas and ballets.

The limitations on print publishing and public theater imposed by increasingly severe censorship laws did not provide an auspicious state of affairs for the aspiring young dramatist *cum* journalist who urgently wanted to take part in articulating a German identity, or, one might say, who wanted to stand in a symbolic relation to his age. In terms of the political situation, Kleist vacillates between extreme anti-French sentiment and apparent non-engagement in the years between 1805 and 1808, even planning with Müller at one point in 1807 to secure the exclusive publishing rights to the Code Napoléon in Germany.<sup>48</sup> He begins writing *Penthesilea* as a prisoner of French forces in Châlons-sur-Marne. After Kleist is released, he moves to Dresden to begin his literary career in earnest and there completes *Penthesilea*. With the Prussian court retreating from Berlin and no real center for resistance emerging elsewhere in Prussia, the political situation seems hopeless to those opposing Napoleon. Kleist, in response, focuses on his

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<sup>48</sup> The following biographical summary is based primarily on James M. McGlathery’s biographical essay on Kleist in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and also, in part, on Brown’s (1977), and Wichmann’s biographical sketches and timelines.

literary projects including the founding of *Phöbus*, an exclusively literary journal with no overt political alignment, which fails and ceases publication within one year.

By mid-1808 a groundswell of resistance is forming and anti-Napoleonic momentum is gathering in Vienna. This growing resistance is inspired by Fichte's *Reden*, which proposed that the German nation put its house in order through a program of moral regeneration based on pride in German literature, culture, and institutions (Brown 29). This idea influences Kleist's subsequent projects including the propagandistic *Hermannsschlacht*, his plans for the political journal *Germania*, and his later newspaper project in Berlin, *Die Berliner Abendblätter*.<sup>49</sup> Calls for an authentic German culture (often framed as the inheritor of Classical Greek culture) as opposed to an externally imposed French one could be heard in the poems of Hölderlin as well as philosophical writings such as Fichte's *Reden*. Kleist's vacillating political views and schemes are important here insofar as they communicate the sense that this was a time of tumultuous change and possibly new beginnings, a time that presented an opportunity to envision a new relationships between bodies, identities, and desires. The challenge for Kleist would be to articulate an aesthetic that would allow for a new culture to emerge.

In January 1809, Kleist sends the manuscript of *Hermannsschlacht* to his Viennese theater contact, Heinrich von Collin, who was helping to arrange the staging of *Käthchen* in Vienna, suggesting that it would be a more timely and politically important piece. In April Austria declares war on France, and Kleist heads to Vienna via Prague with an Austrian passport. It is in Prague that Kleist, with others, hatches the plot to

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<sup>49</sup> Hilda Brown argues that the popular works meant to rouse patriotic fervour, similar to Fichte's *Reden* such as E. M. Arndt's *Geist der Zeit* may well have had an earlier influence on Kleist: "sections of *Penthesilea*, particularly those dealing with the struggle of the Amazons for independence from foreign domination show a marked resemblance to formulation by the patriotic writers touching on the parallel situation of a German nation at the mercy of French imperialistic aggression" (30).

publish *Germania* to rouse further anti-Napoleonic fervour. The effort fails, and information about Kleist's activities is sketchy until he arrives back in Berlin in early 1810, where he finds a publisher for *Käthchen*, and eventually *Der Zerbrochene Krug*, and two volumes of his tales. (*Penthesilea* had been published in 1808). Yet, he was unable to find a stage for his dramatic works. Only *Käthchen* is staged during his lifetime, in 1810 in Vienna. Frustrated with his foundering literary career and running out of money, he turns back to his political-aesthetic writings with his final project, the *BerlinerAbendblätter*.

By the time he returned to Berlin in 1810, Kleist hoped that his play *Käthchen von Heilbronn* would also be staged at the Königliches Nationaltheater and he hoped to set up a lucrative newspaper venture. Both hopes were dashed as a result of an increasingly repressive regime struggling to keep the citizenry under control and to prevent them from rising up against the Prussian collaborationists and the French occupation after the French victory. As he began his newspaper he quickly clashed with authorities on the matter of printing any news of the war that did not portray the French as victorious (Hibberd 219-20). To make matters worse, Iffland rejected his play stating that it was impossible to stage without entirely reworking it. So he set about publishing pieces that would promote his own aesthetics and expose Iffland's theater as a farce, not merely out of personal enmity but as a result of his firm belief in the vital importance of theater in articulating a national identity. Kleist was highly critical of Iffland's direction and of his acting style, as were many established Romantic poets and actors, among them Achim von Arnim, Tieck, Schröder, and Devrient (Weigel 58-60). In one piece, entitled with sarcastic modesty, "Theater: Unmaßgebliche Bemerkung" ('Remark Inconsequential for the Theater'), he condemns Iffland's theater as a base money-making project designed to fill

its coffers by mongering inconsequential fluff rather than promoting quality works with loftier artistic and political aims like those of Goethe and Schiller.

In the majority of Kleist's theater-criticism pieces, he criticizes Iffland and the Königliches Nationaltheater although often in a veiled form given the incendiary nature of the subject matter. Here, he does not veil his criticisms except by attributing them to an anonymous source as in the letter entitled "Schreiben eines redlichen Berliners, das hiesige Theater betreffend, an einem Freund im Ausland" ('Writing of an honest Berliner, concerning the local theater, to a friend abroad,') which appears in the November 23<sup>rd</sup> issue of the *Berliner Abendblätter*. The "honest citizen" bemoans the lack of public criticism of the National Theater as he speaks of its "Theaterheiligkeit" ('Holiness of the Theater') and Iffland as "Theaterpabst" ('Theater-Pope' [243]), monikers that would be fighting words in dominantly protestant Prussia. As Weigel points out, "Das Fehlen von Kritik, einer kritischen Öffentlichkeit überhaupt, sah Kleist als die 'Hauptursache' für die falsche Entwicklung und schlechte künstlerische Qualität des Königlichen Nationaltheaters an" ('Kleist viewed the absence of critique, of a critical public sphere in general, as the 'main cause' for the fallacious development and bad artistic quality of the Royal National Theater' [38]).

A few weeks before "Über das Marionettentheater" appeared in Kleist's newspaper, the Prussian authorities instituted a ban on theater criticism and especially articles critical of the National Theater (Weigel 196). Not only was he prevented from writing freely about the political situation, but, also, from writing critically about the theatre.<sup>50</sup> No longer able to write about the theater proper, a central topic of the *Berliner*

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<sup>50</sup> It appears to have been Kleist's outspoken criticisms of Iffland's theater as well as his purported rabble-rousing at the theater that provoked the ban. Wichmann reports, "Der bericht über einen Berliner Theaterskandal am 27.11.1810 hatte schließlich das völlige Verbot von Artikeln, die vom Theater handelten, zur Folge. Eine Ifflandsche Aufführung des Singspiels Die Schweizerfamilie mit einem Fräulein Herbst in der Hauptrolle, einer Besetzung, über die den BA bereits einige Tage vorher ein Urteil

*Abendblätter*, Kleist frames his critique in terms of the marionette theater in “Über das Marionettentheater.” But this popular entertainment was not exactly neutral territory either, given the increased government control over marionette and puppet shows in the form of strict licensing and script censorship. Weigel shows that the growing control of folk entertainment coincides with the French occupation in October of 1806 and the resulting efforts to maintain control over the lower classes (84-87). In September of 1810, a police action against marionette performers began in which police inspectors looked in on performances to ensure the performers did not stray from the censor-approved scripts.

The censorship and control of newspapers, theater, and marionette theater were all part of “die umgehende Unterdrückung einer sich entwickelnden Öffentlichkeit, in der sich nationale oder soziale Unruhe artikulieren konnten” (‘the immediate suppression of an emerging public (sphere), in which national or social unrest could be articulated’ [92]). Kleist is writing in an extremely repressive atmosphere, one of fear and censorship.<sup>51</sup> Kleist could no longer publish articles on theater, so he chooses a more nuanced form, the dialogue, and the not-so-distant topic of the marionette theater in order to disseminate his aesthetic and political ideas.

In this context, criticism of the theater is inseparable from criticism of the state and both are bound up in the thoroughgoing redefinition of the human body. This

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gefällt worden war, kam gar nicht zum Anfang, da das Publikum, als Fräulein Herbst die Bühne betrat, bereits in brüllendem Gelächter, auf den Zuruf: ‘Hoho!’ und ‘Jetzt kanns losgehn!’ klopfte, ‘Da Capo!!!’ brüllte und selbst durch Einschreiten der Polizei nicht mehr zur Ruhe zu bringen war. Zu den maßgeblichen Pochern gehörte nach dem Polizeibericht ein Major von Kleist... “ (196). In reference to the same event, Weigel writes, “Der eingesetzten Untersuchungskommission hat wahrscheinlich dieser Holthoff, nach dem 26.11.1810, auch Kleist als denjenigen denunziert, der im Nationaltheater “den meisten Lärm gemacht haben soll” (92).

<sup>51</sup> In a letter to Wilhelm Dorow, Achim von Arnim, a regular contributor to the *Berliner Abendblätter*, complains about the repressive situation in Prussia and mounting police censorship. He reports that Iffland and Hardenberg “hängen wie Rad und Wagenschmiere zusammen” (‘are joined together like cog and cart-grease’ [Weigel 28]). This sentiment, which echoes Kleist’s characterization of Iffland as the “Theaterpapst,” illustrates again the close connections between theater and state.

political context is important for understanding Kleist's rejection of Classical aesthetics of the body and of Enlightenment reason based on a stabilized, mechanistic view of physiology. In light of these circumstances, Kleist's treatment of the natural/artificial binary encompasses the aesthetic issues of theater and personal issues of gender identification and sexual desire. These various strands converge in performing bodies on stage. Kleist recognized the significance of the body as a site that licensed Enlightenment and Classical ideologies, a site from which one could leverage a resistance to the normative corporeal models used to discipline and regulate the citizens of an emerging nation. At a point when humanness is being redefined by rational sciences, when normative gender and sexuality is beginning to be more closely regulated and defined by deterministic medical models, actual material bodies were elided, dematerialized into the (universal, normative) body in order to conform to a mechanistic functionality.

A critique of the aesthetics of the body in performance represents, for Kleist, an insistence on embodied perspectives that would undermine a supposedly universal rationality founded on a rigidly mechanical corporeal model. In contrast to the mechanistic model, Kleist's marionette resists Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment rationality by gracefully problematizing the models and solutions that those systems offered, throwing them into question by exposing underlying contradictions and paradoxes for which he does not pretend to offer solutions. As an open form, the dialogue allows Kleist to critically explore the aesthetic problems of the performing body under literary cover and to level a radical critique of contemporary theater without offering a prosaic solution that would foreclose the plenitude of possibilities for models of embodiment yet-to-come.

## **“ÜBER DAS MARIONETTENTHEATER” AS (NARRATED) PLATONIC DIALOGUE**

The four installments of “Über das Marionettentheater” take the form of a narrated dialogue in which the two speakers discuss the gracefulness of marionettes each providing an anecdote to illustrate the inverse relationship of grace and consciousness. The narrator gives an account of his conversation with Herr C., the first dancer at the opera in the city of M. The two men meet in a public garden, and the narrator expresses surprise at having seen the dancer so many times at the marionette theater. Herr C. then begins his argument that marionettes are more graceful performers than human dancers. He identifies consciousness as the primary hindrance to graceful movement arguing that the original sin and the resulting consciousness has displaced the soul from the center of gravity distributing it in various affected sites around the body.

Consciousness, in other words, disturbs the natural harmony of movement seen in the marionette whose limbs move like pendulums around its center of gravity, which is manipulated by the machinist rather than being intentionally or consciously directed from within. The narrator engages Herr C. in a friendly yet skeptical manner, and, in the third installment, offers an anecdote to prove that he understands how consciousness can have deleterious effects on the natural grace of humans. He tells how his young male friend loses his graceful charms as he becomes conscious of them—the harder he tries to affect a graceful pose, the less graceful he becomes, his charms leaving him one by one.

In the final section, Herr C. offers his own anecdote, which concerns grace of a fencing bear superior to that of his human opponents. Like the marionette, the bear is effortlessly graceful because consciousness does not interfere with his natural movements. Since grace exists in inverse proportion to consciousness, it will shine most brightly where there is no consciousness, in the marionette, or where there is infinite consciousness, in God. Finally, Herr C. concludes by returning to the biblical metaphor

of the original sin. The narrator, “ein wenig zerstreut” (‘a bit absent-mindedly’) asks: “müßten wir wieder von dem Baum der Erkenntniß essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen?” (‘must we eat again from the tree of knowledge in order to fall back into the state of grace?’ [BA 331]). Herr C. answers affirmatively adding that this return to the garden is the last chapter in the history of the world. Here grace refers not only to the beautiful movement of the body but also to the spiritual state of innocence before the Fall. In terms of Christianity, consciousness of the body marks the guilt of the fallen (Adam and Eve) and, in terms of theatrical performance, consciousness of the body marks the affected (as in not natural or artificial) acting of the inferior dancer or actor.

To summarize, Kleist presents an account of a dialogue in four parts. The first establishes the context of the conversation as well as the central marionette argument, and it deals with the relationship between the marionette and its operator. The second compares this ideal marionette with dancers. In the third, the argument continues, and the narrator presents his anecdote of the graceful youth’s fall into self-consciousness. In the fourth, Herr C. presents his anecdote about the fencing bear and sums up his argument. Given the complex narrative structure, the text invites consideration of its puzzle-like form. The content is so richly suggestive that it is difficult to avoid isolating the ideas presented for consideration. However, upon close examination, the narrative frame foils reading the aesthetic theories, many of them presented by Herr C., as straightforward expositions of Kleist’s own dramaturgical theories.

Twentieth-century critics tend to read Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater” as a straightforward essay, an exposition on grace and beauty, a treatise on Romantic genius or Schillerian naïveté.<sup>52</sup> As Helmut Schneider points out, for the last few decades critics

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<sup>52</sup> Some standard interpretations include: Hermann Bahr—Bahr quotes Kleist’s “‘Über das Marionettentheater,’” arguing that “das hat schon Heinrich von Kleist bemerkt, das behauptete...[Kleist quote]”—he does not distinguish the argument of Herr C. from those of Kleist himself or even his own

have begun to read the piece in light of its framing devices, nonetheless the traditional reading, which focuses on the characters' ideas and ignores their narrative context, persists in some contemporary interpretations (210). Much of the criticism mentioned above describes "Über das Marionettentheater" as an essay (*Aufsatz*) without qualification. Although the title invokes the essay form with the typical "Über das..." 'On the...' formula, critics have found it difficult to nail down its genre. The piece has been described as a philosophical tract, a prose poem, a parable, an indirect poetological reflection, a conversation, a journalistic feuilleton, a Platonic dialogue, etc. (Röper 15).<sup>53</sup> Such readings have merit as long as they resist the temptation to ignore the crafty narrative frame and take Herr C.'s words as Kleist's own views.

Given Kleist's need to communicate his ideas indirectly, the dialogic aspects bear closer consideration. Manfred Durzak and Hilda Brown make strong cases for considering it a dialogue in the tradition of Plato.<sup>54</sup> Durzak studies Kleist's use of the Socratic method, arguing that form and content cannot be separated and that the process or the movement of thought cannot be scooped out as a fixed concept. The dialogue form makes it impossible to separate that process from any insight one might take away from it: "Erkenntniß ist also nicht etwas, was sich formelhaft umreißen läßt, sondern steht am Ende des dialogischen Gedankenprozesses als Identität mit diesem Gedankenprozeß"

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narrator persona. Hanna Hellman's essay "Über das Marionettentheater" also takes Herr C.'s theories as Kleist's personal views, which, as William Ray argues, "set the tone for a long tradition" that positions the piece as a key to Kleistian aesthetics. Ray observes, "Most frequently it ["Über das Marionettentheater"] is treated as an essay and the ideas of both C. and the narrator consolidated into a single theory, presumably expressive of Kleist's views" (527). Even Alexander Weigel's impressively well-documented analysis consolidates their views, reading them as Kleist's.

<sup>53</sup> Ray also provides a summary of the major trends in criticism on Kleist's "Über das Marionettentheater" from Hanna Hellman (1911) to Hélène Cixous (1976). Hellman reads it as keystone of Kleist's work and signal of his affiliation to Romanticism, Friederich Braig as a Christian allegory, Walter Silz as mere Feuilleton, Richard Daunicht as satire of Iffland. Herbert Plügge offers a face-value reading in order to scientifically define harmonious movement. Heinz Kohut offers a psychoanalytic reading. Etc.

<sup>54</sup> Gerhard Neumann agrees, as he describes "Über das Marionettentheater" as "nicht systemphilosophisch oder streng diskursiv, sondern vielmehr assoziativ und dialogisch" (14).

‘Knowledge is thus not something that can be outlined in a stereotypical manner, rather it stands at the end of the dialogic thought process as identical with this thought process’ [Durzak 316]). The knowledge, or final insight, is identical with the thought process, as no fixed answer or clear proposition emerges at the end of Kleist’s dialogue. Instead, the dialogue performs its critique by presenting the dramatized process of arriving to a particular view on its subject.

As Hella Röper notes, “Das Ziel bleibt unerreicht. Diese sogenannte ‘offene Lösung’ stellt ein typisches Formelement der Romantik dar” (‘The goal remains unattained. This so-named ‘open ending’ represents a typical formal element of Romanticism’ [20]). Röper also points out that the narrator’s last words are in the form of a question delivered absent-mindedly. No ultimate dialectical synthesis of the thesis and antithesis, presented by Herr C. and the narrator respectively, closes the dialogue. Underscoring this genre, Clemens Heselhaus focuses on Kleist’s use of paradox in his essay “Das Kleistische Paradox,” what he describes as “die eigentliche und vielleicht einzige offene Form” (‘the actual and maybe only open form’ [115]). He adds, in a footnote to that statement, “Daß auch die romantische Ironie offene Formen erzeugt, hängt vermutlich mit ihrer Nähe zu Paradox zusammen” (‘That romantic irony also generates open forms, is probably a result of its close connection to paradox’ [129]). As Heselhaus contends, Kleist’s use of paradox is not classical in the sense of Cicero’s definition of paradox as contrary to general opinion. Kleist’s paradoxical approach is instead modern:

An die Stelle der alten Ansicht, daß die Welt auf menschliche Weise begreifbar und erklärbar ist, tritt die neue Ansicht von der Unbegreiflichkeit der Welt, die nur noch der Vorstellung zugänglich ist. Diese Vorstellung benutzt das Paradox als Form und Formel für die Unendlichkeit der neuen Perspektive. (Heselhaus 114)

In place of the old view, that the world is comprehensible and explicable in human terms, the new view hits upon the incomprehensibility of the world, which is still only available to the mind. This mind uses the paradox as form and formula for the infinity of the new perspective.

The aim of the paradoxical dialogue is thus not to present a proposition from one, even unexpected, point of view but, rather, to open up the limitless possibility of different perspectives. It foregrounds perspectivizing and presents a more embodied narrative than expository prose or journalism; that is, the ideas are always embodied in a character and neither character delivers a final solution or truly has the last word. Such use of this open-ended form links Kleist to his Romantic contemporaries such as Hoffmann, Tieck, and Novalis, as well as the pre/proto-romantic Diderot whose dialogues were enormously influential in Germany at the time.<sup>55</sup>

Hilda Brown locates several similarities between Kleist's dialogue and those of Diderot, especially *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Essai sur le Peinture*. She argues that the two writers' shared affinity for the dialogue form and the fact that they both exploited its features more fully than their contemporaries evidences similar strains in their thought: "Both writers employ a distinctly 'polyvocal' perspective rather than the common 'univocal' one found in polemical dialogue" (143). As Brown contends, the polyvocal aspect of the essay is a formal signpost warning the reader away from a straightforward, face-value reading of the piece. She goes to describe this polyvocality as a way around the rigid dualism characteristic of Classical, Enlightenment, and Idealist philosophies. Rather than an *either/or* approach, Kleist's dialogue, like Diderot's, employs a *both/and* to better discover the complexity of the issues under investigation. Like Plato's dialogues (for example his *Symposium*), the process is as important, if not more so, than any stated conclusion. That the *dialogue is narrated* is another example of unresolved (both/and)

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<sup>55</sup> *Le Neveu de Rameau* was first published in German in 1805, translated by Goethe. Stylistically, "Über das Marionettentheater" can be seen as an adaptation of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*.

tension. The outer frame is a first-person narrative that seems to occasionally dissolve into dialogue before the narrative 'I' reasserts itself.

In this reading, Kleist will generally emerge as a Romantic<sup>56</sup> rather than a Classical writer, and it is important here to recognize his affinity to the early Romantics and the romantic features of his thinking: The importance of a national culture, the style of acting (better approximated by Fleck, Schröder, and Devrient than Iffland), the rejection of measured, harmonious style and formal declamation of Goethe's Weimar Classicism, the importance of perspective and the unreliability of perception (and hence the adoption of open literary forms and complex narrative frames). In the introduction to *Gewagte Experimente und kühne Konstellationen: Kleists Werk zwischen Klassizismus und Romantik*, Lubkoll, Oesterle, and Waldow argue that

Beide – Klassizismus und Romantik – reagieren auf die fundamentale Umbruchskrise in sogenannten "Sattelzeit" zwischen 1750 und 1830, auf den enormen Modernisierungsschub, der sich in dieser Zeit in allen gesellschaftlichen Bereichen vollzieht und der nicht zuletzt zu tiefer Verunsicherung führt bzw. das Bedürfnis nach Orientierung und Stabilisierung hervorruft. (Lubkoll 10)

Both—Classicism and Romanticism—react to the fundamental crisis of radical change in the so-called "saddle period" between 1750 and 1830, to the enormous push of modernization, which took place at this time in all areas of society and which, not least, led to a deep insecurity, or, to be precise, called forth a need for orientation and stabilization.

Although both literary movements can be seen as coping mechanisms for the traumatic disorientation caused by radical societal changes, Kleist's way of coping was critiquing an outmoded aesthetics which relied upon conventional ways of understanding bodies, identities and desires. Instead of embracing the stability of Classical harmony, Kleist

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<sup>56</sup> Kleist's work is occasionally considered distinct from the major Romantic movements. However, this particular piece has been firmly canonized as representative of Romanticism, for example it appears in the volume entitled *German Romantic Criticism* in Continuum's *The German Library* series. Also, several of his essays and excerpts of *Penthesilea* and *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* appear in the two volume Reclam survey of German Romanticism, *Romantik I & Romantik II*.

begins to imagine an aesthetics of the performing body yet-to-come in the inherently theatrical mode of dialogue.

Given the instability of the *Sattelzeit*, it's no surprise that "Kleist wendet sich vor allem gegen ein starres klassizistisches Schönheitsideal, wie er sich überhaupt gegen alles Erstarrte – in der Kunst wie im Staat – richtet" ('Kleist, above all, turned against a rigid classical ideal of beauty, as he directed himself, in general, against everything stiff/inflexible– in art as in the state' [Lubkoll 11]). He needed a form that accommodated his need to be indirect, due not only to censorship, but also his need to articulate something that had not yet come about and, thus, could not be narrativized directly, and to stimulate and inspire his audience to think with him about a new kind of stage on which new kinds of bodies (posthuman and queer bodies yet-to-come) could perform. Again, the dialogue form is important here because it stages its arguments in a more embodied, perspectivized fashion. In this case, dialogue remains open to the possibilities of the yet-to-come as it retains the dramatic flexibility of a thought process in motion as opposed to the rigidity of a static proposition or thesis.

### **PERFORMANCE AND ALLEGORY IN "ÜBER DAS MARIONETTENTHEATER"**

In his reading, Paul de Man argues that Kleist's dialogue is inherently theatrical. He notes that the descriptions of the two characters' reactions to one another's arguments can be read against the words of the dialogue as stage directions or a "second dialogue of gestures" (269). The narrator's "distracted" or "absent-minded" state as Herr C. delivers his grandiose conclusion is one example of this second dialogue, which undercuts the main thrust of the narrative. The narrator thus hints that he is not overwhelmingly convinced by this odd argument. Therefore, the text performs the limits of persuasion-through-reason. De Man writes that such a text as "Über das Marionettentheater,"

...which examines the epistemology of narrative, will engage the themes of mimetic imitation critically. Hence its necessarily theatrical mode, the emphasis on stage and scene; hence, also, the prominence of its critique of mimetic themes and the variety of its narrative stylistics. (De Man 274)

Kleist's dialogue performs a critique of mimetic imitation and cannot be taken simply as a straightforward exposition on the superior grace of marionettes. Like the marionette, the dialogue lightly touches on the theme of the performing body without striking a rigid and affected pose. Instead of the quiet harmony of a statue, the classical object (body) par excellence, we have the marionette in motion, a more dynamic embodiment like the dialogue form itself. Given the political context I outlined earlier, it seems unlikely that Kleist, with his strong feelings about the state of the theater and of the nation, would be satisfied with revelling in the negativity of DeManian aporia by constructing a purely self-reflexive puzzle that thematizes the ultimate impossibility of interpretation. Because, to return to Mehigan's assertion, Kleist frequently stages moments 'that could go beyond the aporias of consciousness produced by Kantian philosophy' (14). Although the text critiques mimesis and generates multiple possibilities for interpretation, I would like to consider some possible ways around the deconstructive aporia—a distinctively DeManian absence as opposed to Derridean plenitude—with which de Man's reading presents us.<sup>57</sup>

In response to de Man's and others' deconstructive readings,<sup>58</sup> Helmut Schneider insists that the form and content of the dialogue cannot ultimately be separated, noting that deconstructionist critics such as de Man "neglect the traditional aesthetic theme of

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<sup>57</sup> "But Falle, of course, also means in German "trap," the trap which is the ultimate textual model of this and of all texts, the trap of an aesthetic education which inevitably confuses dismemberment of language by the power of the letter with the the gracefulness of a dance. This dance, regardless of whether it occurs as mirror, as imitation, as history, as the fencing match of interpretation, or as the anamorphic transformations of tropes, is the ultimate trap, as unavoidable as it is deadly" (de Man 290).

<sup>58</sup> Writing in 1994, Schneider notes that Kleist's piece "has now become one of the classic reference texts for the 'deconstructive' turn in literary criticism" (210).

grace, or they... treat it in isolation from the poetic form” (210). He argues that the text itself, the dialogue with its pendular movement,<sup>59</sup> is an (ideal) marionette imagined by the two characters. Like de Man, Schneider reads the text as performing its critique. But, rather than performing ineffability or the “ultimate trap” or failure of interpretation, the text embodies a ployvocal, dialogic thought process about graceful movement and consciousness.

The body engendered by the text is a marionette, a marionette that is constructed with each new reading or excursion through the thought process. For Schneider the marionette is “not just the referential object of discussion, it is *produced* by it” (215). Thus the reader participates in discursively producing a marionette. The dialogue is a marionette, more graceful and less affected in its movements than a univocal essay from the most skilled of pens. This marionette is, then, an allegory for the dialogue between the two men:

They also, as they dance around each other and strike various rejecting or seductive poses, put their body at stake. If the text is the arena where the two men constitute themselves as a body through their relationship, which is theatrical, rhetorical, and physical at the same time, the marionette is the allegory of their effort. (Schneider 216)

If the marionette is, indeed, “the allegory of their effort,” of what exactly does this effort consist? The two men make an effort to come to understanding about graceful movement and why it is that Herr C., the principal dancer at the opera admires the pantomime of the puppets so much and why he thinks that dancers looking to perfect their art could learn from them. The marionette they theorize, says Schneider, is an allegory of this effort, an allegory of this particular *dialogue* about grace. The movement between the two men, their theatrical, rhetorical, and physical relationship, produces the textual body as

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<sup>59</sup> As have many other critics, Hélène Cixous notes that “Über das Marionettentheater” exhibits a well-balanced “pendular” textual construction, swinging from one interlocutor to the other (32).

marionette. This textual body moves as an allegorical critique of the dominant discursive dead-ends of Classical aesthetics, Enlightenment faith in reason, and solipsistic Romantic mysticism.

But, what does it mean that their effort to define the circumstances of graceful movement is allegorized in the form of a marionette?<sup>60</sup> Schneider's reading of the marionette as allegory is appropriate for linking the themes of desire and embodiment to Kleist's narrated dialogue.

Judith Butler poses a similar question about Plato's *Phaedrus*: "If allegory is in its most general formulation a way of giving narrative form to something which cannot be directly narrativized, then what does it mean that desire is approached through allegory?" (1995 370). The ideal that Kleist imagines, that Herr C. and the narrator desire, cannot be spelled out. In the same essay, Butler argues "that language is bound to founder on the question of desire, that it is forced to seek modes of indirection, and that the writings of and on desire that we might consider are ones which seek, in the end, to cancel themselves as writing in order to better approximate the desire they seek to know" (1995 370). "Über das Marionettentheater" exemplifies such writing that thwarts its own narrative force in order to better understand its object through a mode of indirection. From this reading, one arrives at a marionette allegorized in the movement of dialogue and not necessarily a hermeneutically impenetrable maze. Through this mode of indirection, Kleist better approximates the desire to create a founding myth for the body.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This idea of allegory related to desire will echo the reading of the virtually queer marionette as a figure for eros and for homoerotic desire.

<sup>61</sup> Gerhard Neumann reads "Über das Marionettentheater" as an account of the origin of the body or, more precisely, as Kleist's attempt to develop an *Ursprungsmythos* for the body (17).

As Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, the opposition of symbol to allegory is “an opposition invented by the romantics” although they had very different ideas about what it was (199). Todorov writes that, “The presence of the morpheme *allos* in this word may suffice to account for the animosity that Moritz bears toward it: allegory requires something beyond itself, unlike the beautiful object, which is a fully realized whole in itself” (161). For Moritz, allegory is not beautiful because it reaches out to something not itself; it is incomplete, not whole. It is transitive in that it signifies something else, whereas the symbol is intransitive in that it *is* what it signifies. Here, allegory can be interpreted and the knowledge it signifies can be put into other words; the Romantic symbol cannot. Todorov quotes Solger to show how later romantics see allegory as “the beautiful as matter grasped while still in action, as a moment of the activity still related to both sides” (220). For Solger, “the contraries, the becoming, are present in both cases; but the duality is stronger in allegory, more harmoniously absorbed in symbol” (Todorov 220). According to the reading pursued here, then, Kleist’s dialogue is closer to the type of allegory Solger describes which does not attempt to resolve paradox or synthesize opposites. One central opposition in this discussion and in the romantic notion of allegory is that of general versus particular. This opposition connects allegory to the issue of ideal Truth versus particular (embodied) truths, and we have seen that Kleist loses his faith in the former and insists on the latter.

As Theresa Kelley argues, “Romantic allegory welds its abstractions to the ‘flesh and blood.’ The world of lived particulars and feeling” (94). Romantic allegory problematizes the rhetorical move of abstraction through figurative language.<sup>62</sup> Kelley argues that romantics, uneasy with the lifeless abstraction characteristic of Neo-

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<sup>62</sup> De Man also deals with this issue arguing that the anecdotes in “Über das Marionettentheater” provided to explain Herr C.’s eccentric theory illustrate the problem of particular examples violating the abstract principle they are supposed to clarify (275).

classicism, sought to reinvent allegory as a more protean and less rigid form of abstraction:

Like Proteus, this allegory is bound to successive visible and material shapes that hover over the boundary between idea and material form. The imagined proximity of such shapes to real people and events corrodes the unvarying relation between the general and particular which Neoclassical critics urged. (96)

Kleist's marionette appears to hover over that boundary indeed. The marionette is continually in motion between the various bodies (the boy, the bear, the amputees, the dancers) and the abstract ideas (grace, geometry, the physics of mirrors, the force of gravity, Eden). The discussion is embodied in dialogue form, partially abstracted from the lived particulars, but not completely so: Proper names are not completely abstracted to merely 'a dancer' in a 'city,' but, rather, are designated by initials invoking a hint of identity, or a secret identity, in *Herr C.* in the *city of M.* Such abstracted yet relatively embodied details foreground and trouble the boundary between general and particular, between the generic body and particular bodies.

