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Filming Dance: Embodied Syntax in Sasha Waltz's 'S'

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Abstract:

This paper brings Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to Sasha Waltz's dance film <u>S</u>, which focuses on the relation between sexuality and language. Maintaining that movement in cinema takes place in the viewers and not the film, the paper considers how the visual can be deepened to include the ways we move and are moved. Saussure's insights into language are brought to the sensible, which is here understood in terms of divergences from norms. Though film would seem to privilege vision, viewing this film helps to elucidate Merleau-Ponty's claim that a film succeeds when it engages the viewer's embodied understanding, and shifts the norms of the corporeal schema.

Keywords: corporeal schema, dance, film, language, Merleau-Ponty, movement, Sasha Waltz, sexuality

Contemporary dance is in excess of language, and shows how bodies have their own

ways of reflecting, perceiving and responding, as well as their own logic or syntax that is

both general and particular.[1] While this syntax does not directly translate into words, it

nevertheless overlaps and intertwines with language in the ways it is taken up by the

corporeal schema as the possibilities of movement and structures of action that allow us

to engage with the world. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty called this a

kind of 'sensible reflection', a thinking through embodiment which contemporary artistic

works engage since corporeal being is the way in which we live 'our relationships with

others'.[2] In this paper I address this potential of dance but from the perspective of filming

dance performance. More specifically, I explore how filmed contemporary dance

performance takes up this enigmatic relation among the viewer, sense and embodied

movement, an area where little has been written. Erin Brannigan, in her ground-breaking

exploration of dancefilm, points out that those writing on dance have been reluctant to

take on 'film culture', and film theorists have not taken up 'issues in dance studies',

though the history of modern dance intertwines with that of cinema.[3] While Brannigan

draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological

approach to explore Berlin choreographer Sasha Waltz's filmed S, part of the

extraordinary, abstract series on the body which also includes Körper and noBody which

were created to critical acclaim for Berlin's Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz.[4] Importantly,

I work only with the film version; though I have seen two of Waltz's works on stage, I

have never seen S performed live. Film works differently than live dance since it not only

offers the possibility of repetition and of increasing viewer participation, it also relies primarily upon another kind of movement than that of dance — the movement of being moved. Thus, assuming the film to be a lesser version, a copy of the original, does not help us to understand what dance film actually is, which is something different from the performance itself, though both open on to the same world. With dance film, sensible reflection takes place on the part of the viewer, for the film remains a technological object. In drawing on Merleau-Ponty, I turn in particular to recently published lectures from the early 1950s, which shed new light on the phenomenological intersection of language, the corporeal schema, movement and film.[5]

The film of S, though produced when the dance first premiered in 2000, was only recently released, probably because it was the least well received of the trilogy and, according to Waltz, the least understood.[6] It focuses on the relations among sexuality, gender, language and embodiment, and contributes to reshaping viewers' corporeal understandings of bodies as openings to the world. Waltz claims that she wanted the dancers to be for the most part naked in S because clothing communicates a 'cultural, social and historical meaning';[7] clothing, moreover, shifts the ways in which we move, and the ways in which others respond to us, which S also interrogates. Nonetheless, there are no absolutely natural bodies, as these dancers' bodies show — they have been shaped by rigorous training and experience, and are the muscular and supple bodies of dancers; as well, some have tattoos, others wear rings in their ears or navels. But what paradoxically appears in the absolute exposure of moving bodies is the opposite of voyeurism, the opposite of the consumption and objectification of bodies, a theme explored in Körper. Instead, rather than the visual aspects of erotic embodiment, what

comes to the fore is the experience on the part of the viewer of one's body as moving and moved, as vulnerable and open, as inherently relational.[8] Although film would seem to privilege vision, viewing this film helps to elucidate Merleau-Ponty's claim that a film is successful to the extent that it engages the viewer's embodied understanding, and thereby shifts the norms of the corporeal schema and, in turn, the viewer's ways of perceiving according to the film.[9] Thus, film can deepen the visual, revealing the importance of embodiment to sense, and how sense in turn embeds itself in the body's corporeal schema.[10]