As Walter Hinderer argues, Kleist rejects both the classical oppositions that form the basis for Idealist and Enlightenment philosophies such as the opposition between the general and the particular. Neither, says Hinderer, did he indulge in romantic compensation strategies. Kleist rejects such nostalgia with its appeals to origins in antiquity as defined by eighteenth-century classical aesthetics. Reason and the bourgeois order are not working for him, so he goes about trying to imagine a different way to address problems of performance and identity. Like many of his characters including Penthesilea and Michael Kohlhaus who step outside of the social order to seek justice or fulfill their desires and thereby articulate an identity in resistance to the oppressive dominant culture. The allegory of the marionette as the two men's effort has to be open-ended and it has to try to capture something of the process of assembling the (general,

body) marionette through (particular, bodies) examples that continually frustrate any tidy synthesis. The oppositions and contradictions remain suspended rather than replicating the received hierarchical order or narrative of synthesis. Clearly, Kleist's use of the open-ended dialogue form demonstrates his rejection of harmonious Classicism as well as Romantic Idealism.

To return to Todorov's speculation about Mortiz, allegory reaches outside itself for something other, presenting visible parts for a hidden whole. In his article "Das Imaginäre Theater Heinrich von Kleists," Alexander Weigel argues that Kleist, having no satisfactory stage or social sphere, imagines a different kind of theater that could foster an articulation of identities to come. Consequently, Kleist's focus is on the performing body, and acting has the double valence of stagecraft and performance in everyday life, as epitomized in the body of Iffland onstage and off, as stage actor and cultural authority. The marionette is an allegory for the discourse on graceful performance and its corporeal ideal, which does not exist and must be created or imagined not only as a way to express the impossibility of attaining that 'ideal' of becoming a marionette or a god, but also to defer positing any ideal once and for all.

The examples of ungracefulness, however, refer to actual people whose movements are affected. Iffland is one of these negative examples by extension, because in other writings Kleist describes his acting, onstage and off, as affected, avaricious, and effeminate. Kleist's criticisms of Iffland complicate his use of the terms such as *zieren* and *Anmut*, but, as I argue in the following section, his opportunistic and apparently inconsistent uses of those terms does not necessarily imply that he valorizes the natural over the artificial.

## KLEIST'S CRITIQUE OF IFFLAND'S ACTING

In the third issue of the *Berliner Abendblätter*, Kleist published “An unseren Iffland,” a subtly sarcastic verse tribute to the actor-director which he signed “von einem vaterländischen Dichter.” As a ‘patriotic poet,’ he offers exhortations to welcome Iffland back with songs and wreaths. The poem seems generally laudatory but ends with these telling lines:

Stets auf geweih'ten Brettern  
Wird Er, ein Heros, steh'n;  
Wird dort als Fürst regieren  
Mit kunstgeübter Hand  
Und unsere Bühne zieren  
Und unser Vaterland! (BA 19)  
Steadily on the consecrated boards  
You will stand, A Hero;  
Will there as Prince rule  
With artistically accomplished hand  
And charm our stages  
And our Fatherland!

In mock praise, Kleist addresses Iffland as hero and prince, proclaiming that the actor-director will “adorn” both the stage and the fatherland.<sup>63</sup> The verb *zieren* means to adorn or decorate; the noun *Ziererei* is derived from its reflexive form *sich zieren* (Grimm 1188). Grimm traces this meaning of the word “sich gekünstelt, unnatürlich, gezwungen in gebärden und worten geben” (to bear oneself in an artificial, unnatural, or forced

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<sup>63</sup> “Er” capitalized, as it is here, is a familiar form of address (like ‘du’), so Kleist is addressing Iffland directly and (potentially an insult) as an equal.

manner 1184). This use of the verb introduces a notion of the artificial and the unnatural, a forced affectedness in speech, writing, gesture, and comportment. To the definition of *Ziererei*, Grimm adds “namentlich weibliche koketterie, in ubertriebener geschaftlicher etikette, auch in unaufrichtiger gesinnung, im verkunstelten und überladenen sprachstil und verschrobenen kunstempfinden” (1188). Thus, *zieren* has associations with feminine artifice and seduction. Citing Schiller—“aus der affektierten anmuth (*wird*) ziererey”—Grimm shows that the word was frequently used in this way by the end of the eighteenth century (1188).

In “Über das Marionettentheater,” *Ziererei* is the deleterious effect of consciousness on the performing body that makes it ungraceful: “Denn Ziererei erscheint, wie Sie wissen, wenn sich die Seele (*vis motix*) in irgend einem andern Punkte befindet, als im dem Schwerpunct der Bewegung” (322); (‘For affectation appears, as you know, when the soul (*vis motrix*) can be found at some point other than the center of gravity’ [Gollub 240]). The seemingly innocuous phrase “mit kunstgeübter Hand,” from the verse quoted above, gains new meaning in the following issue of the *Abendblätter*. In the “Theater” column, Kleist sharply criticizes Iffland’s acting, especially his exaggerated hand gestures which are so expressive they draw attention away from his face (BA 23). In Herr C.’s terms, Iffland’s *vis motrix* is too much in his hands; his acting style is artificial, unlike, paradoxically, the more natural movements of Herr C.’s marionette. Kleist ends the piece by recommending that Iffland tone down his hand gestures; this moderation would be an advantage to his playing if, he adds with a final barb, anything desirable about it were to remain.

As mentioned above, in “Theater, Unmaßgebliche Bemerkung,” Kleist criticizes the National Theater’s emphasis on spectacle rather than serious theater, as would be represented by the works of Goethe and Schiller. Kleist muses that, in order to stage

something as dull—in the public’s mind—as one of Goethe’s plays, the directors would have to exchange the male and female roles with one another to sell tickets (BA 81). It is interesting that he here uses the titillation of gender confusion as the epitome of low spectacle, as a viable way of making “boring” serious drama palatable to the general public. This cross-casting suggestion is undoubtedly meant as a joke and meant to expose the triviality of Iffland’s programme. Nonetheless it pits a sort of frivolous, carnivalesque spectacle against serious theater: Here, Kleist implies that, because that sort of cross-dressing is inherently low comedy that does not address more lofty concerns, it will sell tickets and please the crowds. This sort of “low” or popular comedy certainly brings the marionette theater to mind, a burlesque performance meant to amuse the rabble (BA 317). His argument makes it clear that Kleist does not advocate this kind of crowd-pleasing theater: The National Theater should be presenting works by Goethe and the like, but to do so in that climate and make money, they would need to dress it up in drag.<sup>64</sup> For Kleist, this would make a light mockery of the type of serious drama in which he prefers. So he privileges a theater that avoids such lampoonery; hence, Iffland’s theater is coded as feminine, artificial, and affected, no better than a common marionette theater. However, the criticisms that Herr C. makes of the various dancers sound very much like Kleist’s criticisms of Iffland; they are both accused of affectation. Perhaps, for Kleist, grace is not the point, an outmoded aesthetic standard that results in a

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<sup>64</sup> As Susan Gustafson writes, “Goethe was into cross-dressing” citing many instances of his interest in cross-dressing onstage and off (166). So either Kleist is being ironic about Goethe and the Weimar stage or he’s overlooking this element of spectacle already present in Goethe’s theater. Also, Schiller had much enthusiasm for Iffland in his early career as an actor, especially his work on the Weimar stage. In “Über Iffland als Lear” (1784) Schiller praises Iffland’s performance as Lear as well as Franz Moor (of Schiller’s *Die Räuber*) and compares him to the great Romantic actor Schröder: “Seine Darstellung ist ganz, keine Grimasse, keine Bewegung des unbedeutendsten Muskels straft die andern Lügen” (896). The commentary notes that “später sollte Schillers große Wertschätzung einem weniger wohlwollenden Urteil über Iffland weichen” (*Theorhetische Schriften* 1487). So it is appropriate that Kleist opposes the two here. But, I think it useful to keep the earlier association in mind so as not to see Weimar-Goethe-Schiller and Berlin-Iffland as necessarily diametrically opposed, as hard and fast in every respect. The situation is more interconnected and complex.

lifeless puppet and not the kind of powerful acting (perhaps like Fleck's) in closer proximity to real bodies and actions that he was interested in staging. Kleist rejects both the affectation of Iffland's exaggerated gestures, as well as an aesthetic system, like Goethe's or Schiller's, that results in another type of affectation, the stiff, lifeless formality of Goethe's Weimar productions. Herr C. is, then, more like a Goethe or a Schiller criticizing Iffland's low theater; in "Über das Marionettentheater," Kleist positions himself outside of these two camps bemused and dissatisfied with the two dominant forms of theater at the time.

Kleist's readers would have immediately recognized Herr C.'s thesis as a reversal of a common practice of criticizing theatrical productions by comparing them to marionette plays. From Lessing and Goethe to popular magazines and actors' reflections on their craft, the marionette is invoked as the opposite of 'good' life-like acting (Daunicht 307-309). In a letter from 1802, Karoline Herder describes the declamation-style acting at Weimar in terms of wooden puppets, while Goethe criticizes the Stuttgart theater in the very same terms (Daunicht 308). Thus, Kleist cites a recognizable strategem of theater criticism to satirize and unsettle the terms of this aesthetic debate. With Herr C.'s theory of the harmoniously balanced soul or *vis motrix*, Kleist takes aim the Classical acting style of Weimar that had dominated European stages for decades, one that he rejects. Yet, his aim is dual at least. He also has Iffland clearly in his sights. Iffland's one-act comedy, *Die Marionetten* (1807), affirms the superiority of the human actor over the marionette. As Iffland's most publicly vocal opponent, Kleist implies in his dialogue that, in fact, marionettes could act better than the Iffland-style actors on the Berlin stage (Daunicht 309).

After Iffland rejected *Käthchen*, Kleist wrote a heated letter to the theater director in which he speculates that, had the play's protagonist been a boy, Iffland would have

been more interested in the play: “Es thut mir Leid, die Wahrheit zu sagen, daß es ein Mädchen ist; wenn es ein Junge gewesen wäre, so würde es Ew. Wohlgeboren wahrscheinlich besser gefallen haben” (‘I’m sorry, to tell the truth, that it is a girl; if it had been a boy, you, honorable sir, probably would have liked it better’ [*Briefe* 448]). This is a clear reference to Iffland’s notorious sexual appetite for young men (Tobin 85). Tobin cites Paul Derks’ evidence for Iffland’s same-sex affairs, including a Viennese police report, and goes on to discuss his appearance in Mortiz’s *Anton Reiser*: “The descriptions of Iffland in *Anton Reiser* invoke the gay stereotypes that were emerging even before gay identity had been conceptualized” (86). Again, Kleist aligns sexual deviance (here pederasty and cross-dressing) with frivolity as opposed to the concerns of high drama. Thus it would be problematic to view Kleist as proto-gay or proto-feminist. Yet, it is clear from Kleist’s letters that he is struggling with the very models of sexual difference and masculinity that he uses to castigate his foe.

Kleist implies that not only profit but also sexual prurience, of a distinctly unmanly sort, guides Iffland’s program rather. However, his characterization of Iffland is complicated by his own expressions of homoerotic desire evident in a few of his letters, but especially his famous letter, of January 1805, to Ernst von Pfuel where he speaks of his “truly *girlish* feelings”:

Du stelltest das Zeitalter der Griechen in meinem Herzen wieder her, ich hätte bei dir schlafen können, du lieber Junge; so umarmte dich meine ganze Seele! Ich habe deinen schönen Leib, wenn du in Thun vor meinen Augen in den See stiegst, mit wahrhaft *mädchenhaften* Gefühlen betrachtet. (336)

You have resurrected the Age of the Greeks in my heart, I could have slept with you, you dear boy; thusly did my entire soul embrace you! As you came up out of the lake in Thun before my eyes, I gazed on your beautiful body with truly girlish feelings.

Although some critics have interpreted this letter more conservatively as an expression typical of the Romantic cult of friendship,<sup>65</sup> most acknowledge it as a unambiguous expression of homoerotic desire. In reference to the preponderance of homoerotic codes, figures recognizably homoerotic to eighteenth century readers, Heinrich Detering writes, “In der Tat scheint mir Kleists Brief nahezu vollständig das Arsenal von Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten homoerotischen Empfindens zu repräsentieren, das an der Wende vom 18. zu 19. Jahrhundert verfügbar war” (“In fact it appears to me that Kleist’s letter represents almost the complete arsenal of possible expressions of homoerotic feeling that were available at the turn from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> [120]). Although Kleist speaks of his “girlish” feelings, his homoerotic expressions are expressed in a more masculine and classically inflected same sex desire than that with which he portrays Iffland. While Kleist acknowledges his “girlish” feelings, it is Pfuel who he wants as his wife: “sei [du] die Frau mir...” (337). As the object of Kleist’s gaze, Pfuel takes on the feminine role of wife. Somewhat like Penthesilea who must conquer Achilles to be united with him, Kleist does not consider taking the conventionally feminine, passive role in his fantasized relationship with Pfuel.

While it may be tempting to try to reconcile these contradictory takes on homoerotic desire, it seems most likely that, for Kleist, they remained unreconciled. The same could be said for his view of gender roles, especially the role of women, to which he seems to want to conform (and to which he wants the women in his life to conform) in some places, and which he seems to want to escape or dismantle in others. In his letters, he chides his sister for being too active and independent and for avoiding marriage. Kleist writes of Ulrike, “Sie ist eine weibliche Heldenseele, die von ihrem Geschlechte

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<sup>65</sup> See Wittels, Fritz. “Heinrich von Kleist – Prussian Junker and Creative Genius.” In *The Literary Imagination: Psychoanalysis and the Genius of Writer*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books (1965), 23-42.

nichts hat, als die Hüften” (‘She is a feminine heroic soul, who possesses nothing of her sex except for the hips’ [Stephan 111]). Inge Stephan argues that Kleist’s heavy-handed advice to Ulrike belies his own problematic relation to conventional gender roles, and, further, that,

Die Briefe zeigen, daß das, was Kleist als patriarchalistische Struktur beschwört und herbeizuschreiben versucht, brüchig geworden ist. Der Versuch, sich und die Frau diese Strukturen hineinzuzwingen, mißlingt, muß mißlingen, weil ihr zumindest auf der Seite von Kleist aber wohl auch auf der Seite der Schwester, keine psychische Realität mehr entspricht. (111)

The letters show that what Kleist invokes and tries to subscribe to as patriarchal structure has crumbled. The attempt to force himself and his sister into this structure fails; it must fail, because it no longer corresponds to physical reality at least for Kleist but also for his sister.

The patriarchal structure to which Kleist tries to subscribe is already crumbling. As Stephan argues, Kleist’s attempt to adhere to this structure fails because those prescribed roles no longer correspond to any physical reality. They are norms based on outmoded ideals that no longer speak to the actual socio-cultural situation. As Erika Berroth argues, the gender roles that Kleist’s female characters often transgress, the same conventions he forbids Ulrike to flout, become part of his literary work which “immer wieder die Krise der Identität in einer Zeit des Wandels von feudalen zu bürgerlichen Familienstrukturen spiegelt” (‘time and again mirrors the crisis of identity in a time of change from feudal to bourgeois family structures’ [2]). Berroth argues that his works mirror the crisis of identity wrought by sweeping changes in familial structures and gender roles. I argue that he reacts to these sweeping changes in his works not by mirroring them but by beginning to imagine queer and posthuman models of corporeality yet-to-come. He realizes that this structure is broken; yet he has no other structure with which to replace it. Thus, his contradictory takes on homoerotic desire demonstrate the sense of crisis that permeates the professional, aesthetic, and personal for Kleist. All of these crises point

back to the problematic status of the body as a site for defining humanness and for authenticating gender and sexuality as functions of a mechanistic physiological nature. As a variety of aesthetic discourses set out to solve these problems (by appealing to Enlightenment science or Classical aesthetics as compensation strategies), Kleist works to problematize or counter-actualize the relationships between bodies, identities, and desires.<sup>66</sup>

### **A VIRTUALLY QUEER AND POSTHUMAN MARIONETTE**

Again, the virtual in this project describes, “a movement towards... the object that is in the process of coming to presence” (Roe No Pag.). The marionette produced by Kleist’s dialogue can be understood as such an object in the process of becoming. In this piece, as we have seen, Kleist stages a narrated dialogue in which Herr C. proposes superior grace embodied as a marionette. This scene of persuasion or this movement of thought is inseparable from the content itself. Instead of arguing from one unified position, Kleist creates a more open scene in which two characters perform a conversation on the topic. Kleist stages the “loss of hermeneutic control... as a scene of hermeneutic persuasion” (de Man 269). As Herr C. tries, somewhat unsuccessfully, to persuade the narrator, and the dialogue begins to oscillate between Herr C.’s initial argument and the narrator’s alternating interest and scepticism, Kleist abdicates hermeneutic control to the dialogue’s readers. Although the narrator wryly suggests that this hypothetical marionette could be built by Herr C.’s Englishman who makes artificial legs, the marionette of which the two men speak does not exist in the text alone and is

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<sup>66</sup> “The question then, is how to actualize events in a different manner or, to be more precise, establish the conditions under which a different actualization might take place. This is what Deleuze calls ‘counter-actualization.’ It is an attempt to return to the virtual structure of the event to pave the way for new actualization” (Colwell No Pag.)

only created interactively by the interlocutor/reader. Hence, the dialogue generates a staggering number and variety of interpretations or invites a multiplicity of reactualizations. The authorial voice is decentered such that it is “not possible to designate a point of view privileged over the others, a center which would unify other centers” (Deleuze 209). The dialogue’s paradoxes, contradictions, and open-ends foreground problematic connections between abstract ideas and the particular examples meant to illustrate them.

Neither do the key terms of the dialogue provide a stable center or privileged point of view. If one follows the discourse on grace as the central topic of the essay, just as with the object of the piece—the Marionette, Gliedermann, Puppe—there is no unity, no self-same identity, in that central key term. The term *grace* is already doubled in the piece: The German words *Grazie* and *Anmut* are, to some extent, interchangeable synonyms, yet they carry different connotations (Grimm 409, 2245). Under the second entry for *Grazie*, Grimm lists the Greek “anmutsgöttinnen” as part A and the more abstract meaning, whose definition begins with “anmut,” as part B. In between he notes that the word in its abstract meaning appeared towards the end of the eighteenth century, when it could be used in either its singular or plural form to denote either or both meanings.<sup>67</sup> Grimm quotes Haller dismissing the “unnecessary foreign” word while pointing to the “critical or ironic play on the excessive use of the word” so fashionable among eighteenth century classicists, specifically Anacreontic poets, like Wieland.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Grimm writes “noch bevor grazie B [below], in einem rein begrifflichensinne und in vorwiegend singularischen gebrauch, in deutschen als ein gleichsam eigened und neues wort auftritt, bildet sich bei Wieland eine pluralische verwendung des noch mythologisch bestimmten wortes heraus, die aber, jenseits aller vorstellung von persönlichen wesen, bis zur abstraktbedeutung ‘reize’ vorstöszt und damit die grenze zu B erreicht. Dieser eignetümliche übergangsgebrauch zwischen A und B reicht bis ins die 90er Jahre 18.jhs., dann man ihn als doppeldeutig fallen zu lassen und zugleich eine pluralische verwendung von grazie B zu vermeiden” (2248).

<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, Grimm also observes that the word can be used “in kritischer oder ironischer anspielung auf den übermaszigen gebrauch des wortes und seinen modecharakter in der dichtung der anakreontiker

Under the more Germanically inflected *Anmut*, one finds that the word was used to express “affectus, appetitus, die begier, lust...” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While, the older definition expresses desire or desiring, the newer one expresses that which stimulates and satisfies desire.<sup>69</sup> Although both words are derived from Latin roots, *Anmut* is plainly more Germanized than *Grazie*, which is scarcely more than orthographically altered from the Latin *gratia*. As late as the 1761, Haller refers to the word as unnecessary and foreign.

Friederich Schiller’s essay “Anmut und Würde” provides a more specific example of the usage of *Anmut* in the context of Classical aesthetics. Chronologically situated between Haller and Kleist, Schiller’s ideas on the aesthetics of grace would have been known to Kleist and his more learned readers. For Schiller, “Anmut ist eine *bewegliche* Schönheit; eine Schönheit nemlich die an ihrem Subjekt zufällig entstehen und eben so aufhören kann” (‘Grace is a *moving* beauty; a beauty, namely, that originates accidentally for its subject and can stop in just the same way [331]). Kleist is dealing with much the same idea of grace, namely, as the beauty of bodies in motion. Gail Hart argues that “‘Anmut und Würde’ and its arguments were available to him and a comparative reading of the two essays strongly suggest that Kleist responded either to the essay itself or to some version of its contents” (84). Schiller’s aesthetic term retains the general meaning “das begier anregende und befriedigende” that Grimm records (409). From the beginning of the essay, grace is linked with sexual seduction; Schiller reminds us that Juno must borrow Venus’s belt, which has the power to confer grace upon its wearer, if she is sure

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*und Wieland’s*: die anmuth, die man seit einiger zeit mit einem entbehrlichen fremden worte grazie nennt HALLER” (2251).

<sup>69</sup> Aus der vorstellung bergierlicher lust gieng aber später die heute allein geltende einer anziehenden, reizenden lust hervor, und schon STIELER (1691) legt anmut aus amabilitas, venustas; anmut ist uns nicht mehr das begierende, sondern das begier anregende und befriedigende, die grazie... (409)

to please or seduce Jupiter. For Schiller, Anmut is fundamentally a catalyst of (sexual) desire:

Diese Göttinnen wurden also von ihnen zwar als Begleiterinnen des schönen Geschlechts vorgestellt, aber doch als solche, die auch dem Mann gewogen werden können, und die ihm, wenn er gefallen will, unentbehrlich sind. (330-331)

These goddesses were indeed conceived by them [the Greeks] as the companions of the beautiful sex, but, as such, they also could be favorable to man, and, if he wants to please, indispensable.

Although grace here is nominally a feminine attribute, in line with the concept as it originated in Classical Greece, men must also borrow Venus's belt. It is 'indispensable' if they want to please or to arouse the desire of another. The scene of feminized seduction recalls the definition of *zieren* discussed earlier. The story of the boy in the baths explicitly touches on this power of grace and the dialogue in its entirety thematizes it as well; as Schneider points out, it is a scene of homoerotic seduction similar to Plato's *Phaedrus* with its similar constellation of bathing, persuasion, and seduction. So Kleist's Narrator and Herr C. are toying with a theory much like Schiller's.

Further in "Anmut und Würde," Schiller writes, "Daher ist ihm auch die Anmut nichts anders als ein solcher schöner Ausdruck der Seele in den willkürlichen Bewegungen. Wo also Anmut statt findet, da ist die Seele das bewegende Prinzip, und in *ihr* ist der Grund von der Schönheit der Bewegung enthalten" (334). Grace is a beautiful expression of the soul in voluntary movements; the soul is the moving force (*vis motrix*) and in it is the ground for the beauty of movement. This sounds like Herr C. but with some important differences: the soul is the moving force yes, but for Herr C. it is transferred into the marionette. Perhaps Herr C.'s proposal is Schiller's theory extrapolated to its logical end: If the soul is really not of the body, not an effect of the body but the ground for it, then why not an artificial body? Schiller continues by distinguishing true grace from learned grace. "Grazie hingegen muß jederzeit Natur, d.i.

unwillkürlich sein (wenigstens so scheinen), und das Subjekt selbst darf nie so aussehen, als wenn es *um seine Anmut wüßte*” (Grace, conversely, must be nature, that is, involuntary/spontaneous, at all times (or at least appear to be so), and the subject itself may never appear as if it knows about its grace 350). Grace must appear effortless, natural, and involuntary without the intrusion of the subject’s self-knowledge. When that reflective self-consciousness is apparent, we move into the realm of *zieren*, affectation, or artificiality.

Schiller distinguishes theatrical grace from true grace: “*nachgeahmten* oder *gelernten* Anmut (die ich die theatralische und die Tanzmeistergrazie nennen möchte)” (350). The latter is artifice for Schiller; he compares it to “Toiletten-Schönheit” (350). Thus, ‘learned’ or ‘imitated’ grace is in effect *zieren*, to decorate or adorn oneself, to make oneself up. *Tanzmeistergrazie* is what one might expect from Kleist’s dancer Herr C., an affected unnatural grace despoiled by the consciousness of the attempt to imitate. Yet, the narrator, with his story of the boy in the baths, comes closer to Schiller’s definition as the boy falls from a natural unaffected grace into vain, comical imitations of his former elusive grace in front of the mirror. As Weigel note, this scene can also be read as a stab at Iffland who was known to practice his roles in front of a mirror (70).

In stark contrast to the frequency with which it occupied the center of classical aesthetic discourse in the late eighteenth century, neither *Grazie* nor *Anmuth* appears with notable frequency in Kleist’s oeuvre.<sup>70</sup> That Kleist takes the topic up in such a playful,

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<sup>70</sup> Helmut Schanze’s *Wörterbuch zu Heinrich von Kleist Sämtliche Erzählungen, Anekdoten und kleine Schriften* (1989) lists the following number of occurrences of the central terms in “Über das Marionettentheater”:

Anmuth = 8; Grazie = 4; Gliedermann = 3; Marionette(n) = 5; Puppe(n) = 6.

Of these words, only Anmuth appears outside Marionettentheater in 3 of Kleist’s stories: *Michael Kohlhaas*, *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, and *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*.

Schanze’s *Wörterbuch zu Heinrich von Keist Sämtliche Dramen und Dramenvarianten* (1978) lists the following number of occurrences of these terms in his dramas:

idiosyncratic manner suggests the theme of grace itself may be a metaphor for the problems inherent in articulating an abstract ideal of grace. Kleist refers to this original state of innocence and unity with two terms, performing a doubling, to point to the reflexivity of language that makes a representation (a double) of what it seeks to know. Rather than trying to formulate the ideal of grace afresh, Kleist appears to be staging an ad absurdum extrapolation of the classical aesthetics of Schiller and Goethe as well as the popular theatre of Iffland.

Kleist stages this aesthetic ideology as a scene of exclusive male bonding and pokes fun at the barely veiled homoerotic implications of that discourse. As Gail Hart argues, “By taking the arch-feminine virtue of grace and appropriating it to mindless or mechanized beings who are *specifically gendered male* [i.e. *der Gliedermann*], Kleist reinforces the exclusivity of the male homosocial bonds being developed between the narrator and Herr C” (83). Hart reads “Über das Marionettentheater” in the context of the effort to maintain the absence of women in literature and drama of this period. She dismisses the possible humor and irony of the piece interpreting it as a radical masculinization of the concept of grace. Yet, Kleist’s fictional works include many women, especially women who do not conform to societal expectations or cultural ideals such as those that Schiller promotes. More compelling, I think, is the notion that Kleist is satirizing such attempts as so much empty posturing and idealism disconnected from actual women and men whose physical reality in no way corresponds to those abstract aesthetic models. As Kleist writes in letter shortly before his Kant crisis, “Unsre Väter u Mütter u Lehrer schelten immer so erbittert auf die Ideale, u doch giebt es nichts, das den Menschen wahrhaft erheben kann” (‘our fathers and mothers and teachers always lecture

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Anmuth = 0 (anmutsvoll=1); Grazie(n) = 4; Gliedermann = 0; Marionette(n) = 0; Puppe(n) = 1. Grazie(n) appears in only in *Penthesilea* as does the one occurrence of anmutsvoll. Puppe(n) appears once in *Die Familie Schroffentstein*.

so bitterly about the Ideal, and yet there is no such thing that people can truly hold up [as an ideal]' [*Briefe* 181]).

As mentioned above, both of the key terms of Herr C.'s thesis—marionette and grace—are multiple from the beginning. In the first installment, the word *gratiös* appears once in reference to the small puppets Herr C. finds charming. The word *Anmuth* appears once in the second part, also spoken by Herr C., but this time in reference to amputees with artificial limbs. In the third section, most of which is occupied by the narrator's anecdote about the young man in the baths, both *Anmuth* and *Grazie* appear twice. They alternate and each is spoken by the narrator, beginning with the *Anmuth* of the marionette of which the narrator says he will never be convinced. The remaining three instances in part three all refer to the young man who is in the process of losing his grace. In the fourth section, the word *Grazie* appears twice and the word *Anmuth* disappears completely. These final appearances of *Grazie* come in the midst of Herr C.'s conclusion, once in opposition to *Reflexion* and once in relation to knowledge having passed through the infinite. If one reads *Grazie* as the more physical term and *Anmut* as the more spiritual, the emphasis falls on the physical and the physical grace is contrasted against the spiritual story of gaining entry to paradise (becoming whole again). Herr C. ends with the “unnecessary foreign” word, de-spiritualized. As Gerhard Neumann reminds us, “Erkennen” ‘knowing’ in the biblical sense refers to both “Episteme,” a language issue, and “Erotik,” a body issue (22). Thus, eating from the tree of knowledge a second time is a return to the scene of the fall with an emphasis on knowing as physical rather than spiritual, as a (sexual) matter of the body. Yet, that body, like that of the elusive thorn-puller in the mirror, dematerializes as discourse moves closer to capture it in language.

In a similar movement, the puppets discussed move from specific ones to the hypothetical, virtual one. Although the puppet is still the case in point for his theory, it is Herr C.'s theory that now takes center stage, not the marionette. This is borne out by tracking the appearance of marionette and its synonyms through the piece. As the two men get closer to this ideal body, it literally starts to disappear from the language. As a necessarily deferred ideal, the marionette cannot fully materialize here; rather it haunts the dialogue by pointing to its own spectrality. By positioning the marionette, an artificial manmade object, as the original form for the human body's grace, as original body not split by consciousness, Kleist's dialogue suggests that all such attempts to get to the nature of an object end by producing not thing itself but a representation or copy of it.

In the first installment, in order of appearance, "Puppe(n)" appears four times, "Figur(en)" appears twice, and "Marionette(n)" appears twice. "Marionette(n)" appears twice at the beginning of part two and then drops out of the second half of the dialogue completely. "Puppe(n)" appears three times in part two and also drops out for the remaining two sections. "Gliedermann" pops up for the first two times in the opening lines of part three. Finally, Herr C. uses the "Gliedermann" in his famous closing formula: grace "...in demjenigen Körperbau am Reinsten erscheint, der entweder gar keins, oder ein unendliches Bewußtsein hat, d.h. in dem Gliedermann oder in dem Gott" ('... appears purest in that corporeal form which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in a jointed-man or an God' [331]). Three marionettes disappear in each new section: from eight, to five, to two, and, if we follow this logic, the final marionette, or "Gliedermann" is, in terms of its sequential appearance in the text, a negative one. At any rate, it is more ethereal and less corporeal, absent if not negative. Given the clear shifts in word frequency, one might say "Grazie" usurps the marionette by the end of the piece. The oscillation between the more Germanic "Anmuth" and the

Latinic “Grazie” comes to rest on the latter classical term. As Herr C. nears his conclusion, his ideal of grace, the marionette, has become less and less tangible if not absent. Bodies disappear as the graceful body is constructed.

Taking up the notion of the absent body, Andrea Gnam looks at Kleist’s marionette piece in the context of “Körperdiskurs” (‘the discourse on the body’ [170]). Gnam argues that “Im ‘Marionettentheater’ steht der Prozeß der kulturellen Normierung des Körpers und der damit verbundenen Ängste zur Debatte” (‘In ‘Marionette Theater’ the process of cultural standardization of the body, and the fears associated with it, is up for debate’ [170]). In her Foucauldian reading, she points to the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century as the moment at which the human body gets rigorously (re)constructed by various discourses and institutions. Gnam recounts how schools, hospitals, barracks, were laboratories for “den kollektiven ‘Umbau’ des Leibes zugunsten eines zur normierten Leistung und effizienten Verausgabung fähigen Körpers” (‘the collective reconstruction of the body, a body suited to standardized performance and efficient expenditure’ [171]). She points out the dialogue deals with the difficulty of filling out a “lebendiges Bild” (‘life-like image’) of the body as opposed to another Classically idealized Laocoon,

...das sowohl den jeweiligen Anforderungen von außen Genüge leisten könne, als auch das unbefangene Agieren einer imaginerten Natürlichkeit bewahrt habe. Ziel dieses Dialogs ist es, in der Unvereinbarkeit dieser Forderungen eine Abwesenheit zu konstituieren: die Abwesenheit des Eigenlebens des Körpers. (Gnam 171)

...that could both satisfy contemporary demands from without and, also, have preserved the uninhibited acting of an imagined naturalness. It is the goal of this dialogue to construct an absence in the incompatibility of these demands: the absence of a life of the body’s own life/existence.

Here the appropriately abstract and absent marionette serves as a model for the disintegration of the body in the discourses that seeks its ideal and normative forms. The

marionette is necessarily negative because it characterizes a fundamental incompatibility between bourgeois norms and the Classical ideals to which they appealed on the one hand and actual acting bodies on the other.

Here, as in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the imagined "natural body" is ultimately inaccessible through discourses that have sought to divide and control it. Instead of an underlying depth or true sexual essence, there are only copies, marionettes, statues, plaster reproductions all the way down. Even if one looks back to the Greeks, as Classicism did for models of physical perfection, one finds that the Greek sculptures did not represent actual Greek youths. Rather they were representing a mathematically articulated ideal of physical beauty—like Herr C.'s description of graceful motion or Pythagoras' prescribed mathematical proportions for sculpting the body. The boy, once conscious in the baths, is trying to capture the graceful perfection of the Greeks by trying to imitate the statue, just as Herr C. recommends that professional dancers imitate the graceful movement of marionettes. Kleist stages the inability of discourse to fully grasp that original body outside of language, the lost "Natural Object" *par excellence*, the whole body unsevered by consciousness and/of sexual difference. He satirizes the attempts by aestheticians like Herr C. to define the ideal body, an attempt which results in mystification on one side and mechanization on the other. The dialogue performs the paradox of attempts to naturalize the body through discourse that instead make it increasingly artificial.

Kleist is dissatisfied with human laws that privilege affected bodies such as Iffland's and idealized ones of Schiller's theories and Goethe's stage. But, given his radical emphasis on perspective, he recognizes the impossibility of positing a fixed ideal and, in doing so, questions whether such an ideal is even desirable. The marionette is virtually queer and posthuman in that it represents an insistence of deferring a corporeal

ideal. The marionette must remain virtual as a multiplicity of possible actualizations. In Gnam's terms, Kleist constructs an absence, but it is the absence as plenitude of the Derridean abyss. In other words, the marionette points to the inadequacy of constructing what is perceived to have been lost as an *a priori* foundation. Attempts to theorize the ideal, natural, body always already produce artificial bodies, marionettes, bodies jointed together so that their lack of unity is apparent. Kleist's virtually queer and posthuman marionette can be read as attempt to counter-actualize the Classical aesthetics of the graceful body in performance.

### **CRUISING THE MARIONETTE THEATER**

Inasmuch as Kleist's dialogue resists the regimes of heterosexual normativity and troubles normative gender performance, the marionette produced by the dialogue is virtually queer. Schneider's argument that the "two men constitute themselves as a body through their relationship" implicitly invokes the Aristophanic myth of Plato's *Symposium*, imbuing their "effort" with a distinct homoeroticism and invoking an alternative model of sexual differentiation to that of the doctrine of incommensurability. Neumann has already read "Über das Marionettentheater" as an attempt to forge an origin myth for the body, an account of how it came into being through the dissociative power of consciousness and language. He argues that Kleist appeals to the "dramaturgische Urmodell" whose basic concept is the biblical Fall: "das Geschlechterverhältnis als Inzitant möglicher Schöpfungsakte, als Auslöser für die Stiftung von Anfängen" ("the relation between the sexes as incitement for possible acts of creation, as provocation for the foundation of beginnings" [Neumann 20]). The Aristophanic myth in Plato's *Symposium*, offers an alternate account of sexual differentiation according to which the body is founded on a loss of original unity, with spherical creatures cut in two. Here it is

desire that produces the body rather than binary sexual difference; this sexual desire can be female-female, male-male, or female-male. This myth suggests various configurations of sexual desire and works against the grain of the more explicit Christian origin myth in the dialogue.

In comparing “Über das Marionettentheater” to both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, László Földényi reads Kleist’s dialogue as “the staging of the erotic” (“Die Inszenierung des Erotischen”). For Földényi, the desire for the unperturbed and graceful unity of the marionette is the desire for the whole:

Die Sehnsucht nach der Ganzen bedeutet teilzuhaben an jener Qualität, ohne die es kein Gefühl von Erfüllung gibt—die Sehnsucht nach Befriedigung. Und an dieser Stelle müssen wir Platon zu Hilfe rufen, der in *Symposion* folgende Worte in den Mund Aristophanes legt: Das “Verlangen und Trachten nach dem Ganzen heißt Liebe.” Auf griechisch: Eros. (Földényi 141)

The desire for the whole means to share that quality, without which there is no feeling of fulfillment—the desire for [sexual] gratification. And at this point we must call on Plato for help, who puts the following words in Aristophanes’ mouth in the *Symposium*: The ‘desire and striving for the whole is called love.’ In Greek: Eros.

In this reading, the marionette becomes the virtual body, produced by and framed within a drama of (homo)erotic desire, an allegory for a never fully completed endeavor, for an impossible or forbidden consummation of homoerotic desire. Their endeavor does not conform to the “efficient expenditure” demanded by bourgeois normativity: It does not produce actual children, but rather artificial ones. As de Man notes, the gestures comprise a drama behind the exchange of ideas. Földényi elaborates this point arguing that the two speakers,

... geben einander recht, obwohl sie einander nicht wirklich glauben, sie stimmen einander zu, obwohl ihre Gesten sie ständig voneinander entfernen. Der Essay ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ ist das Drama der gestörten Erotik—in seiner Weise erinnert er... in *Penthesilea*, in denen die Annäherung aneinander zur ständigen Entfernung voneinander führt. (146)

... admit one another is right, although they do not really believe one another, they agree with one another, although their gestures unvaryingly distance each from the other. The essay 'On The Marionette Theater' is the drama of frustrated eroticism—recalling *Penthesilea* in its way, in which moving closer to one another leads to an unvarying distance from one another.

The two men come together to better know, *Erkennen* in the biblical sense, the origin of the body. Thus Kleist's critique of theatre aesthetics is framed by a sense of frustration that is at once aesthetic and sexual.

Gail Hart catalogues the different elements of the play that produce a homoerotic subtext arguing that the entire framing scene is reminiscent of male same-sex encounters, a kind of early nineteenth century cruising. Földényi also reads the dialogue this way comparing Herr C. to Socrates laying in wait for Phaedrus and seducing the beautiful youth with his clever conversation. Both critics note the fact that it is a presumably cold, winter evening and some other unspoken interest must motivate the two men other than an idiosyncratic chat about the grace of marionettes. Hart also notes that the profession of dancer has historically had a more visible concentration of gay men and suggests that the resulting stereotype might be in play here (90). The narrator has been watching the dancer for some time and approaches him in public garden as night falls. The narrator's story of a young male companion, with whom he bathes and to whose beauty and grace he has paid attention to is undoubtedly the least subtle of the homoerotic cues. Hart notes that the frequent remarks about *really* understanding one another suggest a coded discourse of cruising underneath the surface of Classical aesthetic discourse and that the moments of embarrassment seem to follow from points in conversation which "do not seem capable of generating embarrassment" (90). Their constant looking to the side or at the ground imbues the scene with a coquettish, flirtatious feel, invoking the erotic connotations of the words *Anmut* and *zieren*. Finally, Herr C.'s comment about paradise "ob es vielleicht von hinten irgendwie wieder offen sei" could be read as a sexual

reference to pederasty, as Hart argues, “it may do double duty as a convincing part of the higher philosophical discussion and also as a coarse remark that is solidly within the spirit of the essay, as it merges the explicitly physical with the metaphysical just as grace can be produced by a wooden *Gliedermann* or god” (94 fn.11).

Hart understands the text as creating an exclusively male world. Yet, that male world is populated by characters and ideas, which Kleist rejects in other writings. If these factors do constitute a homoerotic subtext, it is unlikely that they are an expression of an exclusively male utopia envisioned by Kleist. Rather, they are more likely used as veiled insults, as we have seen in his letter to Iffland, and this antagonistic outing of Classical and popular aesthetics belies a deep discomfort with and anxiety about his own homoerotic desires. Although, Kleist strategically adopts the discourse of ‘natural’ authenticity in his criticisms of Iffland’s acting, he presents a performative critique of that very discourse by throwing the distinction between the natural and the artificial into question. Given his radical emphasis on perspective, Kleist recognizes the impossibility of positing a fixed ideal and, in doing so, questions whether such an ideal is even desirable. Again, the marionette is virtually queer in its irreverent critique of Classical and popular aesthetics as well as its insistence on deferring a fixed corporeal ideal or on maintaining the virtuality of the marionette. The anti-Classical elements and anti-Enlightenment tendencies drawn out in my analysis of “Über das Marionettentheater” are given more explicit treatment in his brilliantly subversive tragedy *Penthesilea*.

#### ***PENTHESILEA AS ANTI-CLASSICAL AND ANTI-ENLIGHTENMENT***

With *Penthesilea* Kleist cites the Age of the Greeks, but rather than projecting the aesthetics of serenity and harmony of eighteenth century Classicism, he presents a decidedly more Dionysian, disharmonious vision of antiquity. He selects a minor figure

as the hero, displacing the spotlight from the well-known Achilles to the relatively obscure Amazon queen. Although references to the story of Penthesilea and her Amazon army at Troy can be found in ancient sources such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Seneca's *Troades*, and Propertius' *Elegies*, Kleist-scholars concur that the dramatist freely adapted his play from the account offered in Hederich's *Mythologisches Lexicon*.<sup>71</sup> In terms of its structure, the play is episodic, but bears some resemblance to five-act drama and Greek tragedy (Schmidt 113-15). Goethe deemed it unfit for the stage as has been much discussed. Clearly it did not conform to his vision of classical harmony and serenity; even less did it conform to the popular theatre of the day as exemplified by Berlin's Royal National Theater under the direction of Iffland.

The figure of Penthesilea can be understood as anti-Classical as her monstrous body performs in opposition to the discourse of Classical aesthetics. Penthesilea's body itself stands (and falls) in opposition to the Classical ideal as articulated in aesthetic discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by writers such as Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller. With one breast amputated, Penthesilea's body represents neither harmony nor unity, and, as an aggressive, passionately explosive, woman, her extreme actions correspond to the anti-Classical image of her wounded, fragmented body. Penthesilea is the "vesehrte Körper" ('disabled body') opposed to Achilles' body which is, until the end of the play, of course, compared (often by Penthesilea herself) to models of corporeal integrity and completeness, such as the Apollonian image of the sun, the temple, etc. Achilles is the exemplar of the whole and complete body, perfect form or "Gestalt," in opposition to Penthesilea's

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<sup>71</sup> The details about the founding and laws of the Amazon state are his additions. Penthesilea's upbringing and relationship to her mother is Kleist's invention and vital to the role of Penthesilea (Brown 37). These factors work to frame the Amazon society and provide some of the motivation for Penthesilea's words and actions; in other words they help structure the play.

fragmentedness, formlessness, “Staub” (‘dust’). Bettine Menke writes, “Als das monströse Mischwesen, weibliche ‘Kentaurin’ und ‘die Hündin,’ wie die Hunde und unter ihnen agierend, stellte Penthesilea selbst diese Nicht-Ganzheit, die Nicht-Geschlossenheit im grotesken Körper dar, als nicht-menschenähnlich” (‘As the monstrous mixed-creature, female “centaur” and “female dog,” like the dogs and acting with them, Penthesilea herself represents this disunity, the incompleteness of the grotesque body as not humanlike’ [120]). Penthesilea is a monstrous being, of a mixed nature; for early nineteenth century audiences, her transgression of female gender norms and masculine aggressivity would mark her as “Männin,” neither man nor woman but a mixture of both.<sup>72</sup> Like other such boundary creatures, she dislodges “‘natural’ assumptions of gendered behaviour from the ‘organic holism’ of the body” (Bujdei No Pag.). Her “grotesque” body represents disunity, an open corporeal form that threatens the harmoniously closed boundaries of the Classical corporeal ideal.<sup>73</sup>

Kleist’s play functions as an anti-Classical citation of antiquity, as the ‘Gegentext’ to Goethe’s *Iphigenie* widely considered the apotheosis of “edler Einfalt und stille Größe” (Pfeiffer 188). Iphigenie, Agamemnon’s daughter, is sacrificed at the beginning of the Trojan War to calm the seas allowing the Greeks sail to Troy. She is an exemplar of submissive female figures, a virgin sacrificed for the common interest of patriarchal (Greek) military ambitions. As Hilda Brown puts it,

The big difference is in the respective reactions of the individual heroines to their plights: the association of Iphigenie’s ‘pure humanity’ with Classical values of

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<sup>72</sup> Even Ludwig Tieck who admired the play describes Penthesilea as “dieses seltsame Ungeheuer” (‘this strange monster’ [Reeve 80]).

<sup>73</sup> In her mostrosity, Penthesilea belongs Donna Haraway’s genealogy of boundary creatures that precede the cyborg. “Haraway projects the cyborg in the genealogical line of other boundary creatures, monsters, who have always policed and disrupted the borders of civilisation and identity, refusing containment and limitation. Like ancient Amazons or hermaphrodites, cyborgs are seen to dislodge ‘natural’ assumptions of gendered behaviour from the ‘organic holism’ of the body” (Bujdei)

harmony and moderation and the undisputed triumph of these values over barbarism is in complete contrast to Penthesilea's frenzy and loss of control, and a violence which, even by today's standards, shocks in its primitive destructiveness. (295)

Iphigenie provides a clear counterpoint to Penthesilea's bold ferocity and violent desires. One might say that Penthesilea is Iphigenie's Other as Lillith is Eve's. Kleist presents a raw and unsettling picture of antiquity in comparison to the increasingly shopworn Classical picture presented in Goethe's *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert* just two years prior (Müller-Seidel 145). He cites antiquity, invoking and transforming Classicism's object, shifting the spotlight from Achilles (well-known, male, Classical Ideal) to Penthesilea (lesser-known, female, anti-Classical figure).

Thus, the figure of Penthesilea can also be read, in Simon Richter's formulation, as one of Laocoon's Others. In his Introduction to *Laocoon's Body and Aesthetics of Pain*, Richter advances the following argument:

The serene surface of ideal beauty, as well as the equally serene surface of its discourse, simultaneously conceals *and is dependent on* some form of the dynamics of the infliction of bodily pain. Aesthetic discourse should no longer be artificially separated from the many other discourses that between them constitute a historically specific understanding of the human body. (11)

He continues by arguing that behind the veneer of Winckelmann's famous description of Laocoon, that came to characterize the classical view of antiquity, as an exemplar of "eine edle Einfalt, und eine stille Grösse" are Laocoon's others, behind the noble and quiet beauty lies physical pain as beauty's origin.<sup>74</sup> For Richter, Marsyas is one example of a depiction of gruesome corporeal pain excluded from Classical aesthetics. Penthesilea, as anti-Iphigenie, is also one of Laocoon's others, and, perhaps, even more so. In place of noble simplicity and quiet grandeur, Kleist creates a character driven to

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<sup>74</sup> Winckelmann's *Gedancken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Wercke in der Mahlerey und Bildhauer Kunst* (1755).

gruesome extremes by shockingly aggressive sexual desires. But, as Müller-Seidel argues, Kleist's *Penthesilea* comes much closer to approximating Greek art, specifically Greek tragedy, than Winckelmann's Classicism (145). Kleist discovers the extreme passion and gruesome violence of Greek tragedy, as Jochen Schmidt argues, from his study of Euripides, especially the tragedies *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, and *Bacchae* (110-11).<sup>75</sup> None of these plays embodies "edle Einfalt und stille Grösse" valued by Winckelmann or by Goethe. Kleist invokes the instability of actual bodies or embodiment as opposed to the Classical ideal body. Citing a tradition of Greek tragedy alternate to the canon praised by eighteenth-century Classicists, Kleist brings the more grotesque aspects of antiquity to the fore—revenge, bloodlust, destructive passion, bestial violence, and bodily mutilation.

For Winckelmann, the father of German classicism, "Representation depends on resistance. Though pain and the soul's effort to conceal pain are violently opposed, it is only in their mutual tension that representation takes place" (Richter 47). Unable to reconcile the contradiction that pain is both essential to the representation of beauty and disfiguring to such beauty, Winckelmann shifts his focus from the Laocoon to the eighteenth century Italian castrato, another instance of serene harmonious beauty (the curves of the permanently youthful body) based on a originary pain and bodily mutilation, namely castration. In the eunuch and in the figure of Ganymede, so Richter argues, Winckelmann finds the sort of beauty that works with his classical aesthetics, a clearly counterfeit, or at least highly selective, vision of antiquity (59). Notably, both of

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<sup>75</sup> Like Hippolytus, Penthesilea is characterized through the hunt; both owe their allegiance to Artemis and Aphrodite is the undoing of both. Medea is another case of a female figure outside the cultural norms and Agaue's and the Maenads' violent acts echo the theme of dismemberment and corporeal mutilation, again invoking an unstable border between human and animal; the constant characterization of Penthesilea as wild animal (Tiger, Parder, Katze, Hyäne, Wölfin, Sphinx, and Dogge) corresponds closely to the *Bacchae* (Schmidt 110-13). Schmidt also notices how the final scenes of *Penthesilea* follow a similar arc to Agaue's madness and subsequent return to consciousness and recognition of the deed done (113).

these figures are passive objects of homoerotic desire. “The eighteenth-century castrato, the type for Winckelmann’s conception of the classical Greek statue, is, finally, the unlikely and impossible referent of all subsequent theories of classical beauty, aesthetic autonomy, and the symbol—in other words, aesthetic theory’s cruelty to the body” (Richter 59). Richter refers here to the Romantic idea of the symbol as a closed, autonomous abstraction unlike allegory with its greater proximity to the world of flesh and blood. The formal abstraction of Classical aesthetics disavows the instability and pain of bodies, replacing them with an artificial body posing as natural and unaffected, that avoids the painful specifics of narrative, the story or representation prompted by a fundamental pain, and remains closed, autonomous, self-referential.

This Classical ideal promotes the traditional aesthetic and political ideology of gender roles and identities based on a model of absolute sexual difference. Richter concludes that “The aesthetics of classicism would seek to represent itself as an authentic discourse, as decidedly antique as opposed to modern, as manly in contrast to a diseased and effeminate modernity, as a timeless norm and not a historical contingency” (61). Thus, classical aesthetics dovetails with medical-physiological discourse in diagnosing the modern as feminine and sick and the (imagined) ideal as masculine and healthy and seeking to naturalize absolute sexual difference. Modern medical discourse appeals to this Classical model, using new scientific methods and Enlightenment reason to reinforce conventional social norms. Richter goes on to argue that the picture of Ganymede, which Winckelmann analyzes, destabilizes this model. If Ganymede destabilizes it, unwittingly in Winckelmann’s case, then Penthesilea, intentionally in Kleist’s case, rips it to shreds, not just overturning the hierarchies above but obliterating them in confusion and chaos engendered by forbidden and uncontrollable passions that throw the received order into question. In this way Penthesilea, as both anti-Classical and anti-Enlightenment, can be

understood as virtually posthuman. Kleist's radical treatment of the Amazon subject matter and Penthesilea's victory over Achilles illustrate this point.

As an other to the Classical ideal, Penthesilea's body, then, represents an insistence on corporeality as many recent readings of the play as *Körperdrama* ('body drama') suggest.<sup>76</sup> Embodying a rejection of Classical aesthetics and of Enlightenment rationality, she performs a virtual posthumanity by transgressing the boundaries of conventional gender identity and sexuality. She is doubly removed, without a well-known, celebrated statue, even more phantasmic on the extreme periphery of antiquity, one of Classicism's pathological others that help determine the outlines or limits of the healthy, masculine Greek ideal.

Physiology and aesthetics come to share the term *Reiz* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that provides a connection between these apparently very different discourses (Richter 96). *Reiz* is the root of the verb *reizen* to cause sensation, pleasurable or painful (Grimm 791-4). German Classical aesthetics focuses on the pleasurable side of *Reiz* as somewhat synonymous with *Anmut*, which Schiller defines "bewegliche Schönheit" ('beauty in motion' [331]). Haller and those who followed him focuses on the painful side *Reiz*, the reaction to painful sensation, in this case an electric shock, that causes muscles to contract. This primal physiological reaction, contraction from a painful stimulus, animates all bodies human and animal. In *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, Herder deals with the problem of the abyss between human consciousness (subject) and "todte Natur," dead nature (object). The body, for Herder, is itself the abyss between subject and object. Herder's body-as-abyss appears in Kleist's "Über das Marionettentheater," as Herr C. proposes that the limbs of the marionette are as they should be, free from consciousness,

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<sup>76</sup> See Nutz, Maximilian "Lektüre der Sinne. Kleists Penthesilea als Körperdrama" In: Grathoff, Dirk [Hrsg.]: *Heinrich von Kleist. Studien zu Werk und Wirkung*. Opladen 1988. Also Menke, Schneider, and Gnam.

“dead,” and “reine Pendel” (‘pure pendulum’ [BA 322]). Just as medical discourse also makes this body mechanical, an organic machine, Herr C. appeals to the medical technology of prosthetics in theorizing the perfectly graceful mechanical body. Thus Herr C. combines Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment science to formulate his theory of the graceful body in performance. Kleist cites these Classical and Enlightenment ideas in his dialogue to re-problematize the solutions they offer. In *Penthesilea* he further dismantles these Classical and Enlightenment corporeal models.

Herder proposes that what we know is based on analogy, “from the creature to us and from us to the creator” (Richter 100). As Richter points out, ‘The question, then, is whether or not the physiology of *Reiz* and the principle of analogy can work in tandem to show that all human powers are merely variations and modifications of the basic power of *Reiz* and hence deeply anchored in the body, no matter how spiritual or abstract they may seem” (100). Again, this is closer to Mettrie than Haller in that it insists not on a fundamental spirituality of humans but on a physicality shared with plants and animals (if only analogically). Richter draws the example of Achilles from Herder’s text as Herder uses it to explain that courageous animals and humans have expansive hearts and chests, while cowardly ones are contractive. He opposes the Greek Hero as expansive (masculine) and to the castrato as contractive (feminine). Kleist’s Achilles fits this description of the Greek Hero, but so does his opponent, Penthesilea, who is also expansive, active rather than passive, exploding with *Reiz*. Thus Penthesilea’s body defies both Classical aesthetics of unity and harmony and Enlightenment science that defined woman as essentially weak and passive due to her supposedly naturally inferior physiology.

I read Penthesilea’s body, as imagined in Kleist’s play, as virtually queer and posthuman in that it dramatizes the loss of corporeal integrity and stability by

transgressing boundaries of gender and sexuality, which define humanness in general. To begin this reading, I examine how Kleist uses word *Reiz* with its different connotations in *Penthesilea*. For the discourses on the body around 1800 that I consider here, the concept of *Reiz* is central one. The concept of *Reiz* recalls the discussion of gender construction around the marionette above, of grace (*Anmut/Grazie*) and affectation (*Zieren*), nature and artifice, connected via tropes of corporeal unity and fragmentation. And again, one encounters the problems of the body's double role as site of perception and of (sexual) identity at this discursive intersection of physiology and aesthetics, the normal versus the pathological and the ideal versus the grotesque or monstrous. Thus, the appearances of *Reizen* in *Penthesilea* make evident how the play engages with physiological and aesthetic models of corporeality and its implications for gender and sexuality.

In scene five, as Penthesilea announces she will continue the battle to pursue Achilles. She has already been “gelähmt” by the sight of Achilles, spoiling her satisfaction in the successful siege. Prothoe, noting the queen's mental (“Sinn empört”) and physical (“An allen jungen Gliedern zitterst du”) distress, pleads with her to be satisfied with the initial victory:

Um eines Sieges,

Der deine junge Seele flüchtig reizt,

Willst du das Spiel der Schlachten neu beginnen? (666-7)

[Just for a conquest,

That tempts your young soul for a passing moment,

You would begin again the game of battles? (Agee 32)]

The translation of “reizt” as “tempts” does not quite capture both the aesthetic and physiological connotations here. It is the sensation of desire she feels for Achilles, both pleasureable or charming and painful or unbearable. Achilles' *Reizen* simultaneously

paralyzes her and spurs her on to battle. As Penthesilea, waking from her swoon, is falsely presented with Achilles as her captive, she exclaims, “Nun denn, so sei mir, frischer Lebensreiz/ Du junger, rosenwang’ger Gott, begrüßt!” (1619-20); (‘If that be so, I welcome you, fresh charm/ Of life, young god with roses in your cheeks’ [80]). Achilles is a *Reiz*, in the sense of a pleasureable charm of life, but he also, in the sense of a physiological phenomenon that makes muscles involuntarily convulse, works her nerves. Again, Achilles “reizt,” incites both pleasure and pain in, Penthesilea.

Returning to scene five, Prothoe continues her plea: “Reiz’ ihn nicht mehr, aus seinem Blick nur weiche:/ Den ersten Schritt, beim Jupiter, ich schwör’s,/ In seine Danaerschanze setzt er hin” (730-2); (‘Do not provoke him, just avoid his sight:/ His very first step, by Jupiter, I swear it,/ Will take him back to the Danean fort’ [34]). Here, we see that Penthesilea is also a dual kind of stimulus for Achilles as Prothoe warns her, “Reiz’ ihn nicht mehr,” again with the double connotation of attracting him and provoking him to violence. We see a repeated connection between provoking a violent reaction and arousing sexual desire, the combined powers of Mars and Aphrodite. Already the climactic merging of sex and death is foreshadowed; the desire to conquer the other’s body, to possess and consume it, the traditional metaphors of love, move from the figurative to the literal through the power of *Reiz*.

In scene nine, an incensed Penthesilea exclaims, “Staub lieber, als ein Weib sein, das nicht reizt” (1253); (‘Let me be,/ Dust instead of woman without charm’ [58]). Agee tilts the translation by substituting the noun “charm” for the verb “to charm.” And, as quoted above, he translates the verb *reizen* as “provoke.” So, if we retain the double connotation of the verb as both pleasureable and painful, Penthesilea would rather be dust than a woman who does not charm or arouse desire and who does not provoke or irritate with the force of an electric shock or lightening. This double connotation alters the

notion of a charming/attractive woman (*Weib das reizt*). Penthesilea does not borrow Venus' belt as Schiller would have it, but rather Mars' spear. She does not attempt to charm Achilles with a 'natural' grace; for Penthesilea, *reizen* as the power to seduce becomes the power to possess or conquer.

This constellation of images appears in the third scene as the Greeks watch Penthesilea attack from a distance. A Myrmidon exclaims, "Staub aufqualmend, wie Gewitterwolken:/ Und wie der Blitz vorzuckt— ... Penthesilea" (388-9); ('A smoke-like dust, dark, like a storm cloud:/ And darting forth, like lightening— ... Penthesilea' [19]). The power to enrapture, to cause pain and pleasure, is associated with the natural phenomenon of electricity and opposed to the formlessness of dust. Further, if one views the pair in the context of electrical charges, they are both positive, as they are both expansive and aggressive. Her presence defies and confuses the fundamental, oppositional harmony of the natural elements as Odysseus describes in the first scene:

So viel Ich weiß, giebt es in der Natur  
Kraft blosund ihren Widerstand, nicht Drittes.  
Was Glut des Feuers löscht, lös't Wasser siedend  
Zu Dampf nucht auf und umgekehrt. Doch hier  
Zeigt ein ergrimmtter Feind von beiden sich,  
Bei dessen Eintritt nicht das Feuer weiß,  
Ob's mit dem Wasser rieseln soll, das Wasser  
Ob's mit dem Feuer himmelan soll lecken. (125-132)  
I thought till now that Nature knows but force  
And counterforce, and no third power besides.  
Whatever quenches fire will not bring water

Seething to a boil, nor vice versa.  
Yet here appears a deadly foe of each  
Upon whose coming, fire no longer knows  
Whether to trickle with the floods, nor water  
Whether to leap with heaven-licking flame. (9)

The natural order is upset by Penthesilea's monstrous sexual desires, which are represented through her destabilizing, dis-integrating corporeality. With her expansive *Reiz*, Penthesilea defies the structuring oppositions that undergird Enlightenment physiological model of sexual difference. In her embodiment of paradox and contradiction, she emerges as an unnatural force, a third term or power that contradicts the natural forces that determine gender and sexuality according to the model of Enlightenment physiology discussed above.

The appearance of *reizen* also reinforces the association of sex and death central to the play. In scene thirteen, After Achilles' defeat of Penthesilea, as she is lying unconscious, Prothoe pleads with him to leave before she wakes up. He counters by announcing that he intends to do to Penthesilea what he has done with Hector. Prothoe responds to Achilles:

Du willst das Namenlos' an ihr vollstrecken?  
Hier diesen jungen Leib, du Mensch voll Greuel,  
Geschmückt mit Reizen, wie ein Kind mit Blumen,  
Du willst ihn schändlich einer Leiche gleich (1518)  
You would inflict the unspeakable upon her?  
This youthful body here, you man of horrors,  
Adorned with beauties like a child with flowers,

You mean to drag it, like a corpse, in shame—? (75)

Achilles responds to this with “Sag’ ihr, daß ich sie liebe” (1520; Tell her I love her 75). Murderous desire, in the extreme sense of corpse mutilation, and sexual desire are once again conflated, in the image of Penthesilea’s wounded and alluring body. Prothoe protests comparing Penthesilea’s body, “Geschmückt mit Reizen,” to a child with flowers. This comparison not only invokes the roses of the Rosenfest scene, as I will discuss in a moment, but it reinforces the merging of erotic desire with bodily mutilation or injury. The flowers are at once her charms, her power to attract and provoke, and they are the wounds she has suffered from Achille’s “Stoß... Der ihr Brust zerriß” (1479; blow... which tore her breast; 74). Again, the appearances of *reizen*, in both its pleasureable (aesthetic) and painful (medical) sense, reinforce the fusion of sexual desire and the violent dis-integration of the body. Penthesilea’s body defies the laws of Classical harmony and of Enlightenment physiology’s doctrine of absolute sexual difference.

In this passage from scene fifteen, Penthesilea recounts for Achilles the story of the founding of the Amazon state. *Reizen* appears again in the context of performatively undoing absolute sexual difference.

Gerad’ als sie, im festlichsten Moment,  
Die Altarstuf’ erstieg, um dort den Bogen,  
Den großen, goldenen, des Scythenreichs,  
Den sonst die Könige geführt, zu greifen,  
Von der geschmückten Oberpriesterinn Hand,  
Ließ eine Stimme also sich vernehmen:  
“Den Spott der Männer werd’ er reizen nur,

Ein Staat, wie der, und gleich dem ersten Anfall  
 Des kriegerischen Nachbarfolks erliegen... (1971-1979)

But at the solemn moment when she mounted  
 The altar steps, where the high priestess stood,  
 Adorned in splendour, with the mighty bow,  
 The golden emblem of the power of kings  
 Who theretofore had governed Scythia,  
 And ratched out to receive it, a voice spoke:  
 “A State like this will be the laughingstock  
 Of men, no more than that, and at the first  
 Attack of warlike neighbors, it will crumble... (94)

Here, a voice interrupts the crowning of Tanais saying that a state such as this will only provoke the mockery of men: ‘Den Spott der Männer werd’ er reizen’ (1977). The voice argues that the “weak” women will never be able to use the bow as powerfully as male warriors because their movement is constricted by their breasts. In response to this provocation, Tanais tears her breast off, to make her body equally suited to warfare as the body of a man.<sup>77</sup> But, like Penthesilea, she does not transform into a man, but, rather, she becomes a doubly marked, excessive, unnatural being. As an unnatural, hybrid creature, Penthesilea performs a radical corporeality in opposition to Classical and Enlightenment models of gender and sexuality. *Reizen* appears at the founding moment of the Amazon state Kleist exploits the double connotation *Reizen* to foreground his heroine’s nonconformity to the laws of nature (of natural gender and sexuality) promulgated by Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment physiology. In doing so, he implicitly rejects the

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<sup>77</sup> The founding of the Amazon state perversely revises the Christian creation myth in which woman is created from Adam’s rib. Here, Amazons come create themselves through a performative body mutilation.

humanist model of the body as a site that holds the natural, authentic truths of gender and sexuality. He begins to imagine a virtually queer and posthuman way of understanding the body in relation to gender and sexuality, one that need not appeal to timeless truths or to deterministic forces nature.