I. Sensible reflection

S works both to establish a world my body understands, and to bring cultural and social understandings to the fore in order to interrogate them, and perhaps also to shift them. But it also brings to the forefront embodied norms that provide a background that cannot be thematized precisely because they are the styles in which we perceive, grasp and take up the world, which are not in themselves graspable. More specifically, Waltz's work explores the ways in which bodies take up sense both generally as moving bodies, and particularly in the ways that each individual body moves into meaning. Thus, an important inspiration was the letter 'S', which provides the title of the dance. Waltz's advice to viewers is to search out their own chains of association with words beginning with 'S', such as Schlitz (slit) and Schlange (serpent), the two words offered by Waltz.[11] These slang terms for female and male genitals are at once both signifiers that are overdetermined and, as she shows in her dance, lines of embodied movement: the stage has a slit, a line into which dancers are drawn or leap, and from which they also emerge,

and the dancers dance the sinuousness of the serpentine lines of the body. The sinuous

line, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is not visible in itself. It provides rather an axis from

which other lines of movement are generated. As he clarifies, 'the beginning of the line's

path establishes or installs a certain level or mode of the linear, a certain manner for the

line to be and to make itself a line, "to go line"'.[12] Although he was writing with respect

to painting, his observations about lines apply well to dance.[13] He notes that, relative to

the lines that establish levels, 'every subsequent inflection will have a diacritical value,

will be another aspect of the line's relationship to itself, will form an adventure, a history,

a meaning of the line' (EM, 183; 74).[14] In other words, the line itself can never be

precisely traced — it remains in the background, yet it nevertheless generates

modulations of movement or style diacritically, or in terms of the écart, which can be

understood as a spreading apart, a gap or divergence.

Though, according to Emmanuel Alloa, the term 'diacritical' comes out of

Merleau-Ponty's reading of Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, Merleau-Ponty

takes it up in order to think through the sensible as a differential process.[15] For Saussure,

meaning is not produced through identification with the words but rather through the

ways words, indeed phonemes diverge from one another, which means the relation of

signifier to signified is arbitrary. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the sensible arises

'diacritically' in the divergences from norms that remain in the background, and these

norms belong to the corporeal schema. In a system of embodied meanings and ways of

moving, individuals take up the norms in terms of the ways they individually diverge

from them, the ways they take up the norms and live them. In this sense we partake in the

general but only to the extent that we take it up in the ways which are 'most our own' (Si, 52; 65).

Waltz's choreography in particular addresses the ways in which words, specifically words beginning with 'S', itself a sinuous line, provide generative axes that motivate but do not determine the movements that will diverge from them. Accordingly, as Waltz explains, naming the words in advance already begins to shape the way viewers will encounter the work, something she wants to avoid (Interview). She would prefer that viewers bring their own 'S' words, and still others emerge, both from viewing the dance as well as from the interviews with the dancers; words such as sex, stage (Schaubühne), sin (Sünde), silence (Stille), to swim (schwimmen), solidarity (Solidarität), sport, semen (Samen), sweat (Schweiß), to swing (schaukeln), to stand (stehen), to long for (sehnen), to feel (spüren), to disturb (stören), to slide (schleudern), to hit (schlagen), to play (spielen), Sasha and sinuous (schlängelnd). The dancers themselves helped compose the work through improvisation around 'S' words.

For Saussure, meaning emerges laterally in the relationship between words, but the materiality of the signifier is irrelevant.[16] But for Merleau-Ponty, meaning arises because words belong to the 'immense fabric of language', which is also able to 'present something to us as well. A friend's speech over the telephone brings us the friend himself, as if he were wholly present in that manner of calling' (Si, 43; 54). The dancers, accordingly, extend, and feel out the embodied lines of the words, showing viewers the ways in which the arbitrariness of language becomes deeply embodied. The words are generative and these bodies in turn creatively reshape words' meanings through the style in which they are taken up in their own particularity. In search of new creative

possibilities, Waltz thus encourages her dancers to explore language through movement stretching it into new configurations. In part, as we shall see, she does this through choreographing gender and sexual performances, scripts that seem bound to fail, no matter how they are mixed up or challenged, precisely because they remain clichés or scripts.