### **“IS IT OUR LION SKINS THAT FRIGHTEN YOU?”**

From the few letters in which Kleist discusses his play in his letters, critics focus on two statements that make up a brief letter to Marie von Kleist who had read and responded (positively evidently) to an early fragment of *Penthesilea*. The first statement is his famous declaration that his most inner being, the whole muck and beauty of his soul, lies in Penthesilea.<sup>78</sup> The note begins: “Unbeschrieblich rührend ist mir alles, was Sie mir über die Penthesilea schreiben. Es ist wahr, mein innerstes Wesen liegt darin, und Sie haben es wie eine Seherin aufgefaßt: der ganze Schmutz [Schmerz] zugleich und Glanz meiner Seele” (“Everything you write to me about Penthesilea is indescribably calming. It is true my innermost being lies within and you have fastened upon it like a prophetess: all of the filth as well as the splendor of my soul” [*Briefe* 397-8]). As indicated in the quote, there is some debate about whether Kleist actually wrote *Schmutz* or *Schmerz* on the original manuscript. It might be fruitful here to consider the slippage between filth and pain. If filth can be considered as the shameful parts and functions of the body disavowed and pathologized by bourgeois society,<sup>79</sup> then pain is its correlate in Classical aesthetics, the concealed pain and cruelty to the body. Actual bodies in all their filth and pain are glossed over in Classical aesthetics by the shiny, graceful patina of the

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<sup>78</sup> Whether the play or the figure herself or indeed both is meant here is a matter of some debate (Detering 140).

<sup>79</sup> For an explanation why Kleist might have such a connection, see Sander Gilman’s article...

ideal and normative body. The Amazon bodies in *Penthesilea* corrode the patina of this Classical body.

Die erste Amazone.

Ihr sonderbaren Fremdlinge! Was härt euch?

Was ist's, da uns der Pfeil im Köcher ruht,

Daß ihr vor unserm Anblick euch ensetzt?

Ist es die Löwenhaut, die euch erschreckt? – (974-77)

First Amazon

Peculiar foreigners, what ails you?

Now that our arrows rest inside their quivers,

Why do you flinch from looking at us still?

Is it our lion skins that frighten you?— (43)

In the first scene of *Penthesilea*, Odysseus reports “ein Heer, bedeckt mit Schlangenhäuten,/ Von Amazonen, heißer Kampf lust voll” (18-19); (‘an army, dressed in serpent skins,/ Of Amazons, burning with lust for war’ [5]). By the sixth scene, from which the quote above is drawn, the victorious Amazons survey their prisoners. *Penthesilea* continues to pursue Achilles while the maidens, priestesses, and Amazons prepare for the Feast of the Roses. The Amazons address their petrified captives and get no reply from them. When the first Amazon speaks of their intimidating appearance, the serpent skins assigned them Odysseus metamorphose into self-authored lion skins (977). Brown points out that the Amazons’ manner of dress, snakeskins, is also taken from Hederich. Kleist, thus introduces a subtle alteration of his source material here. The Amazons, as they view themselves, move up the food chain, so to speak, from the lowly place Odysseus (and Hederich) has assigned them, with the whole different sets of

associations that difference brings to bear. From the lowly and further removed from human, i.e. reptilian cold-bloodedness, to the king of the jungle (hunted only by man as it were); as Christian symbols, the lion is the king or Christ and the snake is the serpent in the garden, Satan. But, even without that association, the way the Amazon's view themselves is sharply contrasted to the way they are viewed by the Greeks. This a stunning example of the dramatization of competing epistemologies, the Greek and the Amazon, *der Mann and die Männin*.

On the level of stage-production, this raises the question of what Kleist envisioned them actually wearing onstage—maybe lionskins, maybe snakeskins; perhaps reported as snake skins by the Greeks from afar, when the Amazons are still offstage, and then they appear onstage in lion skins, to underscore the Greeks' failure to see the Amazons from behind their green lenses. Also noteworthy is that this shift in perspective causes a shift in skin. The epistemological gulf between the two parties is dramatized as ontological instability—the lack of integrity and dubious humanness—of the Amazon bodies. Although, on one level, these can refer to the coverings the actors might be wearing, that they are skins makes them liminal and confuses the boundaries of their bodies. In Odysseus's formulation, they are “bedeckt mit” [covered with] snakeskins; but the first amazon's “is it *the* lionskin that scares you?” is less clear about the status of that skin. Is it indeed a covering or is it the surface of the Amazon body at issue here? Perhaps it is the inability to distinguish between them, between the role and the body that inhabits it. This brings up the issue of the body, the imaginary, historical body, the ideologies and practices that materialize or make bodies seem solid, defined, and stable as a site for authenticating gender and sexuality. It is fitting that at the very limen, i.e. the skin, that defines the contours of the Amazon's bodies there is confusion, disagreement about what kind of skin that is; in either case, it is not human skin, but rather bestial skin,

just what kind of beast, though, depends on who is viewing and naming it. The slippage is multiplied in the case of Penthesilea's body as she is named as various types of beasts both actual and mythological.

What really scare the captive soldiers are the roses gathered by the Amazons; the Greeks think they are animal sacrifices about to be offered up to the Gods. As we have seen, flowers and roses double as *Reizen* adorning the body and as wounds or ruptures of the body's boundaries. In terms of female anatomy, the roses are the threatening sexual organs of the Amazons, a potential *vagina dentata* image, both beautiful and deadly. In terms of male anatomy, the rose or rosette can be read as the anus. The Greek captives are exposed and vulnerable, wound with garlands of roses, garlands of open holes ripe for penetration. One of the Amazon girls observes, "It's easier to gather prisoners upon these fields than roses..." (897-8). The soldiers themselves, feminized by their defeat, are also associated with roses; in fact they are easier to gather. The captured soldiers are like an easy harvest of roses, a metaphorical rape that never happens in the play, but could represent their humiliation at being defeated by an army of women, as they metaphorically take the place of the penetrated, passive, object of desire. The animal and floral imagery works to further destabilize conventional gender roles by masculinizing the Amazons and feminizing the Greeks. It also foregrounds the issue of perception as the same bodies appear differently from various perspectives. Kleist thematizes the act of spectatorship—of looking at the Amazona' bodies—in the text of the play. Rather than simply reversing male and female roles, *Penthesilea* throws the oppositions on which they rest into confusion.

The formulation of sexual difference in many of Kleist's letters follows Rousseau's delineation of the difference between man (active and strong) and woman (passive and weak) in terms of Nature. He describes the difference between man and

wife, “einem Natur gegebenen Unterschied” (‘a difference established by nature’ [Pfeiffer 193]), in a letter to his fiancée in which he refers to Rousseau. In the context of this widely held view, it is easy to understand why Kleist’s contemporaries were repelled and even outraged by Penthesilea. Although we see him insisting on this traditional division of gender roles in the letter to his fiancée, he throws this very construction into question in the play: “Die binäre Konstruktion der Geschlechter wird aufgelöst in einem Verwirrspiel, in dem alle essentialistischen Konzepte fragwürdig erscheinen” (‘The binary construction of the sexes is set loose in a play of confusion in which all essentialist concepts appear dubious’ [Pfeiffer 194]). The binary construction of gender that Kleist tries to subscribe to in his letters are let loose in a play of confusion throwing all essentialist concepts of sexual difference into question. In this way, Penthesilea emerges as virtually queer in that her role transgresses gender boundaries making essentialist concepts of absolute sexual difference appear questionable at best.

With *Penthesilea*, Kleist writes against the grain Classical harmony and unity and this is reflected in the episodic organization of the text itself. Pfeiffer argues that one encounters such writing from authors who find no place in the representation systems of Western culture, i.e. women and artists who exist on the fringes of or outside of the symbolic order. Forbidden sexual desires and transgressive gender identification are two examples. Pfeiffer notes that this form of writing is not necessarily emancipatory, but rather: “Das Subjekt rettet sich nicht durch Integration, sondern zelebriert literarisch die Obdachlosigkeit, zu der es verdammt wurde” (‘The subject does not save itself through integration, rather it celebrates, literarily, the homelessness to which it is damned’ [195]). Following Cixous, Erika Berroth understands Kleist’s writing as a type of *écriture féminine*, a “Schreibweise die die symbolische Ordnung unterläuft, die die Brüche und Risse im System in der Organisation des Textes selbst abbildet, öffnet den Blick für das

‘Weibliche’ seiner poetischen Praxis” (‘manner of writing, which evades the symbolic order, which depicts the breaks and rips in the system in the organization of the text itself, exposes a view of the feminine of his poetic praxis’ [2]). Berroth argues that works like *Penthesilea*, that circumvent the symbolic order, mirror the crisis of identity in a time of sweeping change from feudal to bourgeois family structures (2).

Indeed, Kleist has a difficult time finding a place for himself in the quickly changing Prussian society of the early nineteenth century. “Für Kleist sind alle vorgegebenen Sozialisationsmodelle, alle Modelle gesellschaftlicher Subjektbegründung problematisch geworden: Offizier, Wissenschaftler, Zivilbeamter, Ehemann und Vater...” (‘For Kleist all the predetermined models of socialization, all models of social subject formation have become problematic: officer, scientist, civil servant, husband and father...’ [Pfeiffer 195]). What remains for him is literature, which allows an imaginary reconfiguration of such rigidly defined identities, including sexual identities. Literature provides a space for imagining that which will become queer and posthuman models of corporeality. As he writes to Ulrike, there are thousands of common interests, hopes, views, and desires that bind most people together, but none of these bind him. The Kant-krise only intensified his rejection of conventional society in which his intense feelings could find no home.

Die heimatlos gewordenen Affekte, auch die denunzierten sexuellen, investieren ihre Energie in emotional aufgeheizte Metaphern, in metaphorische Gewalt, in Exzesse des Imaginären – der ‘ästhetische Modus’ schafft eine Radikalisierung, die in mimetisch-naturalistischer Literatur nicht möglich wäre. Es entsteht eine literarische Welt, die die symbolische Ordnung unterläuft... (Pfeiffer 196)

The emotions that had become homeless, as well as the denounced sexual feelings, invested their energy in emotionally inflamed metaphors, in an excess of the imaginary – the ‘aesthetic mood’ achieves a radicalization, which would not be possible in mimetic-naturalistic literature. It creates a literary world, which evades the symbolic order...

The images of liquidation, water, overflowing, flooding, and storms in *Penthesilea* support Pfeiffer's reading as images of the menacing abyss of fluid chaos outside of the rigid gender construction based upon the foundation of "natural" sexual difference. In opposition to the "natural" order, then, bodies and identities that do not cohere or that transgress the boundaries maintained by strict social sanctions are necessarily artificial. Pfeiffer also invokes the idea of non-mimetic literature circumventing the symbolic order as reaction to the emotional trauma of coming to terms with an identity outside the social order. Detering makes similar point as he formulates the idea of homosexual 'camouflage' in literature, which is not necessarily a consistent monolithic style but rather a pattern of reactions to sanctions and stigmatization. Rather than as an expression of Kleist's homoerotic desires, *Penthesilea* can be understood as a counter-discourse that problematizes the dominant aesthetic and scientific corporeal models of his time, as an engagement with rather than a mirroring of the identity crises in a time of sweeping social changes. Kleist creates a non-mimetic 'literary world' in which he begins to imagine that which will become queer and posthuman models of corporeality, with their mutable/mutating configurations of bodies, identities, and desires.

#### **PENTHESILEA'S VIRTUALLY QUEER AND POSTHUMAN BODY**

Penthesilea is outside the natural order of things because she is neither man nor properly woman, neither Greek nor completely Amazon. She defies the laws of her own state and is an anathema to the others' state. Sexual desire, in the case of both Achilles and Penthesilea, pits the two characters against the interests of their respective nations. She is excessively sexed in stark opposition to Winckelmann's eunuch. Her performance of gender does not correspond to a fundamental sexual difference. She does not act like a 'natural' woman, but nor does she act like a man; thus, this is not a case of simple

inversion either. Penthesilea's "body is marked by femininity and masculinity" (Cixous 53). She embodies contradictions that throw the distinction between natural and artificial into question. Kleist's Amazon queen is virtually queer in that she confounds heteronormative models of absolute sexual difference based on 'natural' physiology.

As an outsider, she does not conform, in any of the roles that are available to her. With her penultimate performative utterance, she severs herself from the Amazon order as well; she renounces the law of the Amazons, the law of women: "Ich sage vom Gesetz der Frau mich los" (3012). The "Gesetz der Frauen" is not an alternative to patriarchy and it does not offer an emancipatory alternative the law of the father; rather, it creates a symbolic place for women in a patriarchally defined culture (Pfeiffer 197). The origin of this culture, as all cultures, is violence, as it founded by the male of gods, Mars, the god of war. As Carol Jacobs points out, even though Amazons are governed by different laws, they are "Laws that however counter to those of the patriarchal Greeks nevertheless mirror their structure of authority" (95). Nonetheless, Penthesilea removes herself from the gendered hierarchies that order human existence. The Rose scene on the other hand is a moment of romantic, elusive happiness that is only possible outside the social order (as is often the case in Kleist's texts, i.e. *Erdbeben in Chile*). Pfeiffer argues that this moment is the optimistic message of the drama (written into the pain and brutality of the drama), if there is a message, that one must free oneself from the socially constructed gender roles and identities to get to this moment of nonviolent erotic contact (197-8).

In renouncing the law, then, she makes herself monstrous, a dangerously mutating body, she has already become beast or multiple beasts as she attacks, destroys, and devours Achilles. But this also announces her death, as her plans to follow Achilles to Hades appear directly after her rejection of Amazon law. Foundationless, she has nowhere to stand outside this order, no coherent subject position for her to inhabit and

from which to speak. The configuration of her body and the desires that inhabit it do not correspond to the ideals of Classicist aesthetics and norms of Enlightenment science. Kleist elevates to tragic heroine a character, who elsewhere in this time period might serve as a terrifying antagonist to a conventional Classical hero. In this manner, *Penthesilea* evinces a longing for more flexible configurations of bodies, identities, and desires. He cites the Amazon not as an object of horror but as a tragic heroine who is destroyed by human laws governing the body. Thus, with *Penthesilea*, Kleist begins to imagine that which will become queer and posthuman models of corporeality.

In conclusion, Kleist critiques the idealized body of Classical aesthetics by throwing essentialist concepts of sexual difference and gender-valued terms such as *Anmut* into question. He recognizes the dematerialization of the body and its incompatibility with actual bodies. Through his critique of Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment science, he creates a destabilized, virtual space for imagining a new constellation of bodies, identities, and desires. Kleist's rejection of absolute truth in the form of the idealized and normative body in favor of embodied perspectives and his intensely troubled reactions to the body as unstable ground for perception and sexual identity allow one to read his texts, as I have, as part of a discursive practice whose desired objects are queer and posthuman corporeal models.

## **Wilde Bodies: Dandyist Aesthetics, Fantastic Dialogue, and *Salomé***

This chapter explores the ways in which “Wilde” bodies, specifically the dandy and the *femme fatale*, perform virtually queer and posthuman, that is, antifoundationalist theories of embodiment yet-to-come. To examine the ways in which Wilde’s dandy characters and his infamous *femme fatale*, *Salomé*, prefigure queer and posthuman theories of embodiment, it will be necessary to consider the contemporary models of embodiment against which he positions his own aesthetic and dramatic ideas. By the end of the nineteenth century, the distinction between the natural and the artificial becomes only more contentious and intricately configured with the rise of the natural sciences and their application to social issues surrounding gender and sexuality. Valorizations of the supposedly natural body, its sexual functions and corresponding gender roles and expectations, become increasingly dogmatic and shrill as industry and technology speed up the pace of social change. Based in a growing mass of empirical evidence, theories of evolution and reproductive biology continue to naturalize the incommensurability of the sexes (to insist on absolute sexual difference), while emerging progressive movements simultaneously appropriate that model to make the case for expanding women’s roles in the public sphere and decriminalizing and legitimizing what will soon come to be called homosexuality. Wilde’s art and criticism traverse these various discourses—political, scientific, and aesthetic—engaging the thought of the former two while self-consciously privileging the latter.

In the literary sphere Naturalism seeks to use the methods of experimental science, especially experimental medicine and physiology, to lay bare the material truths

of the human body. Émile Zola deploys the mechanistic physiological theories of Claude Bernard in his call for the experimental novel, a new type of novel grounded in empirical research and the inorganic laws governing the body.<sup>80</sup> The truth of social phenomena—of gender roles and of sexual behavior—is to be found within the body and laid bare by the methods of empirical science. Zola rejects Romanticism as a mere rhetorical re-dressing of Classicism; he sees the two movements as “one set of puppets at odds with another” (354). The ‘artificial’ rhetoric of both aesthetic schools only disguises the true underlying nature of humanity, which is now to be found in the mechanical functioning of the body. “Against the inanimateness of conventional representation—the characters of which are little more than statues or marionettes—naturalism [in Zola’s terms] ‘comes from the very entrails of humanity’ (Garner 534). Vivisection, for Zola, will be the defining literary method for the new scientific age of progress.

For Zola, the mere ‘puppets’ of Classical and Romantic drama must be replaced by the intricate, machine-like workings of the flesh and so present more natural characters and actions both in the text and on stage.<sup>81</sup> Rather than dressing characters up in the ‘artificial’ rhetoric of those outmoded aesthetic movements, the transition between which consists only of exchanging togas for doublets, the Naturalist theatre demands a nudity or an analogously stripped-down simplicity of costume, action, and style (Zola 362). Zola’s Naturalism, therefore, calls for a renewed sense of the natural (in stage design, costume, and speech) that rejects the more purely literary and draws its material,

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<sup>80</sup> Stanton B. Garner writes “... Zola’s writings [were] in dialogue with contemporary medical writers, particularly Claude Bernard, whose 1865 *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* deeply influenced Zola. Indeed, sections of *The Experimental Novel* are little more than a gloss on Bernard, as Zola himself acknowledges: ‘I plan on all points to entrench myself behind Claude Bernard’” (534).

<sup>81</sup> “Claude Bernard regularly speaks of the organism as a living machine, operating through mechanical laws. Zola also writes of “*la machine humaine*” (*Naturalisme* 93) – and he further gestures toward this mechanization in his remarks on environment determining action – but it will be the modernists who, under the influence (in part) of later medical technology, write and stage the machine–body interface latent in late-nineteenth-century medicine and theatre” (Garner 540)

via detailed observation and research, from the contemporary streets and, most importantly, the now medicalized bodies on them. He rejects the artificiality of aestheticist art and turns to the “*la machine humaine*” for the truths of human nature including its gender identities and sexualities. This focus on the truths of the machine-like body is descended from Enlightenment and Classicist models of human body such as La Mettrie’s *homme machine*.

The realm of actual, for Zolaists, is one of existing essences determined by natural laws. But, many of Wilde’s progressive contemporaries rally around similar notions of the incommensurability of the sexes and the medicalization of sexuality. As Danson notes, “Wilde’s opposition to Zola and Zolaism comes uncomfortably close to allying him with forces that would eventually destroy him” (45). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is assaulted by the same moral crusaders against ‘pernicious literature’ who spur the prosecution of Henry Vizetelly, the publisher of an English version of Zola’s *La Terre* (Danson 48). Indeed, Wilde’s relationship to progressive politics is a complex one and can be seen in his attitudes toward sexual politics of the day as well. While Wilde can be seen as feminist in his support of female artists and writers, he becomes a symbol of aristocratic male decadence and corruption for some feminists of his day (Stetz 519). The feminists who join the “social purity” campaigns help crusade for the Criminal Law Amendment (1885), which includes Labouchere’s clause criminalizing all “gross indecency” or sexual contact between men. Following the Cleveland Street scandals that implicate members of the aristocracy all the way up to Prince Eddy of frequenting a male brothel, the link between material wealth, decadence, and the sexual perversion of same-sex sexual activity becomes more firmly linked in the public consciousness. Labouchere, himself an outspokenly liberal if not radical MP, conceives the clause as an attack on corrupt aristocracy. Wilde admires Labouchere’s radical politics enough to name him

one of three heroes on whose ideas he enthusiastically expounds to the American press during his 1882 tour (*Letters* 154). That Wilde would be tried and sentenced according to a law written by a liberal politician he admires exemplifies his troubled and complicated relationship to many of the progressive movements of his day, especially those bound up with issues of gender and sexuality. Both schools of thought are taken up by progressives with whom Wilde has a problematic relationship. While he sympathizes with their ends of ennobling same-sex love, he remains at odds with their means, which he sees as dangerously reductive and unimaginative.

Advocates of same-sex love such as John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter argue passionately against the Labouchere clause on the grounds that such love is natural and, in fact, an integral part of a healthy society. Symonds argues “The first thing is to force people to see that the [same-sex] passions in question have their justification in nature” (White 93). Where they see the homosexual as natural, healthy and noble, scientists like Lambroso and Nordau find the truths of these perverse desires in corporeal signs of degeneration. Even from advocates of same-sex love, Wilde refused any naturalizing theories that sought to stabilize notions of gender and sexual identity by appealing to the body as the site of ultimate truth.

What Symonds and Carpenter, and in their different way Lambroso and Nordau, wanted to naturalize and thus bring into the world that science can explain, Wilde needed to keep free from the taint of imitation. What they sought to inscribe in the language of science, Wilde wanted to liberate into the free play of artifice. Only the artificial, never the natural, can be true to an identity constituted as a process of always creative change. (Danson 45)

Artifice and the play of its surfaces is for Wilde the arena of identity as well as of art; and one can see art and identity-as-art linked in the figure of the dandy. Rather than a stripping away of layers to get to the core, naked truth of gender and sexuality, Wilde’s dandyist method is one of dressing up and re-dressing, of “masking.” Wilde’s aesthetic

theories are those of the dandy's clothes as opposed to the naked flesh of the Naturalist body. Naturalism penetrates the mechanical body to expose a true underlying nature. While Zolaism seeks to locate truths in the mechanical functioning of human physiology, and thus present the true nature of human beings, Wilde's aestheticism embraced an artificiality to dislodge any claim to a purported 'natural' essence of being, sexual or otherwise.

In "The Decay of Lying" Wilde cites a widely recognizable aesthetic judgment of Naturalism that not only dismisses its scientific realism but also troubles Idealist aesthetics with which he has often been too simply associated. Vivian protests against Art that looks to Life and Nature for its material; he admits that Art can take elements of Life and refashion them into new forms, but warns against the point "when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness" (CW 978). He follows Plato in rejecting imitative Art, but does not posit a realm of true and beautiful forms beyond the world of appearances. The world of appearances is what Art must make and remake. Indeed, he inverts Plato's definition of Art as imitative. Here, Art becomes poesis rather than mere mimesis; in other words, Art creates new forms while Life and Nature imitate Art. Rather than rejecting imitative Art because it is false, he rejects it because it is too much like Life; thus, he praises the liar and privileges lying as the necessary method for creating good Art. What Plato uses to condemn Art in the *Republic*—its penchant for telling lies—Wilde identifies as its fundamental strength; lies are no longer failed imitations, but self-conscious imaginative creations. "Truth" for Vivian, then, is not a matter of reproducing characters and actions from actual life, nor is it a matter of imitating eternally true and beautiful forms; rather it is "a matter of style" (CW 981). Since, for the dandy Life is an art itself, the same formula holds true for matters of identity such as sexuality.

This inversion of Plato and praise of lying is paired with a barb directed at “Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the compilers of statistics in general” (*CW* 981). Both Naturalism and Platonic Idealism imply a depth-model: scientific or metaphysical truths are to be revealed under the surface of things and truth is to be found in the physical body or the metaphysical mind. Wilde’s dandyist privileging of style, on the other hand, rejects the strict mind/body opposition and focuses on the play of surfaces; it embraces neither the naked body (and its entrails) of Naturalism nor the universalized abstract mind of idealism, but instead the clothing, decoration, and rhetoric of the dandyist aesthete.

Platonic idealism posits a world of essential, unchangeable truth beyond the world of appearances; but ‘The Decay of Lying’ imagines a world in which truth is what we make and unmake, a world where nature prevents us from seeing, not Plato’s eternal forms, but the always new forms of human creation. Platonism, with its ideal reality, and realism, with its sordid reality, are equally unacceptable, since they tie us to a nature not of our own making. (Danson 59)

There is no constant, deep, underlying nature waiting to be discovered for Wilde’s Vivian, because Truth (and by extension Nature) is merely a matter of style. Style provides the lenses through which one views the world, so Nature must be seen as always already of one’s own making so that what one discovers in it will be determined by the style in which one approaches it.

In addition to Naturalist science, the history and literature of ancient Greece in this period also becomes a contentious space in which many advocates of same-sex love argue for its legitimacy through historical precedent and cultural prestige. Writers such as John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Richard Burton, and others look to ancient Greece to articulate a transhistorical ideal of same-sex desire. Citing Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Anacreon, and the noble comradeship of Dorian soldiers (to name only a few of the often exhaustively footnoted references), these writers seek to craft an

image of same-sex desire as noble, invigorating, robust, virtuous, and young. Under the influence of Oxford Hellenism, Plato's dialogues, especially the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, become key texts in these arguments. These arguments dovetail with naturalistic theses that insist on the naturalness of same-sex desire and both valorize that 'noble' tradition in terms of health, vigor, youth, and public good.<sup>82</sup> Wilde does not simply join this chorus but instead plays off these increasingly popular notions, even though he is sometimes seen as one of this crowd by his contemporaries.<sup>83</sup> While the advocates of "Greek Love" like Symonds and Carpenter argue in terms of authenticity, utility, health, and strength, Wilde rejects these ideals, transvaluing the opposing deprived terms to show the instability of these supposedly timeless, transcendental truths.

The same state of affairs holds true for citations of Renaissance culture in the context of the polemics of same-sex love. For example, Symonds cites Shakespeare, Marlowe, Raleigh, and Spenser as examples of the manly vigor of homosexual desire in a younger England (White 120). As seen in his trials, Wilde is associated with this homoerotic idealization of Renaissance culture by virtue of his narrated dialogue "The

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<sup>82</sup> These arguments largely ignored the issue of female same-sex desire. "Ancient Greek culture offers a model in which relationships between men are not only a given, but are an intrinsic part of the organization of society, its laws, education, military prowess and literature, where women are not citizens, where no reference need be made to the female. The valid binary is not between heterosexual and homosexual, but between good and bad homosexual relationships" (White 119-20). Where lesbianism was dealt with in such writings, it is portrayed as corrupt, "poisonous and luxurious pleasure" as "feeble and unsatisfactory passion" and often sadistic predation on innocent women (120-1).

<sup>83</sup> The evident popularity of such arguments for same-sex love that appealed to Greek culture and specifically to Plato can be noted in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. Bunthorne's recitative song mentions "An attachment *à la Plato*" (White 17). Here, Hellenistic aestheticism is connected to the Arts and Crafts movement with its 'vegetable fashion' and given a French twist to complete a stereotype of the homosexual dandy. Aside from those connections, clearly the citing of Plato in this context signals same-sex desire and demonstrates that Wilde, the object of parody, was seen as contributing to Symonds' and Carpenter's program.

Portrait of Mr. W. H.”<sup>84</sup> Again, rather than echoing arguments like Symonds’, Wilde cites them to poke fun at their earnestness and to throw into question the methods and values employed to construct them.<sup>85</sup> These general examples demonstrate to some extent Wilde’s method of citation, a method that invokes and displaces recognizable arguments, theories, and tropes as well as literary figures and *dramatis personae*. Wilde engages the topic of same-sex love in the recognizable terms and codes of the day—the theatricality of homosexual polemics with its Greek (“*à la Plato*”) and Elizabethan props—and performatively transvalues the terms of those arguments without shrinking from the scandalous subject matter itself. Somewhat like Kleist, Wilde’s mode is indirect; he often uses the dialogue form and subcultural literary codes to address the topic of sexuality rather than dealing with it explicitly. For Wilde, justifications for same-sex love would not be based in utility, authenticity, nature, nor truth be it metaphysical or physiological. Rather than claiming the dominant categories as his own, Wilde appropriates conventionally negative terms—the artificial and the lie—and inverts or transvalues them; in these Wildean “inversions, the excluded inferior term returns as the now superior term of a related series of binaries” (Dollimore 16). Wilde’s inversions of natural/artificial, truth/lie, etc. transform what they cite within the theatricality of aesthetic and sexual discourse. The same goes for his repeated performative citation (invocation and displacement) of the dandy persona.

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<sup>84</sup> “Carson: I believe you have written an article to show that Shakespeare’s sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice? / Wilde: On the contrary, I have written an article to show that they are not. I objected to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare” (quoted in White 122).

<sup>85</sup> “Rather than presenting the facts of the appropriation, Wilde’s text [“The Portrait of Mr. W. H.”] performs the appropriation, making explicit the cultural and personal histories at work in those reading these texts, and then invalidating all that has been said and done by his characters by revealing it as a forgery. In this way he critiques an entire methodology and also the assumed authenticity of evidence and identity that his contemporaries find in Renaissance texts. Where Pater, Dowden, and Symonds find continuity and transcendental subjectivity, Wilde shows that there is no tradition, no universal, ahistorical formation of homosexuality which can be recovered, and in doing so succeeds in revealing the strategic nature of all those other readings” (White 122).

## THE DANDY'S ARTIFICIAL BODY

By the time Oscar Wilde appears on the fashionable scene in London, the figure of the dandy had already been recycled, redefined, and relocated. Wilde's appropriation of the dandy cites its French iterations (Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Baudelaire), which, in turn, trace their lineage back to Regency England and Beau Brummel. Waleska Schwandt argues that "Wilde's personae—aesthete, dandy, and aestheticist author—were by no means his own invention, but a plagiarism: a reinvention of the stereotype of the aesthete, a caricature's caricature" (91). The Aesthetes of Wilde's circle revered the Brummel era as they did the Romantics admiring their passionate love of beauty and of art for art's sake; despite differences in temperament and taste, they were viewed by the general public, in much the same fashion as their predecessors, as depraved, unmanly, and probably sexually perverse (Calloway 36).<sup>86</sup> Wilde does not simply promote the aristocratic dandy as an ideal but uses the persona self-consciously, repeating it with a difference. Wilde's own aristocratic pose, a lie that demonstrated the arbitrary boundaries of class, is one of his most scandalous for Victorian culture.<sup>87</sup> His posing as an aristocrat, his supposed corrupting of the actual aristocrat Lord Alfred Douglas, and

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<sup>86</sup> "That such criticisms and attempts at ridicule were in their time routinely leveled at the social and sartorial Dandies of the Regency of England, at the French intellectual and literary Dandies of the mid-century, and against the Dandy-Aesthetes of the 1880s and 1890s, serves strongly to underline the close connections between these groups... " (Calloway 45). Schwandt suggests that Wilde's performance of dandyism is aimed at parodying the specifically Victorian stereotype of the aesthete: "By presenting himself as an aesthete, Wilde plagiarised a stereotyped personality invented by the anti-aestheticist Victorian public, representing and personifying its fears and resentments concerning an allegedly un-english, unmanly, and ungentlemanly style in literature" (91).

<sup>87</sup> "Wilde treated his 'rough trade' to the dinners, cigarette cases, and clothes that were the props and costumes of the upper class to which these boys had no right. Wilde brought unwelcome guests into the club, dressed in a type of class 'drag,' and demonstrated that the lines between the classes were arbitrary (or simply a matter of shopping)" (Schulz 50).

his dressing of boy prostitutes in class “drag” all represent violations of class boundaries, violations that become a central part of evidence used to condemn Wilde.

Like the aesthete, the dandy rejects the masculine virtues of utility and industrious activity, while he privileges the effeminate languor of connoisseurship and interior decor. Wilde’s dandies are belated, already parodies themselves, just as Wilde’s own fame, as a dandy aesthete is concurrent with Gilbert and Sullivan’s popular parody of him.<sup>88</sup> Wilde’s dandies are virtually queer in their scandal-provoking performances of gender and veiled sexuality; they flaunt normative gender roles and values embracing effeminacy and artificiality and rejecting the ‘blood and guts’ vigor of both conservative and progressive discourses of authenticity that appeal to nature and health. They do not disavow sexuality nor do they expose raw physicality. The accoutrements of perversity are easily recognized yet the exact ‘nature’ of their erotic desires is deliberately, but not fully, obscured with a diaphanous social persona that at once conceals and reveals.

Wilde’s dandies stage their bodies as ironic works of art that invite their own dismantling, artificiality or dissembling that invites disassembly. As the narrator of *Dorian Gray* tells us, the dandy didact Lord Henry Wotton, master of superficiality, paradoxically flirts with the Naturalist image of the vivisected body that grounds and licenses medical models of authentic identity by displaying its true inner workings: “He had been always enthralled by the methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject-matter of that science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun by vivisecting himself, as he had ended by vivisecting others” (CW 55). Implied in Lord Henry musings is a depth-model of subjectivity, a trace of Haller’s laboratory in which some inner truth that can be haruspicated with the surgeon’s tools, living animals can be

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<sup>88</sup> Wilde “had come to America not as a celebrity in his own right, but as an advance poster for *Patience*, the Savoy opera, which, having been an immense success both in London and the provincial towns of England, was then to be staged in the United States” (Schwandt 96).

opened up to demonstrate the fundamental powers of *reizen*. Lord Henry employs scientific methods figuratively; his mind becomes the knife that vivisects his own personality and others' personalities. To make life into an artwork, its characters must be vivisected, starting with the dandy himself, eviscerated as a work of nature, and then made artificial, consciously re-constructed into a work of art. Here we see the paradox of Wilde's dandyist project of artifice here coyly and paradoxically appealing to the empirical study of nature; but, that empiricism has been displaced as metaphor, from the knife and lab to the observer and drawing room.

The decadent dandy poses as a provocation to recognize the fictionality of identity as a series of masks, as provisional and ever changing.<sup>89</sup> The dandy confronts his audience with a material dematerialization of the physical body into clothes, a wealth of fine garments and well-made button holes, tasteful jewels, ornate cigarette cases, dyed or exotic flowers, coverings and adornments that draw attention away from flesh towards what conceals it. I use the term material dematerialization to signify a resistance to the discourse of the natural without recourse to mystical or metaphysical disembodiment; instead of disembodiment the dandy insists on a kind of embodiment of complex surfaces and sensuous textures. Wilde's dandyism is in a sense an invitation to traverse the boundaries and re-examine received connections between Art and Life, literary texts and real-life performances. His dandies intentionally blur the boundaries between these realms, but at the same time frustrate any simple biographical interpretation. Wilde seduces his audience and arouses their desire to draw connections between his art and his

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<sup>89</sup> "Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray's opinion. He used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead" (CW 112).

life, but he never fully discloses exactly how they are connected in order to sustain that state of desire.<sup>90</sup>

The elegantly posed surface of Wildean dandies, as well as their frequent praise of aristocratic inactivity, stands in opposition to ethos of utility and practicality. While the earlier nineteenth-century dandies, beginning with Beau Brummel, are characterized by simple black attire as a counterpoint to the norm of eighteenth-century French fashions, the late-nineteenth-century, decadent dandy dons velvets and silks as counterpoint to the norm of unobtrusive utilitarian garb; in both cases, the dandy draws attention to the surface, to what covers his body (Schmid 83).<sup>91</sup> As Rhonda Garelick writes, “The self-conscious artificiality of decadence, and the elaborately posed persona of the dandy, can be read as rebellion against an economy of ever-increasing ‘exchangeability’ and the accumulation of mass-produced products” (Garelick 5). Joseph Donohue also notes that Wilde shares with French avant-gardists the rejection of respectable bourgeois society “fails to corroborate the felt sense of a genuine self that the true artists is impelled to achieve, a sense of self that, in this late Romantic age, was threatened with extinction by the development of industrialism and the relentless march of progress” (90). Although ‘genuine’ is an awkward word to use in respect to Wilde, Donohue rightly connects the dandy with a neo-romanticism that rejects utilitarian conformity.

There is a paradoxical tension in the dandy of striving for individuality while making himself a reproducible object or text. Rhonda Garelick defines the dandy figure

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<sup>90</sup> As Wilde’s grandson, Merlin Holland, writes, Wilde’s “is simply not a life which can tolerate an either/or approach with logical conclusions, but demands the flexibility of a both/and treatment, often raising questions for which there are no answers” (4). Accordingly, Wilde dandies *both* represent the author’s persona in some ways *and* in other ways do not. Susanne Schmid refers to this as a strategy of “literary hide-and-seek” arguing that this “method both constitutes an invitation to a voyeuristic audience and a turn away from it, because what is exhibited is not the author’s own life, but a life that can be measured against the author’s (and, thereby, the reader’s)” (84).

<sup>91</sup> “What is important is not what the dandy wears but how he is perceived while he is presenting himself... In spite of the differences, Brummel’s clothing, like Wilde’s, contributed to drawing attention to the surface. The dandy *is* the surface he presents” (Schmid 83).

in general in terms of this tension: “The reproducibility of the dandy is thus always pitted against his singularity; and his historical or biographical status shades off continually into the fictionalized selves of literature” (Garelick 9). Dandyist writers often mingle their own dandyism with that of their characters: Baudelaire-Cramer, Lorrain-de Pochas, Huysmans-Des Esseintes, Wilde-Gray, and Shaukal-Balthesser. Garelick writes of Balzac’s *Traité de la vie Éléante*, reminding one of Lord Henry as Dorian’s instructor, “At the root of such didacticism [Balzac prescribing what not to wear] lies the crucial dandyist obsession with aesthetic reproduction. To write a dandyist text is to produce more dandies” (15). Although Lord Henry is not the author of the “poisonous yellow book,” the book has just this effect of producing another dandy. Wilde’s dandies shade into each other as well as into their creator but rather than providing a key to an underlying truth about Wilde’s life (or vice versa), each dialogically adds a slightly different perspective; even though they are similar each adds further inconsistency and contradiction. Wilde’s dandy-iterations proliferate copies, which create the illusion for some that Wilde stands behind them all as their original. But as the self-conscious decadent dandy, Wilde deflects that by constantly insisting that Life imitates Art, as Dorian models himself on Des Esseintes. In other words the true biographical or personal nature that supposedly exists ‘behind’ or ‘underneath’ the surface of the text is an already “denatured nature as repetition, quotation division” (Craft 25). In dandyist literature, then, textuality and sexuality are merged, in the physical performance of the artificialized, stylized and stylish body, and in the highly wrought, seductive textual bodies meant to sire further dandies.

I have discussed how the homoerotic elements of Kleist’s narrated dialogue allow one to read the piece as a scene of seduction. Wilde’s dialogues like Plato’s *Phaedrus* and like Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater,” are also scenes of seduction, texts meant

to seduce their audiences. In a similar manner to these dialogues, “Dandyism also conflates textual and human seduction” (Garelick 11). “The Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist” are two such scenes of seduction. Like the ‘stage directions’ in Kleist’s dialogues, the *mise en scène* and reported details in Wilde’s dialogues provide subtle cues to the homoerotic aspects of the text. Cyril opens “The Decay of Lying” with a provocative invitation to Vivian: “There is a mist upon the woods, like the purple bloom upon a plum. Let us go and lie on the grass and smoke cigarettes” (CW 970). The sexual suggestion of engorged genitalia permeates Cyril’s woods with a purple mist as he exhorts Vivian to lie with him and indulge in the decadent dandy’s favorite occupation, smoking cigarettes. Vivian notably declines this invitation in order to seduce Cyril with his text. Cyril obliges on the condition that Vivian give him a cigarette and later interrupts to ask for yet another (CW 972). Christopher Craft notes how cigarette smoking and cigarette cases plays into the dandyist blurring of author and character (30). The cigarette cases Wilde gives to his young male paramours are used as evidence of his “gross indecency” in his trials during which one of Wilde’s boy-lovers testifies that he “‘he had received a letter from Mr. Wilde inviting him to ‘come smoke a cigarette’ with him”” (quoted in Craft 30). The orality of smoking and dialoging provide a subtle connection between sexuality and textuality and work to weave homoerotic desire into the dandy’s *mise en scène*.

In the opening of “The Critic as Artist” Gilbert requests a cigarette just before he goes on to praise daffodils that are “like Greek things of the best period” (CW 1011). Here again one can note the close association of erotically suggestive flowers, Greek art, and smoking that taken together permeate the dialogue with an aestheticized, decadent homoeroticism. *Dorian Gray* opens with a similar constellation of homoerotic codes as the reader encounters Lord Henry smoking “innumerable cigarettes” on a divan of

“Persian saddle-bags” (CW 18). Here orientalist images replace Classical Greek ones for a more specifically *fin-de-siècle* decadent touch. But, the feminized, homoerotic effect is similar. Like Ernest’s Egyptian cigarettes in “The Critic as Artist,” Dorian and Lord Henry’s cigarettes are “gold-tipped” and “opium-tainted,” decadent, oriental, and sexually suggestive (CW 1019, 116, 19). Lord Henry repeatedly ‘flings’ himself down on the nearest sofa or divan as he lights up (CW 27, 48). The pose and sexual suggestion of Wilde’s dandies perform a sexual dissidence that at once invokes and displaces actual sexual acts, scandalizing through a mode of indirection, through the rich odors of flowers, perfumes, and the incense that, for example, clings to the pages of the infamous yellow book (which not coincidentally Dorian *flings* himself in a chair to read) (CW 101). Like the veil that at once conceals and reveals, the cigarette becomes a “screen metaphor for otherwise unrepresentable pleasures,” for suspended or frustrated homoerotic desire, creating an aura of desire meant to seduce. In fact, the thing that makes cigarettes “the perfect type of a perfect pleasure” is that they never satisfy as both Lord Henry and Gilbert point out to their dandy pupils (CW 70, 1019). Smoking is “perfect” both in type and pleasure, because it only creates the desire for more smoking; it evokes a permanent state of incompleteness, of unquenched or frustrated desire. Cigarette-smoking is then, the perfect activity for the virtually queer dandy, seductive, arousing desire, but always leaving one unsatisfied like the open-form of the dialogue that resists reduction to any one fixed meaning. The seduction does not end with a revelation of one certain ‘sin’ or ‘perversion.’ The scent of scandal is there, but it is not the sin itself that interests Wilde. Rather, it is the mechanism of scandal that makes the sinful so exciting and alluring, the workings of prohibition that discursively create that which it outlaws. Hence, in the words of Wilde defending his work to the *Scots Observer*, “Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray’s sins are no one knows. He who finds them has

brought them” (439). Like the seductive power of Salomé’s veils that incessantly point to but never fully reveal the dazzling flesh imagined as existing beneath them.

#### FANTASTIC DIALOGUE

Wilde uses dialogue, in his critical works, narrative fiction and especially his plays, to seduce audiences into artificial fantasies or lies that are meant to reveal truths, truths more about them than the author. As he reminds his readers in the aphoristic preface to *Dorian Gray*, “It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors” (CW 17). Not only does he present seductive fantasies in dialogue form but also in the dialogue of his drama *Salomé*. In dandyist fashion, these dialogues work to undermine the logical structures that underpin literary Naturalism and the medical models of corporeality on which it bases its methods. Emphasizing the movement of thought in dialogue, he refuses the Idealist notion that transcendental truth may be discovered.

... drama, novel, poem in rhyme, poem in prose, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched I made into a new form of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. (*Letters* 729)

“The Decay of Lying” is indeed one of Wilde’s more fantastic dialogues. The fantastic dialogue is the dandyist dialogue, perversely imagined, foppish in attire.<sup>92</sup> Noting the heavy debt to the earlier nineteenth-century aestheticism of Pater, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, Lawrence Danson finds in Wilde’s criticism (in *Intentions*) a dissident modernity, a modernity defined by its paradoxical looking back to the art of other ages and places: “Wilde’s new version of the old aestheticism deploys subjectivity, individuality and the autonomy of art against the supposed objectivity and

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<sup>92</sup> The *OED* defines fantastic variously as “Perversely or irrationally imagined,” “Fanciful, impulsive, capricious, arbitrary; also, foppish in attire.” Examples of these usages date from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

professionalism of nineteenth-century science and its offshoot in literature, realism” (“Wilde as Critic” 85). In “The Decay of Lying,” Wilde’s Vivian reverses the neoclassical imperative of following Nature as the origin and end of Art, asserting that it is Nature that imitates Art. Nature is denaturalized and demoted from an elevated ideal and empirical given to “our creation” (CW 986). As Danson paraphrases it, “In quest of the natural we spend our lives imitating and imitation” and not a pre-ordained empirically verifiable nature; “It suggests that whatever *is* is wrong (even, perhaps, such a ‘natural’ fact as normative heterosexuality), because it mindlessly repeats a prior act of imitation” (“Wilde as Critic” 85). Wilde’s dialogue suggests a self-conscious repetition, repetition with a difference, a matter not of finally getting at some deeper or more natural truth but a matter of sustained stylistic reframing to create something not yet in existence.

Rather than digging under the surface of its object, dialogue shows its surfaces, “in the round,” from multiple perspectives. In “The Critic as Artist” Wilde’s Gilbert explains lauds dialogue as,

... that wonderful literary form... which, the creative critics of the world have always employed, can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every fancy, and reality to every mood. By its means he can exhibit the object from each point of view, and show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things, gaining in this manner all the richness and reality of effect that comes from those side issues that are suddenly suggested by the central idea in its progress, and really illumine the idea more completely, or from those felicitous after-thoughts that give a fuller completeness to the central scheme, and yet convey something of the delicate charm of chance. (CW 1046)

Marginalia, side issues, and after-thoughts are not merely useless digressions but give fuller texture, a “richness and reality of effect.” Not reality per se, but one of effects akin to those produced by the sculptor’s tools; tools that refine surfaces rather than excavating interiors as does the vivisectionist’s knife. Ernest earnestly objects that dialogues merely provide straw men whom the author can easily convert whenever he chooses and by

whatever “absurd” means he chooses. Gilbert counters that converting others is all too easy and, in fact, is not the point of dialogue: Rather, its comparatively difficult aim is “to convert oneself” (CW 1047). Gilbert maintains that to “arrive at one really believes, one must speak through lips different from one’s own. To know the truth one must imagine myriads of falsehoods” (CW 1047). He rejects earnestness for calculated insincerity, which “is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities” (1048). As in “The Decay of Lying,” one can only glimpse the truth by trying on a myriad of falsehoods, and one can only get to what one really believes by speaking through others’ lips, by provisionally and self-consciously inhabiting others’ positions, not in any authentic sense, not getting under someone else’s skin, but by trying on their rhetorical clothes. One might extend this to the formula to the issue of critical-artistic originality; to create an original text, one must cite, borrow, and speak with or through others’ texts.

Wilde was perennially accused of plagiarizing or borrowing heavily from—while failing to credit—others’ texts, of being un-original in both his critical and dramatic works. He plays with convention, citing widely recognizable forms and ideas and casting them in a subtly different light. Again, this is one of the paradoxes of the dandy, pushing originality to an extreme within the bounds of convention, obtaining a provisional, strategic kind of authenticity via the artificial. Here arrangement of ‘plagiarized’ elements is the source of ‘originality.’ Like the dandy, the dialogue poses as original by mixing various samples of bygone styles, by ventriloquizing and parodying. The personae or “puppets” of Wilde’s dialogues are “ventriloquists, parodists, pasticheurs, or... plagiarists” (Danson, “Wilde as Critic” 88). They function to stylistically reframe and transvalue the terms of the literary debates at hand. For example, in “The Truth of Masks,” Wilde extols the virtues of accuracy, fact, and realism before offering a

retraction for the entire essay with which he concludes that the “truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks” (*CW* 1078). The truths of metaphysics rely on revealing what conceals and not what is concealed, the veil itself rather than what is imagined to reside behind it.

Masks can be changed at will and will often contradict one another. As Danson argues, “Wilde, rejecting the idea of a unified and self-possessed subjectivity, claims inconsistency as a virtue” (“Wilde as Critic” 91). As in Kleist’s case, Wilde’s dialogues are performative of a both/and aesthetic. In “The Critic as Artist,” he throws into question the criteria by which we judge criticism itself; sincerity, originality, and consistency are devalued, so that Wilde’s readers would be ill advised to take those terms at face value. He takes up opposing positions and makes contradictory statements, ultimately allowing the paradoxical to stand unresolved. The dandy prizes his unique individuality, yet his originality is performed through a new combination or framing of conventional elements. These contradictions can be read as dissonant performance, wherein the absolute opposition of the true and the false are seen to be unstable and transitory, “merely forms of intellectual existence” (*Letters* 729).

Nicholas Frankel argues that Wilde’s *Intentions* is a “seductive simulation” masquerading as truth. The collection of essays and dialogues work according to the logic Baudrillard assigns to seduction, which “simulates meaning in order to turn meaning against itself” (94). Frankel discusses Whistler’s charge of plagiarism against Wilde demonstrating how the dandy-artist provokes his accuser to make the charge a second time by plagiarizing Whistler’s original charge of plagiarism. He puts Whistler’s words into Vivian’s mouth, reframing them, and thereby reshuffling the values on which the rubric of plagiarism rests.

... influence and plagiarism both imply that each signifier denotes (or when used honestly denotes) its 'proper' signified—indeed that ownership of this signified is the ultimate criterion in judgments about the truth of a text. But Wilde preempts and undermines the epistemic assumptions through his attachment to the sign itself (*not* the signified) as the locus of value, as if he wanted to turn language itself into the object of spectacle. (Frankel 86)

Decked out in its carnation green silk, the book seduces through the pleasure of material textuality. Wilde's criticism is deployed as a dandiacal text, at once a "private art-as-seduction" for those who understand how to read the surface of its playful inconsistencies and a "public diversion-as-critique" for those not in the know searching for a definitive truth or deeper meaning (Gagnier 46). *Intentions* is, then, an open text, incomplete, in its intending, aiming at, and tending toward but remaining unfinished. Its dialogues exhibit this most clearly on the formal level. The dynamics of dialogue with its multiple points of view are analogous to the dandyist conception of identity as a constant becoming and not "a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence" (*CW* 752).

Dialogues and playtexts are open forms that stage a more embodied narrative; the loss of a unified, authoritative, authorial voice is inherent in the dialogue form and even more so in playwriting.<sup>93</sup> Tracing the different instantiations of Wilde's *Salomé*, as a Symbolist poem, different book editions, a theatrical event, etc., Frankel argues that the play cannot be reduced to "a purely linguistic or theatrical entity—but instead needs to be configured as a field of social differences working in contestation with one another" (49). The field of social differences can refer to the competing ideas of gender and sexuality according to which the figure of the *femme fatale* is understood. In terms of both genre and style, Wilde's *Salomé* is dialogic.

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<sup>93</sup> This dialogic polyvocality of course is not limited to texts that take an explicitly dialogic form. Frankel notes, "any text (but especially a play) inevitably escapes its author's desires for it, and instead finds itself transacted by the dynamics of social exchange" (49).

The mixture of styles heightens the open dialogic aspect of Wilde's *Salomé*. By thematizing the act of interpretation among the characters—for example the different ways they perceive the moon—the play performs an intertextual perspectivism. With Wilde's method of repetition, imitation becomes creation; mimesis becomes poesis. Hence, Wilde chooses the overloaded figure of Salomé for his Symbolist drama in the context of the nineteenth-century obsession with the dancing Princess. In the context of late-nineteenth-century "Salomania," she becomes both a self-referential symbol for the quintessence of Art and, also, a representation of the supposedly natural degeneracy of Woman. Citing Salomé in this context is hardly original in itself and, thus, Wilde's play is easily dismissed as merely derivative by many of his contemporaries. Like the recycled half-century of aestheticism in his critical dialogues (Danson, "Wilde as Critic" 85), Wilde's *Salomé* performs in a context rich with connotation and deeply fragmented by competing ideas of gender and sexuality. The over determined textual and visual field of *fin-de-siècle* Salomé figures provides a richly intertextured stage on which his particular version performs, the theatrical context against which his very different repetition obtains performative force. Rather than recruiting the dancing princess for the cultural work of reifying the social evolutionist image of woman (as a mindlessly repetitive reproductive machine with a child-/savage-like, brutal sexual nature), Wilde's *femme fatale* is virtually queer and posthuman. Those rigid relationships between bodies and desires and texts are loosened, opening up a wider field of possibly new connections and reappropriations.

On the level of language, the paratactic dialogue of Wilde's *Salomé* instances this loosening or virtualization; as the textual body disintegrates so do the bodies, especially

Jokanaan's body, both in a literal sense and figuratively in Salomé's blazons.<sup>94</sup> "The semantic counterpart to this rhythmic suspension of linear syntax and atomistic decomposition of textual wholeness concerns the meaning of the look" (Bernheimer 123). Mimesis is thwarted, decapitated, castrated, set free of determinate referents, the text cancels itself as text to approach desire through mimicry, and parody, and by doing so implicates the audience off stage in the economy of looking on stage. The austere ambiguous stage directions, "Salomé dances the dance of the seven veils," is important here. In reading the first edition of the text of Salomé as a performance, Frankel points to the dance as "almost a figure of imagination, or at least a sign 'in' the work of the moment when the reader's imagination is made most self-conscious" (65). Bernheimer is tempted to think that "Wilde did not describe Salomé's dance precisely in order to maintain ambiguity about just how the author 'looks on' his heroine" (128). How one looks at Salomé, what one projects onto her, is the impetus for the outward reaching indeterminacy, or decadent, Symbolist irresolution, of the play. As Garelick argues, Wilde, "the quintessential mass-culture [decadent] dandy... wrote *Salomé* as something of a dialogue with an audience" (Garelick 135).

#### **WILDE'S SALOMÉ IN LITERARY AND THEATRICAL CONTEXTS**

If *Salomé* is dialogic with respect to its readers-spectators because it takes up the act of interpretation itself, then it also dialogic with respect to the literary styles it engages in the text. In his discussion of the various influences on Wilde's dramatic form, especially in the later plays, Kerry Powell argues that his dramas, including *Salomé*, represent "a dialogue in which Wilde 'answered' his dramatic predecessors" (12). Wilde

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<sup>94</sup> Gail Finney places Salomé's descriptions of Jokanaan's body parts in the tradition of the Renaissance blazon (63).

cites a specific nineteenth-century tradition of Salomé figures; by writing the play in French, he specifically cites contemporary French Symbolist iterations of the dancing princess. He does not obscure his “plagiarism” but foregrounds it instead. The predecessors in the case of *Salomé* are the French Symbolist and decadent writers such as Flaubert, Huysmans, Mallarmé, Gautier, Lorrain, and Belgian playwright Maeterlinck. Indeed, many critics at the time saw the play as either plagiaristically identical to its French forebears or, reportedly much to Wilde’s annoyance, as a parody of them (Powell 38). The play is neither an intended parody nor a worshipful plagiaristic imitation of the French poets whom Wilde admired. Wilde repeats this particular *femme fatale* with a difference, a difference with a vengeance. Wilde’s play engages the figure of Salomé dialogically. He reconfigures the economy of desires in the story so that Salomé is not merely a precious object of erotic fascination. Wilde’s Salomé turns the spectator’s gaze back on itself and on her literary predecessors.

Although we know little about Wilde’s intentions for staging his tragedy, the details we do have can tell us something of the styles of acting and staging the dandy dramatist envisions. To understand the performative difference Wilde’s *Salomé* makes, one might consider the actress he envisioned performing in the role on stage. To this day, critics debate to what degree Wilde wrote the play with actress Sarah Bernhardt in mind. Although Wilde denies that the play was written for Sarah Bernhardt, he repeatedly expresses, in both public and private letters, that she would be the best if not only actress for the part. Powell suggests that Wilde may be a bit disingenuous about not lowering himself to such ‘artisanship’ (*Letters* 336), because he often writes roles tailored for popular actors of the day.<sup>95</sup> Before the censor banned the play, Wilde had already

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<sup>95</sup> Powell cites the examples of Lord Illingworth being seemingly crafted for Duke Guisebury and the manuscript of *Duchess of Padua* on which Wilde wrote “written for Mary Anderson” (41).

engaged Bernhardt and company to perform the play during her 1892 season at the Royal English Opera House (Powell 36).<sup>96</sup> Even if *Salomé* wasn't intended for the stage as Wilde began composing the play, when the idea came to him, he greeted it enthusiastically and seemed to have a fairly clear idea of how it should be staged. And, even if Wilde did not write the play for Bernhardt, he certainly relished the vision of “the divine Sarah” in the role Salomé, a role with which she would be quite at home and with which audiences in Paris and London would be accustomed to seeing her perform.

Powell notes, as Wilde's contemporaries did, that *Salomé* is similar in style and content to the plays of Victorien Sardou who wrote many star-vehicles Bernhardt. “Salomé was to have been another such role [like Cleopatra, Fédora, Tosca, Theodora of Sardou's ‘stagy melodramas’] – so much so that neither Bernhardt nor her stage designer saw any urgent reason why the characters in Wilde's play should not appear in costumes left over from one of Sardou's pieces [*Cléopâtre*]” (Powell 48). Clearly, Wilde was invoking the specific stage type of the fin-de-siècle *femme fatale* and the type of plays in which she appeared again and again, “whose generic characteristics and social *gestalt* he could count on an audience of regular playgoers to understand almost by instinct” (Donohue 86). But, when he cites this *gestalt* he alters her generic characteristics to challenge the audience's instincts. Like the dandy's strategy of cultivating eccentric originality just within the bounds of convention, Sarah Bernhardt performing the *femme-fatale* role represents both a generic type and an idiosyncratic celebrity with her own unique style.

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<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Frankel, on the other hand, criticizes what he sees as an overemphasis on the theatrical aspects of Wilde's play, which he considers more in line with the Symbolist closet drama (such as Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*). Frankel argues that Bernhardt's interest in the play and the censor's banning of it resulted in the understanding that the play's “meanings should be theatrically produced, not textually produced” (53). While Frankel rejects the idea that the play was written for Bernhardt and questions whether it was even intended for the stage, clearly both textual and theatrical aspects bear consideration and, in fact, enliven one another.

In a letter characteristically chastising a critic for getting his views wrong, Wilde writes to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* in February 1892 to clarify his view of actors and acting. The letter was published under the heading “PUPPETS AND ACTORS” and in it Wilde takes up the actor marionette debate (*Letters* 518-20). He objects to the critic who had reported on some “perverse” remarks Wilde had made about the stage namely that it “is only a frame furnished with a set of puppets.” The first part Wilde owns, but he objects to the second part contending that he said the stage was a frame “peopled with either living actors or moving puppets” (519). Prefiguring E. Gordon Craig, he notes the danger of the actor’s personality, which can distort, lead astray the drama itself as a work of art. He continues in this vein, humorously praising the docility, passivity, and their lack of egotistic self-importance: “They [puppets] recognise the presiding intellect of the dramatist, and have never been known to ask for their parts to be written up” (520). He gives a glowing review of a Parisian marionette production of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, and then adds the following caveat: “For modern plays, however, perhaps we had better have living players, for in modern plays actuality is everything. The charm—the ineffable charm—of the unreal is here denied us, and rightly” (520). Ever in dandyist fashion, Wilde asserts a fairly naturalist doctrine of the stage wherein “actuality is everything.” But the modern plays of which he speaks are not necessarily dramatic works of art as the only two nineteenth-century English-language plays that qualify as “great plays” are Shelley’s *Cenci* and Swinburne’s *Atalanta in Calydon* (both banned “closet” dramas like *Salomé*). He asserts that the actability of a play has nothing to do with its artistic merit and in so doing pits the actable play against the artistic one.

The implication is, then, that artistic plays might be better staged with puppets, actors—devoid of personality and star-quality—made expressly to act their parts, so as not to distort and lead astray the poetry. One might argue that *Salomé* falls into the

artistic rather than the actable/modern category. Yet, the enthusiasm with which Wilde greeted Sarah Bernhardt's acceptance of the play into her 1892 season, problematizes such a view, as the actress was infamous for taking similar characters from a variety of dramatic texts and settings branding them with her own quite distinct style characterized by a monotone chanting. On the other hand, Bernhardt's repertoire of *femme fatale* characters and her unwavering acting style, in some sense, make the actress seem somewhat of a puppet, a puppet especially well crafted for such a role as *Salomé*, and one that came with a ready set of appropriate costumes. Ever the provocateur, Wilde is impossible to pin down on this point, which is perhaps the point. He cites a recognizable strategem of theater criticism to satirize and unsettle the terms of this aesthetic debate. In the figure of Bernhardt one can see the tension between absolutely recognizable type of the orientalized decadent *fin-de-siècle femme fatale*, but also a highly idiosyncratic and one-of-a-kind performer who would not have been confused with another. *Salomé*, as a "great play" and work of art, is not a play in which actuality is everything; rather, Wilde's citation of the popular *fin-de-siècle* figure calls for pointedly artificial acting and staging styles.

As Charles Bernheimer argues "Although... many of the fears generated by the *fin de siècle* crisis of masculine identity were projected onto the figure of Salome, there can be just as little doubt that this projection rapidly became a popular style of representation rather than the felt expression of a cultural malaise" (106). *Salomé* was indeed "the Decadent ideal," but that ideal—if not *Salomé* herself, one of her *femme-fatale* sisters—was appearing in the flesh on the stages of Europe with increasing frequency and popularity. Thus, Wilde has a certain type of actress and performance style in mind as he cites the French Symbolist versions of *Salomé*. Wilde's *Salomé* brings together the two distinct, but not unrelated, realms of high art and popular

entertainment, of male-dominated Symbolist poetry and the popular female performer on stage. Bernhardt's performances of exotic *femme fatales*—just as much as the poetry of Flaubert and Mallarmé—are part of the theatricality already on stage in which Wilde's iteration performs, performatively altering the conventional networks of assumptions and associations. Dislodging Naturalist and Idealist ways of seeing Salomé, he virtualizes this *femme fatale* by loosening the relationships of texts to personas (utterances to specific characters), and of desires to bodies. He frustrates any stable one-to-one relationships introducing vertiginous alterity of possible relationships between texts, bodies, and desires. He exposes and transvalues the artificiality of the stereotype, making it into a virtual space for cultural renegotiation and reappropriation of 'unnatural' 'pathological' gender identities and sexual desires.

In terms of the play's dialogue, the clipped, repetitive style of Wilde's French would seem to be perfect for Bernhardt's trademark monotone chanting style (Powell 5). The marked subordination of the dramatic text, or narrative aspect of the drama, to the visual and nonverbal aural, i.e. on bodies and voices, also connects Wilde's play to the avant-garde, Symbolist stage. I have already noted Wilde's widely discussed debt to the continental Symbolists such as Flaubert (*Hérodiade*), Huysmans (*A Rebours*), Heine (*Atta Troll*), Gautier (*Mademoiselle de Maupin*), and especially Maeterlinck (*La Princesse Maleine*) for *Salomé's* choppy language, rhythmic sentences, emphasis on emblematic spectacle, tableaux, etc. Wilde adapts the popular fin-de-siècle icon of Salomé to make the play his own and in doing so alters the *femme-fatale* myth by throwing the oppositions that traditionally frame the dancing *femme fatale* into question. Garelick argues that he wrote it, not as Mallarmé wrote *Hérodiade*, for a private exclusive salon audience, but for the theater-going crowds, both English and Parisian, who regularly attended the sold-out performances of Bernhardt in her notorious *femme-*

*fatale* roles (134). Analogous to the play's mixing of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and sexual, Wilde envisions a combination of the elite and the popular.

In an attempt to explain Wilde's tricky relationship with Symbolist poetics, Austin Quigley sees *Salomé* as the work of a "skeptical Symbolist dramatist" (116).<sup>97</sup> Quigley argues that Wilde's skeptical Symbolism gestures backward to Naturalism and forward to Expressionism.<sup>98</sup> His approach invokes the Wagnerian tradition of total theater with its emphasis on synaesthetic effects, while conversely attention is called to the stage as a frame. Wilde's stylistic approach in *Salomé* is one of tentative enquiry rather than definitive statement (Quigley 107). Donohue suggests that we understand Wilde's dramatic oeuvre in conjunction with the figure of the dandy. For Donohue, Wilde creates in the mode of a "dandy-Symbolist" in his treatment of the Salomé theme: "The plagiaristic, parodic, or otherwise imitative tendencies of the play occur as a result of the activities of the dandy-artist" (Donohue 91). Given the dandy's penchant for superficializing the serious, a dandy-Symbolist approach draws attention to the play of surfaces, the texture and intertextuality of its language rather than a hidden, deeper 'meaning.' Here style becomes the paramount issue and the dialogic aspect of particular stylistic deployments (in specific social networks) come to the fore. In this reading, *Salomé* cannot be understood as purely Symbolist but rather as citing, repeating and displacing, that stylistic mode.