Accordingly, just as language has its own syntax, so, too, for each artist 'style is the system of equivalences' created to manifest the perceived world, which means that abstract art is not a negation of the world but is rather a new system of expression that nonetheless belongs to the whole (Si, 54–6; 68–70). In this then, sensible reflection refers directly to such an embodied syntax and understanding. For it is the body that provides 'a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world', and that outlines the 'hollows and reliefs, distances and deviations' (Si, 67; 83). Because we are embodied, being is inexhaustible and can be taken up through each individual's particular style of engagement. Thus, 'primordial expression' institutes new meanings from within the system of equivalences that already exist (Si, 67; 84).[17] In Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure it becomes described as the way in which 'each act of expression becomes significant only as a modulation of a general system of expression and only insofar as it is differentiated from other linguistic gestures' (Si, 81; 101).

II. Film and the Pictorial

In fact, this modulation of expression is a form of movement, which, for Merleau-Ponty, is central to expression. He describes it as a 'double movement': meaning descends 'into the world', and this descending 'movement transforms itself into expression, — which it

was already' (SWWE, 32; MSME, 164). The movement inherent to expression is thus not that of moving from one space to another; it is inherent to embodied being whereby even rest is a kind of movement.[18] But more than this he wants to reveal the 'foreignness' of expression, that it does not originate from a self, but rather that we take it up and make it our own. Merleau-Ponty turns to painting and to film to explore this double movement, this 'conversion of movement into expression', because 'pre-linguistic forms of expression' both sublimate 'human movement' and reveal the ways in which it is not generated from individual subjects (SWWE, 32; MSME, 164–5).

S provides the opportunity to explore this overlapping of the pictorial, film and the sublimation of expression in movement. The dance piece itself is a triptych inspired in part by Hieronymus Bosch's triptych, Garden of Earthly Delights, a fantastic depiction of human desire, sensuality and fall from grace.[19] The left panel portrays Adam and Eve before expulsion, the central offers an ambiguous, sometimes paradoxical illustration of naked bodies cavorting among enormous birds, lush vegetation and oversized fruits, and the right panel provides a depiction of hell with strange creatures and their even stranger actions. Waltz, as she describes it, was interested in this ambiguous in-between state, the moment after leaving paradise when one still remembers what it felt like, and the ambiguity of not knowing exactly where hell ends and paradise begins. This state intertwines the ambiguity of desire and lust, of pain and pleasure, of the elemental and the primal life force, of the past overlapping with the future (Interview). The first section of the dance triptych thus explores this in-between world through a meditation on sensuality (Sinnlichkeit) as a primordial force, a state of freedom without awareness of rules; the second section takes up gendered sexual relations as sport (sportlich), in other

words, the submission of sensuality to rules. The third and final section draws upon a surreal world of animals, mythical figures, strange appearances and incongruences that resonate with the world presented in Bosch's triptych — it is the falling apart of order.

In fact, there are several ways that the dance film S resonates with the pictorial of Bosch's work. First, both are reflections on the creative process itself, the birth of embodied meaning. For Bosch, this theme is introduced by the inscription on the closed triptych, which depicts a grisaille globe of the earth with the Latin inscription: 'He spoke and it was there; he commanded and they were created.'[20] Second, Waltz's choreography is often complex with several things happening on the stage at once. The viewer, and in the case of the film, the director, must make choices about what to attend to, as we do in our everyday perception. Bosch's works are perceptually, and sensually, complex; they cannot be consumed in a glance. Eyes must rove over the texture of his works, in the way that fingers do with touch, interrogating scenes one by one. And, finally, both Bosch and Waltz explore the possibilities of the seemingly impossible.[21]

Importantly, for Merleau-Ponty, movement in the pictorial does not actually refer to the movement of the things themselves, but rather to the ways in which the things relate, which he describes as the '"vibrations of the entire picture", an architecture even when the details are not visible' (SWWE, 33; MSME, 167). In other words, the coming into appearance of meaning, a movement in itself, belongs to the entire picture and not to the details.[22] This means that the 'movement of the pictorial is a movement of "language" (…). The forms breathe. They bear one another, are intertwined, merge with one another' (34; 167). It is the movement of expression, which is also the shifting movement of meaning in the world that is prelinguistic, for the picture is not enclosed within its frame

but rather opens on to a world, providing for the movement of the line, for this 'more secret form of movement' (34; 168). The art work thus provides movement in allowing for 'variations in the modulations of our being in the world'; he describes this modulation as écart, as divergence from 'a norm that is never itself given', that is provided only in the particular ways we take it up (34; 168).