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<sup>97</sup> "The play offers, instead, another kind of mingling of parts, one that relies upon color, rhythm, contradiction, and polyphony to raise the possibility of access to something that is other than the sum of the play's various parts. The tradition of total theater is invoked not to create the possibility for comprehensive statement but to provide access to new forms of partial awareness" (Quigley 106-7).

<sup>98</sup> The rhetorical display of Salomé's blazons is entirely dissociated from its object, Jokanaan's body, denaturalizing it, while her demands (to touch Jokanaan, to see him, to have his head) are delivered in "a mimetic language that offers an illusion of presence, both of a psychological subject and a natural object" (Bernheimer 124-5). The psychological subject and the natural object echo Quigley's argument that the play spans the space between Naturalism and Expressionism.

The tension between styles displays the dialogic aspect of the play; but it is not only a dialogue with his literary predecessors as both Garelick and Powell point out. The play is also a dialogue—a confrontational and scandal-provoking one at that—with the audience. After the stage production is banned and the book version published, Wilde writes to Campbell Dodgson personifying the book as, “That tragic daughter of passion,” who, “appeared on Thursday last, and is now dancing for the head of the English public” (*Letters* 555-6). The work itself becomes the seductive princess and the public becomes the moralistic, logocentric prophet that will soon lose his head as a result of her dancing.

How the audience ‘sees’ Salomé corresponds to how they interpret the play. The role of the audience in interpreting the play and its heroine is emphasized through the unresolved stylistic tensions.

For the issue that confronts the audience in perceptual terms – looking, projecting, revealing – is directly related to the issue of how we regard Salomé in spiritual terms, of where we locate her on the spectrum of human value, and this is, in turn, directly related to the issue of how we regard the play in theatrical terms, of how we distinguish and relate the modes of attention that we now associate with naturalism, Symbolism, and expressionism. (Quigley 113)

If one reads the play as Naturalist, a somewhat acrobatic stance given the pointedly anti-Naturalist style of the text, Salomé will appear to the Naturalist gaze as the essentialized, naturalized figure of the bestially sexual woman; if one reads the play as a Symbolist piece, Salomé becomes a screen onto which the metaphysical mysteries of beauty and the inexpressible are projected; if one reads the play as (proto)expressionist, the inner psychological truths of the pathological princess will be revealed. Whether or not one agrees with Quigley’s particular configuration of competing styles and corresponding visions of Salomé, the important point he makes is that the play dramatizes the act of seeing or interpreting, and, in doing so, confronts the audience with their presuppositions

not only about theater and representation, but also about gender and sexuality of the *femme-fatale* body on stage.

This open-dialogic aspect of the play's style can also be noted in the few sketchy ideas Wilde has for staging the piece. Contrary to Wagner's idea of the seamless unity of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* illusion, which Wilde characteristically invokes and displaces, the dandy dramatist blurs the traditional theatrical boundaries and makes the audience aware of the artifice. As Brad Bucknell argues, "Wilde's use of internal focalizers raises serious questions about the possibility of clear seeing as such..." because there is "almost no one in the play who is not involved in some type of projection, some kind of complex interplay between the eye and the object of vision" (515). In his early discussions with Charles Ricketts over possible stage designs for *Salomé*, Wilde was very much concerned with the appropriate placement of the cistern and the stairs, the two major features of the set (Cave 177). The cistern is one example of blurring the stage boundaries in that it brings an off stage space onto the stage. The cistern, as a giant eye, looks back at the looking onstage and so contributes to the staging of looking itself. The cistern as giant orifice, a penetrable object of desire, aligns the audience, at least in part, with Jokanaan's body as object of *Salomé*'s desire. As Cave argues, the sparse set "immediately focuses attention on the cistern and invests it with a symbolic intensity that carries political, psychological, and erotic resonances" (177). Attention is paradoxically focused on this invisible area apparently beneath the stage, and, as if in looking for the deeper meaning below the surface of the stage, the audience finds itself in, of all places, a cistern, a "strange," "unhealthy" prison (CW 554). Wilde warns his readers, in the preface to *Dorian Gray*, that, "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril" (CW 17). He dramatizes this admonition in *Salomé* not only in the dialogue but also the stage design with the cistern as a focal point.

For all but the brief scene of Salomé's blazons, Jokanaan is hidden in the dark cistern from which his lines emanate; the gazes of the other characters and of the audience are drawn to the cistern as a stand-in for his body. When he is not visible but only audible, the cistern serves as a giant mouth issuing his prophecies and damnations. As such, the cistern is both the locus of the raw corporeal with its associations with mouths and other orifices: Jokanaan's shaft-like body goes in and out of it, and with his final entrance his head comes out on the end of the executioner's huge black arm). A parody of Plato's cave, the cistern is paradoxically the site of 'loftier' metaphysical and spiritual claims, of things that cannot be seen (only heard) just as the Jews in the play are said to believe only in that which they cannot see; it is the place from which the chaste prophet proclaims the coming of Christ and also the place where Jokanaan's dead, headless body is left behind. The Cistern represents a radical mixture of the spiritual and the sensual. In terms of its metacommentary on how one looks at Salomé, in which interpretive framework one views it, the cistern can be seen simultaneously as the locus of deep corporeal truth and as the locus of spiritual/metaphysical truth; both are left behind in the cistern, the strange, unhealthy prison of monolithic interpretive frameworks. That Jokanaan's head is severed from his body is not a repudiation of material corporeality, because his disembodied head becomes the object of erotic, physical desire for Salomé. While Salomé takes idealism's severed head, the head becomes a 'truth' virtualized in a destabilized field of relations that are no longer secured by metaphysical hierarchies nor by Naturalist biological-physiological-empirical truth located in the privileged white male body. Mind is not simply valorized over body, because the bloody, gore-covered head retains a physical corporeality; it is an emblem of the aggressive blending of high and low, of spirit and flesh, of religion and sex, of tragedy and parody.

Wilde blurs the boundaries of the stage in other elements of stage design as well. The few remaining details of Wilde's vision for staging the play appear in Rickett's account of his and Wilde's conversations about a possible production of *Salomé*. Wilde imagined the sky as rich turquoise broken up by perpendicular strips of gilded Japanese matting to form an aerial tent (Cave 177). As Garelick argues, "Such decadent concepts for the staging of the play reach out to the audience and pull it into the rarified world of the decadent dandy" (148). The braziers of perfume that Wilde envisioned replacing the orchestra might have also served to blur the boundary between stage and audience. As a diaphanous curtain, at once concealing and revealing, like the seven veils, "Wilde's braziers would treat as a dancing princess not only the entire stage, which would be drenched in perfume, but the audience as well, for its members would be equally scented, even after leaving the theater" (Garelick 148). In its mingling of styles and blurring of boundaries Wilde's *Salomé* transforms the interior into exterior and depth into surface and in so doing confronts the "audience's outer sanctum of bourgeois constraints and respectability" with the ornate inner sanctum of the decadent dandy. Scents are at once otherworldly, ephemeral, associated with religious ritual and at the same time erotic, sensual, and physiologically sexual. And just as the cistern helps implicate the audience in the economy of looking onstage, the perfumes Wilde imagines would implicate them in Salomé's transgressive sexuality even after they left the theater.

With *Salomé* Wilde confronts his audiences and implicates them in the action of his play by aggressively dramatizing competing models of interpretation. Using a recognizable palate of literary and dramatic styles, he engages his predecessors and his audiences in a dialogue through this popular, iconic story. His innovations appear in relief against the background of such a familiar milieu. The dialogue of the play, the refrains about different ways of looking, and the mixture of competing styles all

contribute to this dialogic confrontation. Although easily read as Symbolist play, Wilde engages that style with the incisive and skeptical wit of the dandy. He provokes spectators confronting them with their assumptions about what they are seeing. Rather than a portrayal of some imagined essence of Woman or of a contemporary type of woman, Wilde's heroine is virtually queer. She has no counterpart in life; if she did, Wilde would not have written about her. "The supreme pleasure in literature is to realise the non-existent" Wilde wrote in defense of *Dorian Gray* (*Letters* 430). In the terms of this project, that pleasure might be described as imagining a Salomé yet-to-come, one that frustrates any moralistic, scientific, or idealistic reduction of her story according to conventional ideas about gender and sexuality.

### **SALOMÉ'S VIRTUALLY QUEER BODIES**

As "the true centerpiece of male masochistic fantasies," the alluring yet deadly figure of Salomé dances around the late nineteenth century crisis of male gender and sexual identity, often embodying a desire to contain female sexuality by naturalizing it as bestial evil (Dijkstra 397). The emerging women's movement of the late nineteenth century, which facilitated women entering the workplace and the public sphere, posed an increasing threat the old order of masculine privilege and, as Dijkstra shows, a flood of artistic reactions sought to contain that threat. Just as Kleist's *Penthesilea* has been interpreted as an expression of misogyny or gynophobia, Wilde's *Salomé* has also been seen as a misogynist portrayal of Woman. Bram Dijkstra makes this argument and presents a wealth of evidence for his case in the painting and literature of fin-de-siècle Europe; his case for the general function of the *femme fatale* figure is persuasive. However, he sees Wilde's Salomé as merely reinforcing the negative, gynophobic stereotype, reading Herod's last lines—in rather frothy hyperbole—as Wilde's own call

for gynocide.<sup>99</sup> He lumps Wilde in with his contemporaries and predecessors, failing to explore the differences between them.<sup>100</sup> Dijkstra's reading of the play as a call to gynocide fails to recognize, not only Wilde's sympathy with the women's movement<sup>101</sup> and his paradoxical dandyist approach to Symbolist theater, but also the most important features of Wilde's character Salomé: She refuses the conventional feminine self-abnegation and self-sacrifice and defiantly eroticizes Jokanaan (Donohue 98). For Dijkstra, Wilde embraces both Symbolist and Naturalist concepts of Woman and female sexuality as perversely degenerate, as über-materialist in stark opposition to superior male spirituality. His reading assumes that the author, and subsequently the spectator, identifies with the prophet and with Herod. As Charles Bernheimer argues, in the context of *fin-de-siècle* Salomania, the figure of Salomé had become more than just an expression of cultural malaise and masculine identity crisis; she had become an appropriable fashionable icon of decadence associated with popular female performers.

Although, the vampiric blood lust and the decapitation she demands suggest the trope of the castrating woman, Wilde's Salomé subversively cites this particular *fin-de-siècle* network of associations and displaces strictly Symbolist or Naturalist interpretations. Bernheimer reads *fin-de-siècle* Salomé myths as fantasies of castration

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<sup>99</sup> "Wilde's play is a very carefully designed dramatization of the struggle between the bestial hunger of woman and the idealistic yearnings of man. The play works up to a conclusion in which the masculine mind is led, through temptation and submission, to an understanding of the need for woman's immediate physical destruction. In Wilde's symbolic drama a wholesale manipulation of the image of woman as aggressor serves as a cleansing ritual of passage designed to expose her mindless perfidy and insatiable physical need. As such the work climaxes in a categorical renunciation of any communication between male and female, and, in effect, becomes a call to gynocide" (Dijkstra 396)

<sup>100</sup> "Salome, the evil woman, became their [fin-de-siècle male artists including Wilde] favorite scapegoat, became the creature whose doings might explain why the millennium, that glorious world of the mind's transcendence over matter, did not seem to loom as near as their impatient souls desired" (Dijkstra 398).

<sup>101</sup> Margaret Diane Stetz makes a convincing case for considering Wilde's 'bi-sociality' by pointing to his involvement with and support of professional women of his time: "Indeed, few prominent men of the day did more than Wilde to encourage the ambitions of female artists and to promote their access to the public sphere or to influence the social climate in ways beneficial to middle- and upper-middle-class women seeking advancement or financial independence" (519).

applied simultaneously to the realms of subjectivity and of language, arguing that, “For the decadent male creator, Salome is the muse of negation, the siren of death. When she inhabits the psyche, she drives it to sadomasochistic splitting; when she inhabits language, she drives it to compulsive reflexivity” (138). As castrator of the subject, the figure of Salome shatters coherent identity of male mastery, and, as castrator of language, she cancels writing as mimesis, enclosing it in Symbolist self-reflexivity. Following Bernheimer, these castrating figures tend to construct woman as a feared and animalistic object of nature while opening up the negative possibilities for the male (artist) subject construction.<sup>102</sup> In the trope of castration, Bernheimer detects a potentially liberating negativity or denaturalizing of the male subject, but only retrograde and misogynist naturalizing woman as essentially lacking. Fernbach reconsiders the image of Salomé as the castrating woman, but widens the possibility of identifications in her psychoanalytic reading of Wilde’s play:

In *Salomé* the phallogentric order is threatened only so that it may ultimately be reinstated; this is the conservative dynamic of the play. However, because of the fluidity of gender and sexualities within *Salomé*, its fetishistic imagery generates a plurality of erotic meanings and fantasies that are not limited to the framework of male heterosexual desire. (Fernbach 197)

She notes the conservative dynamic in many of the same features Bernheimer rightly assigns to the Naturalist aspects. However, the fluidity of gender and sexualities, what Garelick sees as the “communal nature of desire” in the play, frustrates viewing Salomé’s body exclusively within a male heterosexual framework (or as purely Naturalist or Symbolist). The detachment of signifier from signified, and the continual metaphoric

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<sup>102</sup> “Castration offers both an essentialist interpretation of woman’s lack, which justifies the misogyny so characteristic of decadent sensibilities, and a constructivist interpretation of the male subject as a mobile play of identifications and reflections. Hence the crucial role of castration as the foremost trope of decadence: it is at once naturalizing and denaturalizing; it insists on the most retrograde misogynist ideology, yet it opens a radically new view of the operations of negativity in the psyche” (Bernheimer 117).

displacements of bodies and body parts, generates a plurality of possible erotic meanings coded within the text itself and, yet, dependent on the audience's ability to recognize those codes. Wilde's *Salomé* is not reducible to mere object of the scopophilic gaze; she is also the subject of the gaze and the maker of metaphors, and as such she performs a significant inversion of gender and sexual desire.

In *Sexual Dissidence*, Jonathan Dollimore sees Wilde as a proto-deconstructionist and argues for the value of inversion as a crucial step in the deconstructive project of displacing the "violent hierarchy" of binary logic.<sup>103</sup> He argues that "Wilde's inversion, operating to subvert a deeply conservative authenticity and the deep subjectivity on which it is premised, were overturnings in Derrida's sense" (65). Thus *Salomé*'s position as sexual aggressor and metaphor-maker, in addition to the play's deprivileging of underlying, deep meaning in relation to surface textures and movements, represents an overturning of conventional logocentric hierarchies. Dollimore contrasts Wilde's dandyist mode of expression to André Gide's adoption of the discourse of depth, sincerity, and authenticity pit against a superficial, insincere, affected and fake society. As his critical writings demonstrate, Wilde refuses to adopt the discourse of authenticity and naturalness. He does not argue that 'perverse' sexual desire is in fact natural, but instead his "transgressive desire" is "both rooted in culture and the impetus for affirming different/alternative kinds of culture" (15). Dollimore continues,

... It is because and not in spite of this shared cultural dimension that Wilde can enact one of the most disturbing of all forms of aggression, namely that whereby the outlaw turns up as inlaw, and the other as proximate proves more disturbing than the other as absolute difference. (15)

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<sup>103</sup> Fernbach notes that "Dollimore... sees Wilde's 'transgressive aesthetic'... as anticipating contemporary theoretical critiques of subjective depth such as deconstruction and postmodernism, and I would argue that this holds true for *Salomé*" (196).

The repeated refrains of dialogue that move among various characters—for example Naraboth, Salomé, and Herod—decenter any notion of stable of subjectivity and deconstruct absolute sexual difference. Hence the supposed ‘natural’ female perversity of Salomé as absolute other to the respectable bourgeois male subject breaks down. She turns up as a much more threatening, because proximate, outlaw as in-law. Salomé cannot be simply or diametrically opposed Jokanaan or any of the other male figures in the play. Salomé’s hybrid proximity problematizes the concept of the body as organic-mechanical site of sexual truth and performatively undermines absolute sexual difference. In its transgression and dissolution of such boundaries, Salomé’s body performs the virtually posthuman.<sup>104</sup> Her desires burst the contours of Woman and violently dismantle the idealized, normative male body. The final scene of execution represents an attempt to contain this bursting forth, to reinstate the ‘natural’ corporeal contours of Woman; Salomé is crushed beneath shields, compressed to death by the soldiers’ protective barriers, a feminized mode of execution performed on the female by the males.

### **THE MANY MOONS OF SALOMÉ**

In *Rising Star*, Garelick argues that all of the characters in the play blend into one another, that “It almost ceases to matter who is speaking, since the dialogue seems to live an independent life, detached from speakers’ individual motives or psychology” (135). The qualification ‘almost’ is important here, because it does matter whose body performs the dialogue onstage. Garelick is right about the “enchained repetitions” of the text, in which many different characters speak similar or occasionally identical lines. But it seems the important point is that they are the similar lines from very different embodied

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<sup>104</sup> Here, “insincerity, inauthenticity, and unnaturalness become the liberating attributes of decentered identity and desire” (Dollimore 14).

perspectives. Where and in what manner they differ, even if they differ slightly, does matter. Signs are loosened from their referents, and desires from individual bodies, but, unlike Jokanaan's head, they are not entirely severed. For example, Herod, Salomé, Naraboth, the Page, and Herodias all repeat similar refrains about the moon; yet they all see different things in the moon, projecting onto it what they think they see. These overlapping projections invite the spectators to reflect on their interpretive assumptions. As Bucknell argues, "this turn toward the symbolic is the intrusion of the eye upon the surface. There is no sense of the 'natural' here. 'Meaning' intrudes from outside the surface, from the beholder" (516). The repetitive structure, then, implicates the audience by frustrating any one stable way of seeing Salomé.

The repeated utterances of the play do not represent a leveling of all desires into a sameness or conformity; rather they introduce subtle differences in shading that defy black-and-white oppositions between the different figures of the play. Colors are assigned to different objects and bodies and, rather than marking them as distinct, the colors create networks of non-oppositional relations between the different figures in the play. How the different characters describe the moon demonstrates this constant shifting of light and shadow. Herodias' Page is the first to draw our attention to the moon; for the Page, the moon has a "strange look" of a "woman rising from a tomb," "a dead woman looking for dead things" (552). The Page repeats this description with a slight alteration; the moon becomes "the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud" (557). The way the Page sees the moon matches his repeated intuition that some misfortune will happen; he does not give the moon any color and is only ever a sign of impending doom for him. When he describes the Syrian, his object desire, he only reports the jewelry he wears and the sounds of his voice. For the Page, the Syrian was the dead thing the moon was looking for, and his misfortune was to be seen by the moon

and by association Salomé; looking and being seen are both fatal for the Syrian. The moon and Salomé are most closely associated in the Page's view of things. But this is only one part of the circulating moon and color metaphors.

The Syrian sees the moon as "strange" as well, but, for him, it is like a "little princess" dancing on dove-like "feet of silver" wearing a "yellow veil" (552). He repeats this description of the moon as a "little princess" this time with "eyes of amber" smiling through "clouds of muslin" (557). The moon as princess is an explicit comparison to Salomé; yet, the similarities between the Syrian's descriptions of the moon and of Salomé diverge. While he sees Salomé only in terms of images of white and silver,<sup>105</sup> he sees the moon with yellow eyes and veil. The tinge of yellow distinguishes Salomé from the moon. The color yellow connects the moon to the Jews who are dressed in yellow, creating faint links between the moon, Salomé and the Jews. It also evokes the poisonous yellow book on which Dorian Gray models his decadent persona. Wilde invokes a network of associations between homosexuals, Jews, and the Avant Garde, all understood as decadent and perverted, that will be reinforced by Max Reinhardt's Berlin production. These transvalued stereotypes form a set of subcultural literary codes that Wilde exploits in the text of the play.

There is a closer relation in the way Salomé describes Jokanaan and the moon than in the way the Syrian describes Salomé and the moon. Salomé only looks at the moon once; she sees "a piece of money," "a little silver flower," a "cold and chaste" virgin (555). After that the object of her gaze is almost exclusively Jokanaan. She is immediately repulsed by his "terrible" eyes, which are like "black lakes troubled by fantastic moons" (558). Salomé then associates the moon with his ivory and silver body

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<sup>105</sup> For the Syrian, Salomé is pale like the "shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver" (553). She has white hands like "doves" and "white butterflies;" he compares her to a dove, "a silver flower" and a narcissus trembling in the wind" (554-55).

“chaste as the moon” and “like a moonbeam” (558). In effect, she identifies Jokanaan with herself via images of the moon and purity. Again, this complicates any reading that would strictly oppose the two characters. That description of Jokanaan is displaced by another set of blazons enumerating his beauties in terms of white and black; both are then transvalued and used to describe his ugliness. These constantly displaced repetitions thematize the impossibility of assigning any equivalence between the moon and one particular character. The erotic desire in these descriptions and moon comparisons is dispersed onto the various bodies as objects of desire and of fear.

As the most explicitly homosexual character, it is interesting that, while he joins in the metaphor-making gazing at the moon with Naraboth, the Page does not do so when he talks about the Syrian, his object of desire. He only reports on the gifts he had given him (homosexual codes—perfume, earrings, etc.), the walks they used to take, his narcissism, and, most notably, his voice, which is low, yet like a flute, or like the voice of a flute player. The musical voice aligns the Page’s desire for Naraboth with Salomé’s desire for Jokanaan, both illicit desires. Noting the exchangeability of the repeated similes and metaphors, Garelick argues,

Just as no particular referent needs to be attached to the constant metaphors, so does Salomé need no particular body part of Jokanaan’s. It is the play of metaphor that matters here; referent is immaterial. The physical body is fragmented and dissolved, ceding its place to the body of metaphor. (139)

Just as Salomé is fragmented into hands and feet that are like doves, flowers, and butterflies, Jokanaan is fragmented into figures of his eyes, body, hair, and mouth. While Herod’s and Naraboth’s metaphorizing of Salomé occupies a few lines here and there, Salomé’s blazoning of Jokanaan occupies the play’s center. Her thoroughgoing dismantling of Jokanaan ends in his decapitation. Following Bernheimer’s suggestion that Salomé castrates the mimetic power of language, one can read her love of his voice

as “music” and “perfumes and strange music” as her refusal to hear his logocentric language. Jokanaan repeatedly condemns Salomé in none too flattering terms, yet she hears music; she chooses surface over depth, the materiality of the voice rather than the meanings of the words.

The effect of these shifting repetitions thematizes the act of interpretation and frustrates any one stable way of seeing the bodies on stage. It dramatizes a play of surfaces, shifting colors and sensations that deny any underlying metaphysical or natural truths. The stylistic hybridity and instability manifests itself in the different modes of seeing within the play. For Herodias, “the moon is like the moon, that is all” (561). But her injunction to see simply what is there has little effect and becomes only one limited way of seeing. The way bodies are viewed in the play dramatizes the subjective nature of seeing and throws into question the nature of what one sees. Depending on who views her, Salomé’s body is pure, virginal, corrupt, vile, bloodlessly pale, bloodily inflamed, and in Herod’s final pronouncement “monstrous” (574). None of these views of Salomé is ultimately authentic or natural; all are artificial and so resist the reductive model of absolute sexual difference based in the model of machine physiology. Wilde does not disavow bodies to create a drama of the mind or of metaphysics; bodies are all over the place, desiring, bleeding, and dying. But they are never merely material or exclusively determined biological objects; rather they are always already caught up in webs of signification of repetitions that constantly shift across their surfaces. In this sense, then, Salomé’s body is virtually queer and posthuman in that her sex materializes as a stage effect rather than a deep corporeal truth.

The problem of Salomé’s “invisible dance” comes into sharper focus with this tension between the puppets body and Bernhardt’s, especially if one considers Salomé as proximate in-law rather than absolute other. As Bernheimer points out:

As the subject of the gaze and the creator of metaphors, Salome takes over this male position. Thus gender identities are detached from essentialist definitions, and Salome, the archetypal femme fatale, becomes 'like' a man, a homosexual in love with a man who rejects his passion. (125)

Indeed, Wilde "infused his dramatic character with an extrascenic identity that exceeds the fictional boundaries of her character" (Garellick 145). Wilde's dandy persona shades into the fictional figure of Salomé: "In having Salome promise the carnation, Wilde allies her with his own public personality as dandy and gay man" (Garellick 144). Worn by homosexuals in Paris at the time, the "green carnation was the emblem of the aesthetic movement, of decadent dandyism" and of the artifice over nature credo (Garellick 144). Again Wilde blurs the boundaries between his public persona and his fictional creation. In this sense the striptease must remain a tease rather than a full exposure of flesh.

In Wilde's *Salomé* the dance of the seven veils is also the dance of gender and desire... Her dance signifies gender undecidability and subsequently allows for the masked expression of gay erotics, as the body of a potentially male Salomé is eroticized through the sexually charged dance. As a fetishistic or male homosexual fantasy, Salomé's dance has the power to seduce only while a last veil remains. (Fernbach 201)

Hence, although he was not entirely pleased with Beardsley's drawings for the first English edition of *Salomé*, Wilde wrote that he was the only artist who truly understood the dance of the seven veils. As a performance of gender undecidability, the dance reverses the naturalization of Salomé; she must remain defiantly artificial, a seductive surface hinting at a depth never fully revealed. She cannot be naturalized as woman, or as any one nationality, neither completely French nor English nor Irish. In dandyist fashion, Wilde creates a paradoxically perverse version of Salomé that destabilizes the ontological foundations of sexual dimorphism by dramatizing competing epistemologies, not as opposites, but overlapping proximates.

The Wilde bodies I have considered here are virtually queer and posthuman; they problematize both Idealist metaphysics and Naturalist empiricism both of which claim to provide explanations and justifications for gender roles and sexual desire. Wilde refuses to adopt such models even in the service of valorizing same sex desire or furthering progressive political causes. He strikes the pose of the dandy aesthete to transvalue the terms of these debates, not to provide a final answer but to spur audiences to question their basic assumptions about Nature and Truth. He cites received aesthetic dictums and in doing so transforms them, augmenting their performative force for the purpose of social critique. The dialogue form allows him to explore the paradoxes and politics of aestheticism without simply subscribing to one viewpoint or another. He cites the *fin de siècle*'s most famous *femme fatale* to provoke readers and spectators to question their own interpretive frameworks, frameworks that routinely rely on the medical model of absolute sexual difference. He engages Symbolist dramatic style in a skeptical and dandiacal way to confront the audience with their misogynistic suppositions about the alluring and deadly princess. In doing so, he envisions theories of embodiment yet to come, ones that need not rely on the foundations of Classical metaphysics or medical science. Wilde bodies, then, represent a dialogic discursive practice for which posthuman and queer models of embodiment are the desired objects.

### **Staging Artificial Bodies: Virtuality, Theatricality, and Technology**

As I have argued, Kleist and Wilde engage in the problematics of the body as a site, which determines gender and sexuality. I have examined how Kleist and Wilde's citations of the *femme fatale* work at the textual level in the contexts of their initial

creation and publication.<sup>106</sup> Kleist cites a figure on the margins of Classicism, an infamous other to Classicism's Laocoon or the idealized antiquity of the eighteenth century that would come to provide the authoritative undergirding for regulatory discourses defining bourgeois normativity. In citing the Amazon queen, he also assaults the conventional understanding of gender and sexuality being rigorously relegitimated according to a model of incommensurability of the sexes based on empirical evidence of the physiological sciences of the day. At the end of the century, Wilde cites a figure on the margins of Christianity, an old-testament other to the bible's more celebrated new-testament heroines, the virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene for example, as a clearly recognizable *fin-de-siècle* decadent *gestalt*. In citing the dancing princess of Judea and thematizing the act of spectatorship, he dislodges Idealist and Naturalist ways of seeing Salomé's body.

Both Kleist and Wilde set out to provoke scandals with these plays and succeed to such a degree that the plays are deemed unperformable by the majority of their contemporaries (Nutz 199, Powell 36). What is equally important to understanding the Max Reinhardt productions of both plays, as well as later twentieth century receptions, is how by the beginning of the twentieth century both authors and their works are made into exemplary types of sexual pathology and deviance, so that the performances of their plays evoke a whole cluster of associations, which are transformed on stage. This cluster of associations around the *femme fatale* characters and their sexually perverse authors plays out in terms of distinctions between the natural and the artificial. They are deployed in the context of inventing new kinds of theater and imagining new modes of embodiment yet-to-come.

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<sup>106</sup> Again, I use the term cite in the Derridean sense of simultaneous invoking and displacing, or reframing of what is cited.

The texts and authors for this study, were chosen because the relationships of text and context and of text to author are of central import, given that they have been appropriated for different purposes and under the auspices of competing literary and critical schools, who claim Kleist and Wilde as forebears or precursors. Not only are the interrelationships of their texts and lives of interest, but also the ways in which they have been marginalized, repudiated/denounced as pathological and decadent, and simultaneously taken up, lionized, and canonized. At this juncture, Wilde and Kleist have moved closer to the center of the canon, or their respective canons, and not just in British and German literary studies, but also in the overlapping fields of performance and theater studies. It is important to consider the appeal of their aesthetics and texts to current theoretical movements and debates, to understand the contexts in which they will have already been taken up, celebrated, demonized, diagnosed, appropriated, and re-deployed for strategical purposes at the beginning of the last century and at the beginning of this century; this goes for their critical works, their plays and stories, as well as their biographies.

By producing these plays, Reinhardt and company summon Kleist or Wilde at a time in which they are understood by many to represent manifestations of Expressionist *Nervenkunst* or of the hysterical male for Kleist, and the decadent-dandy-aesthete or of the homosexual-pervert-degenerate for Wilde. Such associations obviously work differently for different audiences. They can reinforce existing norms or call them into question. The question here will be how might those citations have performed for the audiences of Reinhardt's avant-garde theaters in pre-war Berlin. Kleist and Wilde get cited, their texts adapted to the contemporary performance behavior of pre-WWI German-language (and wider European) avant-garde theater from which Reinhardt draws to form his eclectic and experimental style. The performative force of staging

*Penthesilea* or *Salomé* is partly constituted by the gap between the text (both the play text and the text of the authors' lives and what they are understood to represent) and the transformations of them on stage. The bodies of the actresses playing these roles (or potentially playing them) Gertrud Eysoldt and Sarah Bernhardt and the various roles already associated with their careers and celebrity personae create a field of similar, linked citations of *femme fatales*. These productions are thus haunted by their perverse authors and by the other similar roles for which these female performers were famous.<sup>107</sup>

Reinhardt's productions of *Penthesilea* and *Salomé* are iterations that transform the texts they cite—the figure of Kleist as well as his play, the figure of Wilde and the text of his play—reiterating their own regimes. As Worthen argues “these regimes can be understood to cite—or, perhaps subversively, to resignify—social and behavioral practices that operate outside the theater and that constitute contemporary social life” (1098). So how might have regimes like Reinhardt's have cited (and perhaps subversively resignified) social and behavioral practices for women, and for lesbian and gay audiences? They potentially open up a space for imagining new kinds of social behavior and new kinds of embodiment and they also potentially cite and further naturalize connections between homosexuals, perverts, Jews, and the avant-garde for audiences who want to defend and uphold the existing social structures. In terms of

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<sup>107</sup> I refer to Marvin Carlson's idea of “the haunted stage,” in which “the recycled body of an actor, already a complex bearer of semiotic messages, will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles” (8). Because Kleist and Wilde had themselves become representative types based the diagnoses of the two plays discussed here, the two perverse authors ghost or haunt the posthumous productions of their scandalous plays. See also Avital Ronell's *Dictations, On Haunted Writing*, especially her chapter entitled “The Farbenlehre or ‘When Pac Man Eats a Power Pill, the Ghosts Become a Transparent Blue Color’” (139-146). She takes up many of the same issues of haunting authors, literary paternity, perception, the body, and technology: “But this writing takes as its point of departure the remoteness of the original author, the incalculable distance of the one who dictates... the cases which concern us have in this respect the privilege of supposing a primary gap between the text and the source; and this gap repels the source itself toward a place where it can take the form of a genuinely mythological constellation, enabling it to exercise from a distance an inordinate force: Goethe is no longer for Freud and Eckermann a simple text—if such a thing exists—but a text, amplified, so to speak, by myth and biography” (Ronell xvi).

audience, these *femme fatales* cite the contemporary fascination with the hysterical woman, the bestially erotic and cannibalizing-castrating figure of woman as at once alluring-seductive and threatening-deadly. These *femme-fatale* figures are citations by the playwrights in their texts, taken from literary milieus, reiterating mythological and biblical figures and reframing them, repeating them differently but within a (performative) stylistic idiom such as, for Wilde, French Symbolist literature. For Kleist the idiom is more markedly different than those of his contemporaries; his play breaks with more traditions and conventions of his time than Wilde his. Kleist reiterates antiquity into something much different from Classical drama. Symbolism can be seen as a continuation of Romanticism; both movements share a skeptical view of rationality and positivistic thought. As I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, both texts cite concepts of the body and of sexuality of their times and challenge them.

The various versions and performances of these plays are like the virtual-actual circuit—a continuous iterative structure—that invokes the multiplicity of the text (in the broad sense described above) and actualizes them onstage, within the constraints of the local conventions of performance. Yet those actualizations retain something of the virtual within the quotations marks of the stage; now embodied onstage, they provoke further reactions and reiterations in everyday life. So they are virtual-actual bodies surrounded and tainted by all the texts and performances out of which the performance event is created. Once embodied onstage they become yet another part of the available cultural script (as bodies or embodied actions rather than words on a page), they are available for appropriation on more than just a linguistic level. Gestural and sartorial aspects of the performance are made available for citing and for repeating differently “on the bus.” Such highly stylized artificial bodies on stage potentially create spaces for imagining new types of embodiment, for imagining something beyond humanist notions

of body and identity, notions of gender and sexuality understood as social and scientific certainties, i.e. bodies understood as organic-machines or as fully determined by natural mechanical laws. Their potential for opening up these spaces exists in inverse proportion to their potential to affect the opposite, to performatively further naturalize and fix types of bodies and identities. These plays run the risks of reinforcing prevailing stereotypes and of unintentionally provoking laughter from the audience. The performative force of the actual bodies onstage in these dramas is intensified through a conscious artificializing of those bodies, a force at once capable of reinscribing the notions of absolute difference (sexual, racial, gender) and capable of pretending new/other/alternate configurations into existence. Once they are performed into virtual-actual becoming onstage, they are incorporated into the wider cultural script in various ways according to audiences' views of the theatrical style, as well as the text and the author who haunt the production.

### **REINHARDT'S PENTHESILEA**

The initial reception of *Penthesilea* in the first issue of the literary journal *Phöbus* (run by Kleist and his friend Müller) was as an intentionally scandal-provoking piece. Reviewers saw Kleist and his colleagues as merely posing as important artists, as inauthentic and affected (Nutz 203). Likewise, the fragment of *Penthesilea* published here is seen not as true art especially in reference to its rejection of Classical form and content. The fragment is seen by one critic as “ungriechische” and therefore inauthentic; in place of true Greek form and content the play, according to one critic in the *Nordische Miszellen*, delivers only “fieberhafte Zuckungen, geschraubte, unnatürliche Bilder, Rohheit und Wildheit” (‘feverish throes, affected, unnatural images, brutishness and wildness’ [quoted in Nutz 205]). Criticism of the play’s style and heroine went hand in

hand; both his choice of style and of subject matter are deemed unnatural and artificial. Kleist cites the figure of the Amazon, embracing and elevating a character he knew could not be accepted as natural. In doing so he begins to imagine what will become queer and posthuman models corporeality that refuse essentialist models of gender and sexuality like those offered by Classical aesthetics and Enlightenment science.

By the mid-nineteenth century, interest in *Penthesilea* focuses around the *femme fatale* as representative of nymphomania, as exemplary of uncontrolled sexual passions that could imperil women's health (Nutz 212). As a malfunctioning *femme-machine* who transgresses gender boundaries and sexual norms, she embodies a sickness engendered by sexual perversion. She acts unnaturally, not in accord with natural femininity, and the perverse violation of gender and sex norms is seen a function of her now pathologized female body. Penthesilea becomes firmly fixed as representative of a type of sexual perversion in 1886 with the publication of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. She becomes the fearsome image of "feminine Sadism" and the product of the pathological fantasy of her perverse author (Nutz 213). For the play's detractors who read it through the lenses of medical science, Kleist's character becomes a symptom of his disease.

In the context of literary Naturalism, Kleist's works were analyzed and staged with an emphasis on his depiction of characters as social and biological creatures (McGlathery). *Penthesilea* was finally staged in Berlin in 1876 by Salomon Mosenthal, in a drastically curtailed and re-worked version, with Clara Ziegler as the Amazon queen. Mosenthal tried to remake the play in a more conventionally Classical vein by altering the language, omitting the potentially offensive passages, and squeezing the sprawling episodes into three acts (Reeve 80). The production with its antiquated heroic-style declamation and costumes left audiences cold; laughter broke out when the Amazon army

appeared in modern dress and high-heeled boots. Audiences thought them too feminine to pose a convincing threat to their Greek opponents (Reeve 81). Ziegler kept campaigning for a less redacted script and more Naturalist-style production and acting (Reeve 81). She eventually toured her own production around Germany in the early 1890's and was praised for her 'realistic' or naturalistic style of acting although the unintentional comic effects still plagued these later performances (Reeve 80).

Against the backdrop of the theater scene in Germany at the end of nineteenth century, *Penthesilea* still proved difficult to perform. German theater of the later part of the nineteenth century gave rise to stage innovations both realistic and non-realistic. The Meiningun players toured with their illusionistic Shakespeare productions, which strove for historical accuracy. By the 1870's Wagner had articulated his ideas about theatre as a 'total work of art' and was building his theater at Bayreuth. Naturalism was also on the rise; the works of Zola were circulating and Ibsen had made his home in Germany. Otto Brahm's *Freie Bühne* introduced the German-speaking public to the plays of Ibsen, Zola, Strindberg, and Hauptmann. In this context, *Penthesilea* would have little luck finding a stylistic or thematic home. The play's subject matter, structure, and language were at odds with the new Naturalist plays and with the complete illusion and totality of effect sought after by Wagner and Meiningun. Moreover her raw, bloodthirsty sexual desires were downplayed for audiences at a time when Wedekind's *Lulu* plays were banned from the stage. Ziegler was known for her portrayal of such *femme-fatale* roles as Judith and Medea and these roles provide the context of imagined female types in which Kleist's *Penthesilea* is placed, part of the theatricality or theatrical conventions of that era. Nutz argues that in the context of these naturalistic productions, *Penthesilea* was domesticated into a traditional version of the *femme fatale*, which worked to downplay the more sensual-sexual aspects of the drama. *Penthesilea* was so outside bourgeois humanist and

contemporary scientific notions of gender and sexuality—she was so (virtually) queer—the role could hardly be embodied on the Naturalist stage devoted to depicting contemporary social problems of the middle and lower classes. Nor was the play a good fit for the idealistic nationalism of Wagner’s theater.

The reception at the *fin de siècle* moved from understanding *Penthesilea* as a product of the individual poet’s pathological fantasies to an embodiment of a futile female rebellion against her supposedly natural inferiority, not a unique case but, rather, the continual struggle of Woman. The shift from disgust to fascination with such *femme fatales* at the turn of the century takes place in the new discourse on the “Feminine.” The shift from Ziegler’s *Penthesilea* to Gertrud Eysoldt’s *Penthesilea* (in Reinhardt’s production) illustrates a paradigm change of reception from one of disgust to one of fascination. Whereas the earlier version was understood in the context of the great heroine types, the Virgin of Orleans, Medea, Judith, and Brunhild, the latter was received in the context of hysterical (and orientalized) woman types, Salomé, Electra, and Cleopatra. In Reinhardt’s version of *Penthesilea*, a ‘Dionysian’ dance scene is introduced, bringing her in line with her more fashionable oriental sisters (217). By 1911, the one-hundredth anniversary of Kleist’s suicide, various prominent artists and intellectuals had fostered a greater appreciation of Kleist’s work in Germany and Austria. As William Reeve writes, in his study of Kleist’s works on stage, “Not only Kleist’s work but also his life came to be viewed as one of the first manifestations of expressionism in German letters” (82). In this context *Penthesilea* enjoyed its first taste of popularity as one of the more frequently produced Kleist plays of the period. In 1911, there were six new adaptations and ten stage productions including one at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin then under the direction of Max Reinhardt. The beginning of the twentieth century for the German stage was an era of greater experimentation and

stylistic blending and Reinhardt's theater in Berlin was at the fore of such experimentation.

In attempting to synthesize late nineteenth-century staging innovations, Reinhardt wanted to move beyond but not entirely reject Naturalism (Brockett 445). In his 1901 essay, "Über ein Theater, wie es mir vorschwebt," Reinhardt names Wilde, Maeterlinck, and Strindberg as examples of drama that has moved beyond Naturalism and points in the direction he wants to move (73-74). The production of *Penthesilea* employed the new revolving stage, colors as symbolic devices, and a somewhat impressionistic approach in which decor and color reflected mood of protagonists. The costumes were rough barbaric and the Amazons "exposed wide expanses of flesh, suggesting their affinity with their animals" (Reeve 83). Ernst Stern, stage designer and co-director, was very concerned about getting the Amazons right, making them believable and not laughable as they often had been. The Amazons were now painted dark brown introducing a more explicit racial dimension that had not been previously exploited (Reeve 83). Here the ambiguity of lion skin versus snakeskin, discussed earlier in this project, is elided with risqué costuming and brown-painted skin. Rather than playing up the ambiguity in the text, Reinhardt's production transformed *Penthesilea* into a more recognizable, contemporary *femme fatale*, one already haunted by his earlier production of *Salomé*.

Reviews were mixed, but the play did not leave its audience in rolling in the aisles as earlier productions had. Gertrud Eysoldt, Reinhardt's *Salomé* from the prior decade, acted in the title role and apparently played up the sadistic, sexual aspect of *Penthesilea*'s personality. The Amazons' darkened skin and the emphasis on sexual sadism move

Kleist's play into a new network of associations. The association of Woman with 'savage' comes more prominently to the fore as oriental motifs creep onto the scene. Penthesilea's body is now marked as non-white and Eysoldt's performance introduces a further 'oriental' sensuality to the play. To some extent, *Penthesilea* is absorbed into a "syncretistic otherness" that was the fashion (Apter 30). Such 'syncretistic otherness' provided a set of visible codes that transgressed bourgeois norms but also served to compound notions of perverse otherness for critics like Max Nordau who denounced the avant-garde as decadent and degenerate.

For some, she is no longer a false, artificial image, but one of truth about the nature of feminine sexual desire (Nutz 219). However, contemporary critic Arthur Eloesser critiques Eysoldt's performance because it is based on the oriental and Dionysian tradition exemplified by wild dancing and not the true German tradition of tragedy and not Kleist's character. He sees Kleist's version as innocent, not perverse like the three latter *femme fatales* (Nutz 218). The true German tradition he says did not come from the hysterical orgy of dance, as did that of the Greeks. Friederich Gundolf criticizes the artificiality of this new Penthesilea and makes a distinction between Kleist's authentic hysteria and the *Nervenkunst* ('art of nerves') of his new admirers, which is fake and decadent (Nutz 218). For Eloesser and Gundolf, this new orientalized version is artificial opposed to the more natural character of Kleist's text. The dance and her darkened skin mark her as inauthentic and un-German, foreign and decadent. Reinhardt's production invokes and displaces the figure of Penthesilea, and like Salomé she "is perverted because she serves as the audience's focus for a set of representations of

difference, all of which are understood as perverted” (Gilman 169). Thus, one can see *Penthesilea* caught up the *fin-de-siècle* craze for oriental *femme fatales*; she is cited in this context, orientalized and made to dance. For some critics and spectators she embodies the essence of woman but for others her doubly marked, monstrous body throws essentializing concepts of sexual difference into question. For the avant-garde who embraced decadence, this dramatization of corporeal instability and gender transgression represented a powerful antidote to bourgeois respectability as well as the worship of masculinity and virility exemplified by the emerging German Youth Movement.

For Eysoldt, often described today as the first feminist of German theater, the transgressive experience of playing *Penthesilea* was exhilarating. She describes acting in the role as a confrontation with the audience and as an exaltation of passionate desire.<sup>108</sup> Emily Apter argues that for the female actors playing these roles, the experience was often one of emancipation from restricting bourgeois norms of gender and sexuality. The virtually queer and posthuman role of *Penthesilea* provides a space for empowerment,

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<sup>108</sup> Zu ihrer Rolle der *Penthesilea* sagt die Eysoldt 1911 selbst: „Und ich werde die *Penthesilea* spielen rein aus schauspielerischem Wille und schauspielerischer Lust heraus, um ihren Herzschlag erstaunt, erschreckt in der eigenen Brust zu spüren und aufzuhorchen, um meinen Körper gespannt und fast bis zum Weh unterjocht unter *Penthesileas* Temperament zu fühlen, um mich aufzurichten, um zusammenzubrechen, um im Rhythmus der herrlichen Verse die stürzenden Gefühle im Sturm aufzufangen. Ich will spielen um in das Wunder wieder aufzusteigen, mich mit der Kraft eines fremden Willens zu verschlingen, getragen zu werden von einer Welt, in der nur die erregte Seele herrscht und bildet.“ (‘And I will play *Penthesilea* purely from theatrical will and theatrical desire, in order that they notice and obey their heartbeat amazed and frightened; in order for my body, eager and subjugated almost to the point of pain, to feel *Penthesilea*’s temperament; in order to raise myself up; in order to collapse; in order to catch the tumbling emotions of the storm in the rhythm of the magnificent verse. I want to play in order to ascend again into the wonder, to intertwine myself with the power of a strange will, to be carried to another world, in which only the inflamed soul rules and creates.’ [“Gertrud Eysoldt: zur Erinnerung an den 50. Todestag der bekannten Schauspielerin” *Pirnaer Anzeiger* No 3, 2005, [www.pirna.de/downloads/assets/pa03\\_2005klein.pdf](http://www.pirna.de/downloads/assets/pa03_2005klein.pdf)].

and, by actualizing or embodying the role on stage; actors like Eysoldt make such transgressive avatars available for appropriation off stage.

Not only were women empowered or accorded sexual license through association with the dominatrix characterologies attached to exemplary princesses, queens, seductresses, or women leaders of the East, but, more interestingly their agency was enhanced by 'being' these avatars both on stage and off. (Apter 24)

Embracing the syncretistic otherness of the oriental *femme-fatale* avatar, a staged artificialized body, represents a transvaluation of the natural/artificial binary. Eysoldt's performance cites the paradigms of the sexually perverse, sadistic woman and reappropriates that conservative image, displacing and exposing what was understood to be biological essence as staged effect. Penthesilea's body emerges not a site for discovering the truth of gender and sexuality but as site or surface upon which the instabilities of gender as corporeal stylization could be played out. Thus, for some audiences and theater practitioners, the play opened up a space of virtuality for imagining new configurations of gender and sexual desire and for transvaluing what had been demonized as lethally perverted.

### **REINHARDT'S *SALOMÉ***

In the years just prior to the newly burgeoning popularity of Kleist's *Penthesilea*, Oscar Wilde and his play *Salomé* were also in vogue in Germany and Austria. As Kleist's work and life were thought to be exemplary of Expressionist aesthetics, Wilde and his work were exemplary of Symbolist aesthetics and decadence. Interest in Wilde grew rapidly after his imprisonment and the Wilde epidemic was occasioned less by

interest in his works and aesthetic theories than by the sensation caused by his trials and his death (Bridgewater 47). Arthur Roessler refers to a prevalent “Wilde-mania” in his preface to 1905 translation of *Intentions*. More conservative critics like Max Nordau characterized Wilde as the epitome of decadent degeneration while more progressive critics like Karl Kraus saw him as the aesthete-martyr and victim of British philistinism. Roessler’s comments and Nordau’s work show the importance of the author’s life and reputation to the early reception of Wilde in Germany and Austria. Bridgewater argues this “Wilde-mania” again intensified “quite suddenly following Max Reinhardt’s successful production of *Salome*” in Berlin in 1902 (240).

Whereas, in England, Wilde the playwright was known primarily for his society comedies, in Germany he was frequently understood as the “*Salome-Dichter*” or ‘*Salome-poet*,’ because of Reinhardt’s production and Strauß’s opera (Kohlmayer 1996, 9). His status as ‘*Salome-poet*’ complements the widespread image of Wilde as the persecuted homosexual dandy and the artist-martyr. Given its extraordinary popularity and lengthy run, it is clear that Wilde’s *Salomé* played a decisive role in shaping the German-Austrian versions of Oscar Wilde and, by association, of the decadent dandy. In November of 1902 Max Reinhardt’s production of *Salome* opened for private audiences at the newly christened Kleines Theater.<sup>109</sup> As many critics and theater historians have observed, *Salomé* and the new plays at the Kleines Theater represented Reinhardt’s move away

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<sup>109</sup> He had recently left his acting position at the Deutsches Theater, then under direction of the eminent naturalist director Otto Brahm, to focus on directing at the newly christened Kleines Theater, formerly the Arnim Hotel where his cabaret troupe, Schall und Rauch, had been performing its political and theatrical parodies. Reinhardt and company wanted to get back to producing ‘serious’ theatre and made the transition, during the 1902 season, to performing one act plays. In their book on Wilde’s *Salome* in performance, Tydeman and Price observe that “the double bill of [Wilde’s] *Salome* and *Bunbury* was the first important production at the renamed Kleines Theater” (32). This move represented the establishment of a new, more experimental, approach to stagecraft in Berlin, which had been dominated by Brahm’s naturalist productions during the last decade of the nineteenth century. When the play opened, the former cabaret name still appeared in parentheses, “Kleines Theater (Schall und Rauch), reinforcing the link between the exclusive Jewish avant-garde (art and) theater world, Wilde the homosexual, and *Salome* as a synthesis of both perversities.

from the dominance of the word (or play script) and toward the visual, mimic, and aural aspects of theatre.<sup>110</sup> The nonrealistic, luxurious production was mounted with conscious opposition to Realist and Naturalist schools of drama (Tydeman 32). Although the sets gestured toward historical accuracy, the realism was offset by interpretive lighting, colorful costumes, and atmospheric music. In addition to Wilde's reputation as dandy and aesthete, Reinhardt's emphasis on (and ground-breaking experimentation with) spectacle, surface, synaesthesia, and artifice links this somewhat Symbolist production to the aestheticism of the decadent dandy, as do the motifs of oriental luxury and the *femme fatale*. Max Nordau explicitly links all of these elements to the concept of degeneration in his chapter on aestheticism. As Sander Gilman points out, given the "strong popular image of Jewry as the bastion of the cultural avant-garde," it is no surprise that this famous production "served to link the names of Reinhardt and Wilde in the public imagination" (158). This set of associations is already firmly in place by the time he stages Kleist's *Penthesilea* almost a decade later and so exerts a gravitational pull on Kleist's piece pulling it into this particular avant-garde theatrical orbit.

Even with the Symbolist elements, the figure of Salome onstage in this production appears to have been both a bit more conventional and a bit less ethereal than Oscar Wilde seems to have imagined her.<sup>111</sup> Both of these tendencies have to do with the *fin-de-siècle* understanding of *femme-fatale* figure and with the image of Wilde as the homosexual dandy, the two linked together by the notion of perversity. Tydeman and

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<sup>110</sup> Among those plays were Maeterlinck's *Pelleas et Melissande* and Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen*. For *Salomé* Reinhardt collaborated with stage designer Ernst Stern, the sculptor Max Kruse, the painter Lovis Corinth, and composers Max Marschalk and Friedrich Bermann to create a 'total theater' effect. Tydeman and Price note the influence of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* on Reinhardt (32). Reinhardt's vision was arguably a more sophisticated and cosmopolitan version of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

<sup>111</sup> "To Wilde himself, Beardsley's illustrations appeared to be too Japanese, while my play is Byzantine. [...] My Salome is a mystic, the sister of Salmambo, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybook (Jullian 1969:218)" (Kohlmayer 1997 4).

Price report that tight colorful costumes and rings on the feet of the women performers contributed to a general impression of heightened sensuality. Most critics, whether sympathetic to the play or not, lauded Gertrud Eysoldt for her portrayal of Salomé as “Weib und Tigerin” (‘female and tiger’ [Kohlmayer 1996 13]). In the following years, she garnered much praise for her riveting portrayals of other favorite fin-de-siècle *femme-fatales* such as Hofmannsthal’s Elektra and Wedekind’s Lulu. Rainer Kohlmayer remarks that “almost all critics agreed that Gertrud Eysoldt brought the anarchic, animal traits of Salome to life grandly...” and conveyed a “predatory sexuality” on stage (1997 9, 1996 13).

Salome’s lascivious body and hysterical emotions are repeatedly emphasized in the reviews of Reinhardt’s production. As opposed to the somewhat interchangeable figure of Wilde’s text, she stands out in sharp contrast against the other characters (with whom she still shares a lot of the play’s repeated lines) in the eerily sensuous spotlight of perversity. Whereas Symbolist theater is generally characterized by suggestion, connotation, and evocation of subjective moods, Expressionist theater is characterized by more blunt protests against bourgeois values, extremes of emotion, and shocking climaxes. The production photos and reviews belie a Naturalist insistence on the presence of a seductive and fleshly body (as opposed to a veiled, ethereal form occasionally enveloped into further veils of smoke), as well as an Expressionist fascination with extreme psychological states and mental illness. The Expressionist tendencies, as Kohlmayer maintains, was due, in part, to Hedwig Lachmann’s translation of Wilde’s *Salomé*.

Lachmann’s German translation of Wilde’s play appeared in the *Wiener Rundschau* in 1900 and helped create this more fiercely aggressive Salome; both Reinhardt and later Strauß used this translation to mount their stage productions.

Kohlmayer demonstrates how Lachmann exaggerates Salome's demonic sexuality, defining the character more decisively as a quintessential *femme fatale*. He contrasts the nuanced Salome he finds in Wilde's original with the more fixed figure in the German translation: "Almost in slow motion, Wilde portrays her development from a child to a young woman growing aware of her sexuality during her first entrance; Lachmann, in contrast, has a fully-fledged *femme fatale* appear on stage" (7). He takes issue with slight changes in the language that elide Jokanaan's demand for Salome's death. In Lachmann's translation, writes Kohlmayer, "Jochanaan embodies solely the passive purity of a Christian prophet detached from the world, so that, for the theatrical reception of the characters as well, the simple dichotomy of whore and saint had to impose itself" (9). He argues that the parallel between the two main characters is downplayed, while the demonic-erotic aspects of the heroine are heightened.<sup>112</sup> Kohlmayer concludes "The development of Wilde's *Salome* from the French original into English, via Beardsley's drawings, Lachmann's translation, Reinhardt's production, i.e. Eysoldt's acting, shows a process of increasing... brutalization of the character of Salome, who is... shaped with increasing clarity into an icon of eruptive sexuality" (9-10).

That eruptive sexuality invokes the fin-de-siècle medical diagnosis of hysteria. In his article on Strauß's *Salome*, Sander Gilman shows how accepted stereotypes of Jews and characteristics of difference ascribed to homosexuals were linked via notions of sexual pathology, especially hysteria (166-70). German and Austrian audiences understood the homosexual dandy Wilde through the inverse figure of exotic oriental Jewish *femme fatale* because they were seen as part of the same condition, in which the 'pervert' exhibits an excessive femininity, either as result of oppression or genetic

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<sup>112</sup> Kohlmayer also concludes "... that Hedwig Lachmann played a decisive role in the reception of *Salome* in Germany [and Austria] by transforming Wilde's French Symbolist-impressionist "piece of music" (Wilde 1987:922) into a pre-expressionist drama" (Kohlmayer 12).

weakness, feminine physicality for the homosexual (read: dandy) and uncontrollable erotic bloodlust for the hysterical woman (read: *femme fatale*). As Gilman argues “Salome is perverted because she serves as the audience’s focus for a set of representations of difference all of which are understood as perverted” (169).<sup>113</sup> He also points out that “her perversion certainly has nothing to do with the representation of homosexuality on stage” (168). But it didn’t have to because the association of the two was already in play; the dandified figure of Wilde the notorious/celebrated homosexual was already haunting the perverse scene. Given the covert homoerotic codes in the play, such a reading opens up more space for pleasure and identification for sympathetic audiences while, conversely, affirming the diagnoses of degeneration for unsympathetic audiences.

In a pamphlet circulated in 1906 in Vienna, H. Ernstmann compares the pathology of the play to that of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, writing that “Ibsen’s play concerns the depiction of the effects of a diseased brain, in the case of the English poet [Wilde], the depiction of the effects of an unnatural disposition of the sexual organism” (Davis 172).<sup>114</sup> Ernstmann ends this part of his discussion with a line that epitomizes the reductive biographical reading of the play: “*Nicht Salome—nein, Oskar Wilde sollte dieses Stück heissen*” “[*Not Salome—no, ‘Oscar Wilde’ this piece should be called.*”] Ernstmann 20). Given this kind of total identification of Wilde the artist with his character Salomé, it is easy to see how each perverse icon bolsters the other. Both are degenerates, sexually perverse, and tragically doomed. Wilde’s dandy persona, attended by notions of sexual pathology, influenced Lachmann’s translation, with its emphasis on demonic,

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<sup>113</sup> Bernheimer contends “A typically perverse femme fatale is hysterical, and a typical description of hysteria is Charcot’s...” (101). Gilman also refers to Charcot’s theories in his discussion of hysteria (166-70).

<sup>114</sup> From Davis’s translation of Ernstmann’s *Salome an den deutschen Hofbühnen: Ein Kulturbild* (Berlin, 1906).

pathological sexuality. The theatrical style of Reinhardt's and other similar productions, informed by these theories of pathology, work to intensify the figure of Salomé as *femme fatale*. This, in turn, determines the reception of the play as, at least in part, an expression of Wilde's homosexuality.

In Reinhardt's production of *Salomé*, one can see citations of contemporary concepts of the body and identity: pathology, racial and sexual stereotypes, and the contemporary associations between Jewishness, homosexuality, and degeneration. Those ways of understanding identities and bodies get cited as part of the regimes of contemporary concepts of the body, gender identity, and sexuality, all linked by the notion of perversion. As Kohlmayer argues, the reception of Wilde in Germany works to frame the production of the play in the context of sexual pathology. Yet, for some audiences this network of associations does not necessitate reading the body of Salomé as essentially woman or the essence of pathological female sexual desire. For some critics like Karl Kraus, a staunch defender of Wilde, 'perversion' becomes "a positive label, the label of libertarian aesthetics, of the cultural avant-garde" (Gilman 165). Thus, even if Reinhardt's production of *Salomé* represented a "brutalization" of the text as Kohlmayer argues, the inversions and homoerotic codes remain legible to those who would appropriate such perverse *femme-fatale* figures transvaluing the underlying hierarchies of natural and artificial that would result in reading the role as the essence of pathological female sexual desire. While running the risk of staging another misogynist embodiment of feminine evil, the production allows for a performative resistance to medical and legal discourse on sexuality that would locate the truth of gender and sexuality in the biological body. Given the play's thematizing of the act of spectatorship, the citation of Wilde's *Salomé* as *femme-fatale* stereotype works to undermine essentializing concepts or Idealist

and Naturalist ways of seeing the dancing princess.<sup>115</sup> The performativity of these iterations of the *femme fatale* stereotype unsettle essentialist concepts of gender and sexual identity and spur, at least some, audiences to imagine queer and posthuman models of corporeality (of configurations of bodies, identities and desires) yet-to-come.

### **ARTIFICIAL BODIES AND LOST “NATURAL OBJECTS”**

This project has read dialogues as instances of open form, a form in which process is more important than product or goal; like the digital aesthetic of the ‘unfinished’ its aim is, in the words of Peter Lunenfeld “to open up a third thing that is not a resolution [or dialectical synthesis], but rather a state of suspension” (8). This suspension is not purely aporic, but a provisional actualization, or an ongoing series of iterations. I also read playtexts as open forms in that they are never finished (or wholly self-identical and unified in and of themselves) but transformed by each new stage performance—as dialogues are provisionally actualized by each new reading—which in turn alters or contributes to the ‘worldliness’ of the text itself. The openness of such texts can be ascribed to their heightened intertextuality. As Marvin Carlson argues, the “dramatic script, as text, readily opens itself to analysis on these terms... it participates in the recycling of elements in a rather different and arguably more comprehensive manner than do texts created in the tradition of other ‘literary’ genres” (5). This recycling or

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<sup>115</sup> “Stereotypes, both cultural and erotic, are generated by and through the frozen inventory of gestures constitutive of theatrical meaning. Though the sheer performativity of this inventory can serve to unsettle identity (easily unmasked as ‘nothing but an act’), the rehearsed cultural referentialism of the performed type, together with its excessive affect, function to create politically strategic points of semantic connectivity among the blurred procedures of *acting*, *outing*, *being*, *doing*, *passing*, and *meaning*. Simultaneously subversive and hegemonic, unfixing the status quo, stereotypes render sexual identity politics legible through adhesive, situationally motivated fictions of culture” (Apter 31).

(re)citing is one of the defining is indeed one of the defining features of dramatic texts (Carlson 17).<sup>116</sup>

The text itself of course may be literally fragmented, in unordered pieces as Büchner's *Woyzeck* was left behind. But it need not be in pieces to instance open form. Of course, open form could be attributed to most playtexts as they inevitably exist in different versions: the "organic fragment" and various other manuscripts of *Penthesilea* as well as its first published form; the French, English and German versions of *Salomé* appearing shortly after the original French version. As Oscar Wilde indicated, reading is to some extent always a writing, in that one can sign one's name at the end of reading another's text, appropriating it as one's own. The case is a bit different here, because these dialogic texts formally and more thoroughly resist closure, in that they signal or point to their own openness or unfinishedness, by thematizing the act of spectatorship or interpretation within the dramatic text.

This textual strategy shares an affinity with open or monstrous bodies that erode humanist corporeal boundaries. As Foucault has shown, the category 'human' emerges as the result of a network of discourses, medical, legal, psychological, philosophical, and aesthetic. The "human" is defined, taxonomized, and studied. In the eighteenth century, with the visceral turn, the body is dissected, explored, exhibited, exposing its workings, flaws, and pathologies. Law drafted modes of behavior for the body, some acts illegal and transgressive result in incarcerated bodies. Aesthetics concerned itself with imagining the perfect human form often by appealing to an illusory origin or projecting a past that never was, the unrepeatable, inaccessible past in which mind and body were

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<sup>116</sup> "Among all literary forms it is the drama preeminently that has always been concerned not simply with the telling of stories, but with the retelling of stories already known to its public" (Carlson 17). The "more comprehensive" recycling that Carlson discuss implies a reframing or transformation, which moves his concept closer the idea of citing as simultaneously invoking and displacing.

unsevered or whole, capable of unaffected graceful performance. All these discourses converge on this thing called human defined at the site of the body, the black hole of senses. In the midst of the visceral turn of the Enlightenment, as the body warranted ever-closer scrutiny and threatened to destabilize rational philosophical systems, unreliable fleshly bodies were displaced by increasingly abstract models based in the emerging empirical sciences.

In the late eighteenth century, as the human sciences sought to discover the underlying principles and inner workings of the human body among other natural phenomena, “Nature, caught in a perpetual and linguistic representational scheme... [loses] its privileged ontological status” (Donato 40). Romantic writers—German, French, and English—deal in depth with this loss of a privileged “Natural Object.” Eugenio Donato argues, “If the romantics required elaborate and baroque philosophical mythologies to arrive at a privileged conception of the self or nature or society, it was because these entities had already lost their privileged status” (40). In his work on Romanticism, Paul de Man shows that the Romantic poets work at allegorizing the loss of this privileged “Natural Object” with a certain stable ontology as foundation or origin, here the site or location of the material body.<sup>117</sup>

Humanity comes to be defined in opposition to nature, a “Subject” or mind “*opposed* to the Object” of the body.<sup>118</sup> One might go so far as to say that the human

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<sup>117</sup> Many Romantics responded to this crisis or trauma with compensation strategies of mysticism or transcendentalism, but not Kleist as I have argued. This refusal of compensation strategies sets Kleist apart from his Romantic contemporaries and is part of what has been decribed as his presciently modern outlook. Part of what makes him hard to classify is his insistent engagement in imagining new modes of thought and expression that might avoid the pitfalls of Idealist and of positivist models for understanding gender and sexual desire. More important than distinguishing him as a specific type of Romantic or proto-modernist is to understand his focus on pretending or fictionalizing such new modes of thought yet-to-come. This is not to set him up as a hero who recognized or solved problems earlier or better than other thinkers. But it is to recognize that he grappled deeply, critically, and creatively—against the grain of contemporary thought—with problems of identity and desire for which there were no certain terms and names.