Film similarly reveals movement as transformation. A film, as Merleau-Ponty points out in his essay on the subject, presents no horizons as such.[23] Movement is not absolute movement, from one place to another. The editing and montage can give us the sense of a space and the movement within it that is provided by our experience of a spatial and temporal world that we bring with us to the viewing, but there is no actual movement as such. As Vivian Sobchack explains, a film is 'an expression of experience by experience'.[24] This means that rather than providing representations of movement from place to place, movement in cinema is the 'interrogation of my natural and {social} being in the world by means of divergences' (SWWE, 35; MSME, 170).[25] When we watch a film we bring with us 'sensorial and cultural fields', a 'completely assembled system of relations between sign and signification' (35; 170).

Thus, movement in film makes sense to the extent that the viewers are able to enter into the world that the film presents. Merleau-Ponty describes this process in terms of anchoring my vision and taking up residence in a milieu or level (FNP, 54). Importantly for Merleau-Ponty, the 'film is only a work of art if it plays with this system' allowing for divergences that bring something new to presence in my corporeal schema, in my embodied ways of understanding (SWWE, 35; MSME, 170). The success of filming dance is the extent to which my body can take up and make sense of the

movements, can enter into and be moved by the world of the dance. Thus movement in film concerns transformation or metamorphosis rather than movement from place to place.

The significance of Merleau-Ponty's claim about the relation of viewer to film is underscored if we turn to Brannigan's work on dancefilm where she relies on Deleuze's somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Henri Bergson. According to this reading, the 'ancient' way of thinking that privileges the 'pose' or the instant is deposed for the 'modern' one that engages the '"endless flow" of life'.[26] With flow, a moment can be understood as 'any-instant-whatever' — no moment is privileged over another, contributing to the figure or whole, rather than the part. This understanding of flow is mirrored for Brannigan in the flow of early modern dance and cinema. But the problem with drawing on Deleuze's reading is that Bergson, unlike Deleuze, is critical of cinema. Dorothea Olkowski points out that, for Bergson, the any-instants-whatever of film belongs to the classical physics from which Deleuze draws.[27] As Deleuze understands it, the privileged instant is deposed for moments which provide the homogenous blocks of space-time that make up a single duration; 'personal consciousness' is abandoned (DLMT, 14). These any-instants-whatever are, for Deleuze, 'immanent and material, derived from the continuous and mechanical succession of moments of classical science, according to which time is an independent variable' (DLMT, 2). Change can happen in the relation of one instant to another but not in terms of the instant itself. But, as Olkowski explains, for Bergson, human consciousness cannot be collapsed into natural science: 'there is no duration without consciousness and no before and after without memory (…). [W]ithout this personal element all we have is one moment next to another

and there will be nothing to connect them' (DLMT, 14). Accordingly, film can go backwards or forwards; it can be sped up or slowed down, but it does not itself change. Change only takes place in the viewer, something Merleau-Ponty understood. Brannigan herself seems to recognize a problem in Deleuze's approach when she acknowledges he touches 'only momentarily on the role of the spectator'.[28]

Sasha Waltz seems to understand the significance of the movement of meaning in film. S incorporates video projections of moving water, flocks of birds circling in flight, an airplane taking off from a runway. Some film sequences play repeatedly. Others are held as stills, sometimes slowed down or even reversed. In the final surreal section of the triptych, the video projection takes on a more central role. The scene begins with a dancer (Laurie Young) in a long flowing dress walking gracefully in front of a screen. A giraffe appears projected on the screen behind her. Though they both move in tandem, the giraffe overtakes her and she in turn then follows. The two bodies seem, chiasmically, to mirror each other — just as we take up and embody the meanings that film provides, and film in turn embodies corporeal meanings.