<sup>118</sup> ... an ‘animal that is *in harmony* with Nature or given Being’ is a *living* being that is in no way human. To remain human, Man must remain a ‘Subject *opposed* to the Object,’ even if ‘Action negating the given

body is the “Natural Object” *par excellence*, an object that has lost its privileged status with the recognition of its necessarily mediating function. Just as the body is ‘discovered’ by the empirical sciences, its transcendental status is simultaneously lost. The Romantic problem of representation responds to the crisis of this loss: “God as origin, the ontologically privileged object or transcendental subject, is no more” (Donato 41). But, in its quest for uncovering the workings of the human body and its relationship with the mind, positivist science takes little notice of this Romantic irony. The desire for immediacy and presence does not precede but follows this perception of their absence. Donato discusses the loss of the ontologically privileged object in terms of history and memory, but they are as important to issues of performance, corporeality, and identity. Theatrical performance relies on the effects of immediacy and presence, the perceived presence of bodies and the apparent immediacy of action. Thus, this loss of the “Natural Object” is an absence that begins to haunt dramatic literature and theatrical performance specifically.

It is an absence that structures the modern drama, a dramatic tradition that comes to organize itself around the desire for presence and immediacy—the immediate presence of sexed bodies onstage, the effects of performance projected as the very site of its cause or natural essence. “After the death of God one is doomed, in Said’s vocabulary, to repetitive representational beginnings rather than absolute origins” (Donato 41). Hence the desire for and impossibility (or necessary failure) of ironic origin myths like Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater.” The “last chapter in the history of the world” invokes Hegel’s concept of “The End of History.” As I have demonstrated, this trauma or crisis

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and Error’ disappears. This means that, while henceforth speaking in an *adequate* fashion of everything that is given to him, post-historical Man must continue to *detach* ‘form’ from ‘content,’ doing so no longer in order actively to transform the latter, but so that he may *oppose* himself as pure ‘form’ to himself and to others taken as ‘content’ of any sort. (Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, quoted in Donato 49)

revolves around the object of the body, as both scientific and aesthetic object. The mind/body problematic and the problems of perception and representation that accompany this subject/object split, or the opposing of form and content are played out in the image of the marionette. The disembodied machinist (puppeteer) making precise minimal movements, imposing form, that results in the graceful motion of the body as pure content or pure materiality devoid of consciousness. The intention, mind, or form, is imposed from the outside, moved from without, completely severed from the disembodied *cogito*. Consciousness, the subject's alienation from its own body as object, imposes form to render the body legible but at the same time obscures what it seeks to know. For Kleist's Herr C. there is no possible return to an original innocence, only a chance for second one, a second eating of the fruit. What is lost is not ultimately recoverable because what is lost is, in fact, produced by the perception of loss. The perceived loss of mind/body unity produces the ideal of the graceful unified body; Kleist's "Über das Marionettentheater" dramatizes this phenomenon as the dialogue between the two men produces the marionette. The necessary but constructed object, the trace or pseudo-presence of an object, in this case the body, within representation is product and effect, and not a prior subject or state of being, not an origin or foundation 'avant la lettre.' In seeking the organic, naturally graceful body, one arrives like Herr C. at a mechanical marionette devoid consciousness.

The tensions between the organic and mechanical and between the natural and the artificial cut across a wide variety of disciplines and discourses. It stakes out the limits of the realms of economics and history as a response to the rise of capitalist industrialism and the emergence of the bourgeois subject. For Balzac as for Marx men are deindividualized in the image of the steam engine as "living appendages" of a "lifeless mechanism" (Asendorf 41). The mechanizing impact of labor discipline forbids

individual behavior and further compounds the link between man and machine. Nineteenth-century writers such as Balzac and Flaubert react against the instrumentalization and homogenization of working class and of the emerging bourgeois culture by adopting dandiacal poses and rejecting the ideology of utility and progress. In doing so they ironically perform, as did Beau Brummel, the lost object of the discerning aristocrat, the noble artist; through a sort of citational bricolage they create a new aristocracy of style, and eventually of art and literature.

This anti-instrumental pose is one of the crucial connections between decadent dandyism of the *fin de siècle* and early nineteenth century Romanticism: A self-fashioned, eccentric identity that self-consciously invents its own paternity and genealogy. As a self-consciously ironic pose, dandyism does represent a sincere longing to reestablish the moribund aristocracy of the feudal world; instead its pose is a matter of repeating, citing (invoking and displacing) the past so as not merely repeat the past unconsciously, which is at once a tragic impossibility (the impossibility of repeating exactly) and a farcical inevitability (as Marx describes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*).<sup>119</sup> The way Marx describes the making of history, especially in the contexts of epochs of revolutionary crisis such as the years around 1800 and 1900, touches upon several issues important to this project: performativity and theatricality, the figure of the dandy, and the theorizing of gender and sexuality in the context of emerging scientific disciplines such

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<sup>119</sup> “Hegel observes somewhere that all the great characters and events of world history occur twice, so to speak. He forgot to add: the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce. Caussidière after Danton, Louis Blanc after Robespierre, the *montagne* of 1848-51 after the *montagne* of 1793-5...” (Martin 19).

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present circumstances, given and inherited. Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they appear to be revolutionising themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis, that is when they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from them their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes in world history, but in this time-honoured guise and with this borrowed language” (Martin 19-20).

as biology and medicine. The traditions of dead generations, the given circumstances already existing, constitute the theatricality of the world stage in which the subject always already finds itself in the midst of ongoing action. The point Marx makes about history and political events is the point queer theorists attempt to articulate about gender and sexual identity; both propose a model that allows for agency while recognizing the constraining power of prevailing material conditions and time-honored traditions of the dead.<sup>120</sup> The inaccessible past like the spectral material body outside of language are the lost “Natural Objects” that Donato describes.

The body becomes the lost “Natural Object” *par excellence*, the no longer unified body, the body pieces, the dissected body, the machine-like body that can be disassembled and reassembled, and is man-made. Artificial bodies—like the marionette, the dandy, the stereotype of the oriental *femme fatale*—are in such a state of suspension, but not fixed in terms of gender and sexuality; they are suspended in a state of virtuality or in a more open field of potential relations between bodies, identities, and desires. They are neither purely other, but, rather, a “proximate” mixture or hybrid in terms of gender and sexuality; they highlight tensions between the artificial and the natural and between the mechanical and organic as can bodies onstage. Artificial bodies are *becoming* bodies rather *existing* natural bodies with ontological integrity and full presence of being.

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<sup>120</sup> As Donato argues, “If the dead are more seducing than the living, it is because the past as representation is more ‘real’ than the present. The present has no possible privileged ontological status; the past, reduced to a series of representations, is the only possible ‘truth’” (41). James Martin points out, “Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* embodies a recognition... of the ‘performative’ character of politics, that is, the manner in which the symbolic is not simply some secondary ‘level’ perched upon the hard rock of property relations but is itself integral to the materialisation of class power. One hundred and fifty years later, that point has become central to innovations in theorising politics and the political” (132-133).

In light of the hauntings noted above, one might argue that the logic of the specter is at work here. One can apply Derrida's concept of hauntology to this constellation of sexual identity, performance, aesthetics, and theater.<sup>121</sup>

[The] specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain body phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter. (Derrida, 1994 6)

Hauntology, like performance theory, is concerned with the event as repetition and as first/last time: "A question of repetition: a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back." (Derrida, 1994, 11). The presence of a sexed body, of a Man or Woman, requires the ontological foundations of sexual difference that are taken as such, as natural and given. Martin Hargreaves has suggested that, "it could be argued that a 'hauntology' should be 'queer' because it has to welcome the excluded abject figures that haunt gender hegemony."<sup>122</sup> Queer theory concerns itself with the specters of absolute sexual difference, with the constant returns of natural objects that are always already lost as we join the performance already in progress. Queering is then a form of hauntology.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> "Derrida's notion of hauntology involves acknowledging the other that haunts the self and which acts as a hovering, spectral presence that pluralises the certainties of ontology" (Gye).

<sup>122</sup> "Queering B – B-ing Queer" <<http://www.sarma.be/nieuw/bvisible/..%5Cbvisible%5Cbhargr.htm>>.

<sup>123</sup> "By emphasizing "the haunting or the return of revenants," Derrida offers a clue as to how "hauntology" is related to queering. *Revenant*, one French word for *ghost*, is also the present participle of the verb *to return* or *come back*, *revenir*; ghosts *return*, then like the repressed. When this repression is that of sexuality (as it so often is, in Freudian as well as nationalist narratives), the ghosts that come back are sexual ones. Since non normative sexualities suffer repression to a far greater extent than normative ones, these sexual ghosts are often queer. *Queering* as a form of hauntology thus exposes the connection between sexual repression and political oppression..." (*Queer Nations* by Jarrod Hayes, 518-19). "Derrida has been pleased to term this dual movement of return and inauguration a 'hauntology', a coinage that suggests a spectrally deferred non- origin within grounding metaphysical terms such as history and identity" (Buse & Scott, 1999, 10-11).

Both Derrida's deconstruction and Butler's queer theories are concerned with theorizing a politics yet-to-come, a messianicity without messianism, or a faith in the impossible.<sup>124</sup> This project has considered such 'futural imaginings' in the works of Kleist and Wilde. As Michael O'Rourke has recently written, "With each new book, conference, seminar series, we hear that Queer Theory is over. It must then be a revenant, a spectre, a ghost, and as we know from Derrida's hauntological discourse the spectre always returns and always promises the future" (25).<sup>125</sup> If queer theory itself, like deconstruction, is to be "a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purpose" (*Bodies* 228). Queer theory, or what I have been calling queer corporeality, must itself remain open to the yet-to-come. In his *Saint Foucault*, David Halperin has pointed out queer "describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" (62).<sup>126</sup> The virtually queer bodies this project examines are *revenants* that cannot be delimited in advance, that permanently install the undecidability of the yet-to-come.

A similar point can be made about the posthuman, the post as marking the impossibility of a fully present identity, the impossible inclusionary politics incessantly deferred but not abnegated in which Butler and Derrida are interested. "There is to be no 'arrival' or 'destination,' no horizon... for if the messiah were ever to show up, then

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<sup>124</sup> See John Caputo's *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

<sup>125</sup> "[a]t bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come, or come back." (Derrida: 1994; 39).

<sup>126</sup> In "Queer Theory: Unstating Desire," Lee Edelman defines queer as a site of permanent becoming: "Utopic in its negativity, queer theory curves endlessly towards a realization that its realization remains impossible" (346).

deconstruction and queer theory would (really) be over” (O’Rourke 33). Queer and posthuman models of corporeality yet-to-come that I argue one can find in the works of Kleist and Wilde, are models that permanently install the undecidability of the yet-to-come, or the Deleuzean virtual.

The “that which remains unrealized” for Butler, the *perhaps* for Derrida, the impossible for Caputo, are the not-yet but possible of the political future, an undecidable future, what Butler calls “a modernity without foundationalism... [where] the key terms of its operation are not fully secured in advance, one that assumes a futural form for politics that cannot be fully anticipated, a politics of hope and anxiety” (O’Rourke 35).

The perhaps and the yet-to-come provoke us to imagine the possibilities of a politics and a politically efficacious aesthetics yet-to-come as do Kleist and Wilde’s theaters for their specific places and times. What this suggests is an affiliation between works such as Kleist and Wilde’s and the deconstructive sensibilities of queer and posthuman theories of corporeality. They all insist on impossible bodies that must always retain a virtuality, a becomingness, a creative aporetics, on identities always already haunted by *revenants*, what Laclau describes as a “dislocation corrupting the identity with itself of any present... a constitutive anachronism that is at the root of any identity,” the origin as a necessary return, the first time as a repetition (88). The dialogic unfinishedness of the artificial body—the marionette, the dandy, the virtually queer and posthuman *femme fatale*—opens up more space for pleasure and identification by transgressing humanist corporeal boundaries and by subverting or transvaluing the natural/artificial binary.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> “The unfinished work or person allows us to read our own desires into a not yet fully formed object—opening up more space for pleasure and identification than any ‘complete’ work or person can ever offer” (Lunenfeld 8).

## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE VIRTUALITY OF POSTHUMAN/QUEER BODIES

Queer theory insists on embodiment, on positionality, on an anti-essentialist, shifting relationships between bodies and subjectivities. It is in this concern with the troubled, disruptive status of actual bodies that theories of queer and posthuman intersect. Both Butler and Hayles contest “the illusion of disembodiment” (“Condition” 94). Both theorists also share the notion of identity as performatively constituted. Although Butler and Hayles do not represent the scope of queer and virtual theories, they have a common project, one that is important to both general areas of inquiry: to contest the disembodied universality of normative discourse on gender and sexual identity.

Although Hayles notes that “*the information/matter dichotomy maps onto the older and more traditional dichotomy of spirit/matter*” (“Condition” 73), she argues that there are still significant differences in these two mind-sets. Hayles writes, “Spirituality is usually associated with mental and physical discipline whereas the imagined escape of the soul-as-information from the body depends on having access to the appropriate high technology” (“Condition” 73). But this project asserts that the way they can be mapped onto one another, despite the difference in the processes of attaining such transcendence, is through their similar concerns and anxieties about the instability of the physical body. As I have shown, both Kleist and Wilde work to undermine the distinction between the natural and the artificial as a way of contesting universalizing narratives of the body that privilege such notions of transcendence.

In “Cyber-Kleist: The Virtual Actor as Über-Marionette,” Paul Malone writes that “In 1811 Heinrich von Kleist, in his short story ‘Über das Marionettentheater’... posited the marionette as an ideal performer – not a poor substitute for a human actor, but a superior replacement” (57). He rejects the notion that Kleist offers a “mere critique” of human performance and argues that the marionette is a “symbol of an epiphany both

aesthetic and spiritual” (58). Although he does not specify what that epiphany is, he aligns it with E. Gordon Craig’s idea of Über-marionette actors that return the mysteries of religious rite to the theater. Malone traces the roots of the digital avatar or synthespian in “the substitution of actors by simulations” proposed by Kleist’s Herr C. (57). He concludes by arguing, quoting Gundolf Freyermut, that “technology only makes possible escapes that others have long sought after” (63). Thus, Malone sketches a provisional if somewhat familiar genealogy of imagined “escapes” from the problems of the physical body on stage, from Kleist to Craig, Meyerhold, Schlemmer, and finally to digital synthespians.<sup>128</sup> As I have argued, Kleist satirizes such mystical or metaphysical “escapes” into disembodiment; instead he insists of the importance of embodied perspective.

Malone’s connecting of Romantic and Modernist theater aesthetics with high-tech digital culture is indeed a provocative one. He has a point here about the disappearance of actors’ fleshly bodies that touches upon a wide array of issues of corporeality, theatre, and poststructuralist performance paradigms; and all of these in relation to media technologies (from, newspapers to electric lights to digital mixed-media, to name a very selective few). He shows how Craig, Meyerhold, and Schlemmer all advocate the artificial body as a more streamlined and freely malleable performing object through which the director can assert more complete control in conveying their artistic ideas.

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<sup>128</sup> At least the first half of this genealogy is quite familiar in theater studies. For example, in his excellent article on Schlemmer, Moholy-Nagy, and the Bauhaus stage, Matthew Smith sketches a similar path from Kleist to Craig, Schlemmer, and Moholy-Nagy with much the same effect of adding a “this has been going on since Kleist” notion of historical weight without any specifics for what that might have meant for readers and dramatists circa 1800. “The sheer weight and restraining qualities of these costumes [Schlemmer’s designs for the Bauhaus stage], as well as the precision with which Schlemmer’s dances are meant to be performed, follow logically from such theoretical conceptions [the subordination of the human body to abstract geometry] as does Schlemmer’s embrace of Kleist’s essay on *Marionettentheater* and Gordon Craig’s conception of the *Übermarionette*” (90).

But the question remains, how exactly does Kleist's marionette figure into this genealogy except as the inspiration for the later dramatists? The imprecise historical and literary details offer some more potentially interesting comparisons between Kleist's aesthetics, performance theory and virtuality as it has been defined in this project. Kleist published his narrated dialogue in his newspaper in December of 1810. The date is a minor detail; Malone is only a month off, and one could argue that such specificity is of little import to his argument. Yet, this slight temporal blurring signals a broader decontextualization of Kleist's text. The formal/generic status of the piece is even more blurred as Malone designates it a *short story* and proceeds to read it as an *essay*. In arguing that Kleist "posits" anything in a "short story," let alone Herr C.'s famous thesis, Malone assigns the piece inaccurately to a particular genre and, then, does not read it in terms of that literary form. One "posits" in expository writing, and, as I have argued, Kleist's narrated dialogue is neither pure essay nor pure fiction, just as it is neither purely diegetic nor purely mimetic. Thus, Kleist posits nothing directly in the piece and especially not the ideas that are spoken by Herr C. or his bemused interlocutor. For Malone's reading, it is only important here that Kleist (even if in Herr C.'s words) has already imagined the escape from the fleshly body on the stage in an aesthetic-spiritual epiphany, one strikingly prescient of technological developments to come. Lifted out of literary and 'worldly' contexts, Kleist is here (and elsewhere) read as modernist rather than Romantic or rather than within the literary-philosophical contexts of German Romanticism, Classicism, and the Enlightenment. Instead of a dramatist on the margins of Goethe's Weimar, he is dislocated by a hundred years to the scene of European avant-garde theater from the turn of the century through the Weimar Republic.

What exactly is the disadvantage of the decontextualized use of Kleist's piece Malone's argument makes? How might one find a more scholarly rigorous and more

theoretically situated connection between Kleist's marionette and virtual bodies (in a wider theoretical sense than the digital avatars Malone discusses), as superior replacements for human actors, as ideal performers? The processes of substitution of an artificial body for an actual body on the stage, be it marionette or digital avatar speaks to an idea of a virtual body as a product of the desire to make the flesh inessential, reproducible (in that it can reliably reproduce the same performance over and over, a seeming guarantee of being able to return to the same, the impossibility which Phelan celebrates in her definition of performance),<sup>129</sup> to dematerialize the body to make it a more reliable medium of dramatic expression. Rather than mere antecedent – or a strikingly prescient moment – Kleist's piece could be analyzed with greater care in order to get to the mind-body issues and issues of gender and sexuality that are central both to his own ideas on theatrical performance and to current theories of performance, performativity, and theatricality. Reading Kleist's piece in relation to the dominant theatre of his day and as a dialogue, I have shown how Kleist, far from advocating such "escapes," aims his critique at Classical and Enlightenment theories that privilege disembodiment. In doing so, he 'constructs an absence in the incompatibility of these demands' on bodies, opening up a destabilized, virtual space for imagining new constellations of bodies, identities, and desires.

My use of the term virtual begs the question of why should one attempt to define virtual in a way that includes dialogues, play texts, and stage productions of the pre-digital era. In terms of computer technology, the virtual I consider here is *not* that of so-called Virtual Reality. As Deleuzeans have argued, VR should be called 'simulated

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<sup>129</sup>The issue of iterability is central here. In her discussion of Derrida and Butler, Janelle Reinelt explains, "Iteration means that in the space between the context and the utterance, there is no guarantee of a realization of prior conditions, but rather a deviance from them, which constitutes its performative force" (204).

reality' (Kalaga 102). We might reconsider the virtual in terms of the "unfinished," which, according to Peter Lunenfeld, defines the aesthetic of digital media. I argue that such a repositioning of the virtual allows one to consider literary forms and theatrical performances and technology as part of a more expansive network of affinities. As Peggy Phelan writes in her introduction to *The Ends of Performance*, "this new discourse [on digital media technologies], like most born-again devotees, forgets the technologies that preceded it and helped bring it into being. In the discourse of the new technologies, performance tends to be seen as atechological, rather than as a complex technology refined across cultures and across history" (9). Here I read theatre theory and practice as part of the complex technical and philosophical tools for imagining bodies, as well as defining and performing post/humanness, that precede the concept of the virtual in the context of computer technology. Insisting on the importance of literature, dialogue, drama, and the embodied materialities of performance to *digital media* or *new media*, is an attempt to steer thinking away from the VR model to the MOO model, from readymade product to participatory process.<sup>130</sup> Rather than simply rejecting or embracing virtual technologies as idealized escapes from material embodiment or from the messiness of the flesh, or rather than fearing or championing the replacement of actual stage performance by a purely computerized theatre, digital media and technologies offer ways to keep rethinking embodiment, especially in terms of gender or sexuality. It is the back-and-forth, the collision of digital avatar and fleshly embodiment that is necessary if

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<sup>130</sup> A MOO is an Object-Oriented Multi-User Domain that was popularized in the gaming community, especially among Dungeons and Dragons enthusiasts, and has been used as an online community-building and pedagogical tool. A MOO is a text environment which allows a designer to create spaces and objects. Users move through virtual spaces while communicating with other players and manipulating objects. Originally, a MOO interface was text-only; now, internet browsers are used for many MOO client interfaces allowing users to incorporate multiple media into the spaces they construct. In terms of pedagogy, I am no proponent of distance learning, but I am a proponent of using networked environments for teaching, and I find the mixture of digital technology and live performance quite compelling and worth exploring further (and here I'm thinking of Yakov Sharir's work in dance, and performance artists like Kate Bornstein and Guillermo Gómez-Peña).

we are going to learn how to best understand and exploit digital technologies in the humanities and performing arts.

How, then, might theater practitioners engage with and exploit digital technologies and aesthetics which have traditionally privileged the disembodied aspects of cyberspace? Can one do theater, to which the physical body is so central, in cyberspace without simply imagining another escape from the instabilities of the flesh? Hayles's theory of the posthuman "grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information... offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines" (287). By foregrounding embodiment and the mediating function of the digital avatar and computer technologies in reconfiguring relationships between bodies, identities and desires, some virtual theater practitioners avoid the Enlightenment fantasy of an escape from the flesh, culminating in the Moravecian uploading of consciousness and shedding of the physical body.<sup>131</sup>

Rather than equating the term 'virtual body' with the pre-fabricated synthesian pop star or video game hero, virtual bodies could be understood in light of the Deleuzian definition pursued here, the *that-which-will-become*. As Hayles has pointed out, embracing the posthuman does not necessarily require the elision of embodied actuality and the privileging of disembodiment or idealizing escapes from the flesh. While

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<sup>131</sup> I refer to Hans Moravec's *Mind Children*, discussed by Hayles, in which consciousness is uploaded into computers leaving physical bodies behind. In a similar move to my suggestion here, Matthew Causey asks "Can VR technologies be configured as a poststructuralist diremption machine undoing the sense of a unified self in known space, or does VR necessarily sustain the Cartesian mind/body duality and the conception of the self as steady and central, thus representing—as Simon Penny puts it—"the completion of the Enlightenment project?" (231). Catherine Bernard argues that "By breaking away from the idea of natural sex, and male and female sexed bodies, we can follow [Judith] Butler's lead and consider gender as enacted, as multiple and fluid... As we move about a virtual space, our avatars or our perspectives become sites for performativity when we are using them in spatialized interactive texts. If we can reveal the processes by which gender is produced—partly through the concept of performativity and partly through the technological apparatus used to create the work and its embedded ideologies—then we may also be able to reveal the processes through which ideas about space and their tie to gender are produced" (81).

keeping actual bodies on the scene, theatre and performance theory can exploit the dialogic opportunities that high-tech, digital spaces and tools offer to denaturalize deterministic relationships between bodies, identities, and desires. They can use technology to contest and resist normative, reductive models of gender and sexuality by foregrounding the movement between embodied actuality and cyberspace, rethinking the articulations of post/human and machine through a dialogic, open-ended aesthetic of 'unfinished.' The MOO environment with its emphasis on interactivity, dialogue, and process provides a flexible space in which to pursue such performance; mixed media performance, especially the mixture of live physical stage performance and remote, real-time interactive network performance provides opportunities for highlighting the relationship between actual bodies and digital avatars that can underscore the virtuality of bodies in performance in a broader sense. Rather than the finished product of a canned synthespian, process-oriented MOO performance speaks to the idea of virtual bodies as *becoming* or "unfinished."

Theatre practitioners and scholars began to think about and experiment with digital performance in the late 1990s. Stephen A. Schrum's collection of essays, *Theatre in Cyberspace*, reports on a variety of approaches, which employ MOO technology for performance and theatre. Juli Burk's work with ATHEMOO, The Association of Theatre in Higher Education's online space for remote conference meetings and dispersed performance events, explores the combination of "the pleasure of theatre on physical stages with the fully interactive nature of the MOOspace" (129). Kenneth Schweller's "Staging a Play in the MOO" discusses how comparing and contrasting theatrical performance with other dramatic mediums, here MOO theatre, help us to understand what constitutes physical theatre performance (147). He notes some of the features of MOO performance that allow audiences greater control and choice of focus and, in some

cases, that foster audience-performer interaction, breaking down the traditional fourth wall (148). Monika Wunderer looks to this interactive aspect of MOOs for possibilities of creating new kinds of theatre audiences. She shows how the MOO provides a venue for Meyerhold's ideas of the audience's dialogic interaction with theatrical performance.<sup>132</sup> Quoting Meyerhold's idea of "Stylized Theater" which "forces the spectator to create instead of merely looking on," she points to the MOO as a space in which the unfinishedness of theatrical performance can be enhanced by the MOO's interactivity and focus on dialogic process rather than end product.

Performance projects such those by Avatar Body Collision address the issue of the physical body in the realm of digital/networked performance more explicitly. In the production of *Swim*, the group presents a mixed media performance with remote participants appearing as projected images or digital avatars on an actual stage with an actual body on it.

The audience sees only close-ups of our heads and hands, and glimpses of other body parts – yet my presence on stage, performing to my web cam, insists that we are indeed real flesh and blood women. Despite the geographical distances, we are very really together in the performance: at one point, Leena (who is actually in Helsinki) leans out of her web cam and removes Karla's glasses. Karla (who is actually in London) responds by letting down Leena's hair, and the two women touch each others' bodies across cyberspace, playfully and sensuously, finishing with a kiss.<sup>133</sup>

Although embracing high-tech networked and remote performance, the group foregrounds flesh and blood bodies paradoxically exploring gestures of intimacy in the absence of physical proximity. They dialogically approach thinking about the physical body in relation to digital avatars, marking and foregrounding the relationships between

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<sup>132</sup> Wunderer quotes Meyerhold: "We produce every play on the assumption that it will still be unfinished when it appears on the stage. We do this consciously because we realize that the crucial revision of a production is that which is made by the spectator" (205).

<sup>133</sup> Jamieson, Helen Varley. "Dating, Relating, and Performing inside the Internet." *Art-e-fact* 3, 2003. <[http://artefact.mi2.hr/a03/lang\\_en/art\\_jamieson\\_en.htm](http://artefact.mi2.hr/a03/lang_en/art_jamieson_en.htm)>. August 31, 2005.

actual bodies and digital representations. The bodies of this type of theatrical performance conform to the definition of virtual bodies (offered in this project), because the focus on the denaturalizing and the opening up (or loosening) of relations between bodies, identities, and desires, and technology. These artificial bodies, like the ones considered earlier in this project, destabilize the natural/artificial binary by calling into question the status of and blurring boundaries between actual bodies onstage and digital representations of bodies and to purely digital avatars.

Such high-tech performance demonstrates the transgressive possibilities of artificial bodies as reactions against the erasure of actual bodies. They provide a counter-discourse to the high-tech narratives that privilege or uncritically celebrate disembodiment or escaping the flesh. Rather than aestheticizing the body as machine or dismissing the importance of physical bodies, these types of computer-enhanced performance engage in dialogues about performing bodies that throw the distinction between natural and artificial into question. In the plays and dialogues I have examined, Kleist and Wilde imagine new modes of embodiment, the queer and the posthuman, yet-to-come in that their aesthetic theories and dramas evince a longing for more flexible and complex models of embodiment that do not prescribe or authenticate gender and sexuality as functions of a mechanistic physiological nature. If the figures analyzed here represent virtually queer and posthuman modes of embodiment on stage, have actual queer and posthuman bodies arrived onstage? Or is their virtuality necessarily constituent? In other words, do the very notions of queerness and posthumanity require a permanent installation of the *that-which-will-become*? Queer and posthuman bodies have made their entrances onto the scene, but they arrive as *revenants*, appearing for the first time as a repetition. For example, transgendered artist Kate Bornstein's *Virtually Yours* presents the author/performer interacting dialogically with a computer program to

confront questions about the relations between sex, gender identity, and sexual desire. In the introduction to the printed version of this piece, Bornstein describes how she is “actually more comfortable transitioning than she is in arriving at some place called an identity” (235). Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the *La Pocha Nostra* troupe’s high-tech, cyborgian “aesthetic praxis involves ethnic and gender-bending, cultural transvestitism and constant, atypical and surprising power inversions” (*Manifesto*).<sup>134</sup> Both artists are concerned with dislodging and interrogating essentialist notions of identity that rely on the body as the defining site for sexual and racial identity. They present stylized queer and posthuman bodies whose artificiality resists those normative discourses that appeal to the nature of the body to rigidly prescribe gender and sexual behavior. But they do not invoke any ultimate authenticity based on the physical body, rather they explore the mutability and disruptiveness of embodiment to engage in rearticulate the relationships between bodies, identities, and desires, exploiting technology not to escape the body but to better understand its performative complexities.

To conclude, this project asserts that the re-readings of Kleist and Wilde’s works presented here can help us to rethink issues of performance and embodiment in the context of digital technology. The nineteenth century reductionist readings of Kleist’s *Penthesilea*, which interpret the heroine’s excessive or hyper-femininity as the product of a ‘perverted’ mind, are replicated in the early twentieth century reception of Wilde’s *Salomé*. Such readings extend well into the twentieth century, and some persist to this day. Unlike Bram Dijkstra’s readings of feminine perversity, this project insists that the

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<sup>134</sup> “La Pocha Nostra is a virtual ‘maquiladora’ (assembly plant) that produces brand-new metaphors, symbols, images and words to explain the new complexities of our times. The Spanglish neologism ‘Pocha Nostra’ translates as either ‘our impurities’ or ‘the cartel of cultural bastards.’ We love this poetic ambiguity. It reveals an attitude towards art and society: ‘Cross-racial, poly-gendered, experi-mental, y que?’” (*Manifesto*).

work these plays are doing is not necessarily misogynistic; rather they engage these conventional *femme-fatale* types to challenge dominant ideas about bodies, identities, and desires. In their dialogues, both Kleist and Wilde work to dismantle the very types of reductive interpretive strategies that come to frame their plays in their initial contexts of reception, and those interpretive frameworks are still with us. Interpretations such as Malone's force Kleist's dialogue into the rubric of the Enlightenment project with its privileging of the disembodied white male subject, a project many see as culminating in digital technology's promise of escaping the flesh à la Moravec. Similarly, Dijkstra's project remains firmly rooted in humanist notions of gender and sexuality. Reading these plays and dialogues as virtually queer, in light of their dismantling of the natural/artificial binary, is an attempt to resist such reductive interpretations. Rather than continuations of the Enlightenment project or reifications of humanist notions of incommensurable sexual difference, the works examined here represent breaks with those corporeal models. Rather than idealizing escapes from the flesh or fixing gender and sexuality as natural corporeal phenomena, Kleist and Wilde's works problematize those models; in doing so they offer strategies for rearticulating the relationships between bodies, identities, and desires. The artificial bodies discussed here in conjunction with the unfinished, open-ended aesthetic of the dialogue, suggest strategies for exploiting digital technology, not to escape embodiment, but to better understand the performativity of bodies in performance.

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## **Vita**

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