Indeed, the last section of the dance triptych reveals the ways in which bodies' capacities to move into and take up non-linguistic meaning can also result in a kind of cacophony. Modulating with Bosch's work, there are a myriad of overlapping surreal vignettes, Jonathan Bepler's sonic scores of accordion music, industrial sounds, and birds chirping, an overlay of competing sonic and even historical levels. On the screen at the back of the stage we see rhinos lumber across the space, a woman sitting on an oversized egg, and, in the background, greenery and trees, a mythic landscape. Multiple corporeal possibilities are explored in this section as overlapping sensible significations, from the

dancer moving with the jerkiness of a marionette, to fluid bodies writhing on the ground in a milky substance, to a scene where one dancer thrashes another with a contraption made of thin branches that would easily fit into a Bosch triptych. The encroachment of bodies, pleasures and pain speaks to the ambiguity of bodies as well as their limitless potentiality for expression.

III. Corporeal Schema and Movement

It is through the corporeal schema that this modulation of expression takes place. Dance as an art form in particular allows for sensible reflection on this movement of taking up the strangeness of meaning in one's own way, for dancers embody rather than represent. In improvisation, upon which Waltz relies, neither the dance nor the meaning is set out in advance but emerges through the intertwining of ideas, the ways dancers take them up, and the space in which the dance emerges. Of course, choreographers and dancers bring with them a certain style or way of understanding the world embedded within their corporeal schema, which can be understood as the individual's way of moving into and taking up the world as a system of practical capacities, as the 'je peux' or 'I can'. The corporeal schema is the body as interpenetration of subject and world, which means that it is always already a 'certain structure of the perceived world' (MSME, 144). Nevertheless, it remains open to further articulation (MSME, 132). As Emmanuel de Saint Aubert suggests, for Merleau-Ponty, 'it is not the eye or mind which perceives movement, but rather the corporeal schema in its entirety' which is in turn animated by movement, thus revealing to us our 'co-existence with the world'.[29]

Importantly, the corporeal schema as this system of practical possibilities provides a structure that cannot be reduced to signification; it is a 'totality without an idea', a plan that aids memory, yet itself resists interpretation (MSME, 133–4). For example, if I am asked to locate the letters on the computer keyboard, my hands and fingers guide my response. For a dancer to think through a choreographed move, her body prepares to guide her through. The corporeal schema is thus not itself like an object deployed before us but, rather, we are stuck to it, situated within it. It allows for our contact with the outside, our mutual implication in the world. Perception is thus part of an entire system of schema, world and movement. This means that the schema, like the pictorial, is a system that 'dominates the details', that shapes the senses, and that 'indicates an order, an interior process' (133). Because the corporeal schema gathers and shapes our contact with the world, it is itself movement. It is thus, so to speak, 'an attitude towards' the world; it 'opens up goals', and 'founds praxis' (127, 133). Importantly, this means that, since the corporeal schema is itself not perceived, it can be understood to be more like a 'norm or a privileged position in opposition to that which defines the perceived body' (143). Nevertheless, because our bodies are a certain structure of the perceived world, we carry its traces within us (112).

When I view Waltz's film, I experience this dynamic of divergence as sensible reflection in that, in watching the film, I become more aware of the ways in which my body moves rather than the ways in which it appears, although the appearing nonetheless contributes to these structures. The film is successful to the extent that it engages my whole body, and not just my visual perception. In fact, it is, for Merleau-Ponty, precisely because the corporeal schema precedes 'explicit perception' that it requires rethinking

how we understand what it is to be conscious, and that motility and consciousness are co-implicated one in the other (MSME, 143, 158). Since the corporeal schema is 'an opening to a world through motricity', it is also thus a relation with others, language and thought; it is always already expression (MSME, 158).

Each section of the dance triptych provides what Waltz calls a different universe, or, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, a new level against which the field of moving relations appears (Interview). The first scene sets the measure as one of sensuous and embodied touching. Indeed, what is remarkable about the opening scene of S is how riveting it is to watch a body being touched, intimately, and yet with the distance that questioning attentiveness requires. The film begins with a naked dancer's body (Virgis Puodziunas) lying face down on the stage, filling the frame. The only movement is the expansion and contraction of the body breathing — the basic movement of life. As the scene unfolds, this body is touched in turn by other dancers, each of whom has his or her own style of touching, and the man's body responds differently to each one.

The four dancers who individually engage with this body, explore, question and move into its level, each finding their own expression of the style of the caress, finding the right speed and pressure to explore the horizons of this vulnerable corporeal terrain. To explore a body, to really take measure of its surface, seems to require this gentle, sinuous, respectful exploration, and we see the ways in which the body responds, rising to meet each caress, twisting gently into their hands. This is not the way in which bodies are usually approached. It is an intimacy that new lovers might share, and yet these questioning gestures are not overtly part of a lover's entanglement. The level is set by the responsiveness to one particular body, but no one response is precisely the same. Each of

the dancers who engages with the body brings a certain style of gesture, shaped to an extent by the clothing each wears as well as by each one's own particular way of moving.

The living body itself provides a model for this divergence from the norm. Touching, like seeing and hearing, requires movement. Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, perception is synonymous with movement; this means seeing and touching are dependent on motility, and yet the touching of the touching, the seeing of the seeing, will always diverge.[30] Thus, touch as touching oneself can be understood in the ways that things are a 'prolongation' of the body and the body is 'the prolongation of the world' (VI, 255; 308). I cannot touch myself because my movements are 'entirely woven out of contacts with me' (255; 308). The living body thus belongs to another dimensionality; it is not a 'sum of self-touchings' it is rather a corporeal schema, an 'I can' that is in itself 'contact of self with self' (VI, 255; 308). In fact, for Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is the outcome of praxis and not of contemplation (MSME, 158). He suggests that there is a non-causal relation between consciousness and motility. We are motile because we are conscience, and conscience because we are motile (158). Thus, as Stefan Kristensen clarifies, the 'structure of movement is that which gives sense, that permits us to think the question of the sensible and that of sense together'.[31] It is the subject as an 'I can' and not an 'I think' who organizes experience.

V. Gender and Sexuality: The Slit and the Serpent
If the first scene of the triptych calls us to meditate on desire and sexuality as a primal sexual force before it has been subjected to codes, the second scene focuses on the interrelational need to connect despite the imposition of codes. In the first scene, the

dancers' intertwinements do not follow strictly heterosexual scripts, and we are called to understand the power of a life force that is both universal and particular to each sexed body. Male bodies sinuously move through and around the holes created by each other's arms or legs, suggesting both the slit and the serpent. Naked bodies slither, roll and bounce off the hard surface of the floor. We can feel the difference in their surfaces, the soft and supple flesh of bodies and the firmness of the floor. The dancers breathe faster and faster, moving more and more frantically, rolling over each other, until all the bodies are intermingled and vibrating. The scene ends with four pairs of dancers leaning into each other, supporting each other's weight like tilted dominoes, or the 'x' of the chiasm, arranged in diverse pairings both in terms of gender and of racialized bodies.

If we meditate on this dance in terms of the letter 'S', which is itself a sinuous line, then the slit and the serpent are less forms of ontic materiality than modes of sexual and sensual essencing, of moving and being moved. They are generating axes that bodies take up and from which they diverge in their own ways. These are ways in which '"pure" ideality [or meaning] already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things' (VI, 152; 200). The slit and the serpent thus both provide articulations of the line of divergence (écart), of being caught up in the dance to the extent that the body is only partially agent; instead, the dancers' bodies feel themselves responding to the ideas that belong to the structure of the work.[32] Merleau-Ponty describes the way that Proust's violinist finds himself 'to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it.' Ideas, like the little phrase, 'animate' and 'haunt' 'interior speech', as the '"little phrase" possesses the violinist, and they remain beyond the words as it

remains beyond the notes' (VI, 151; 199). The ideas are thus corporeal essences, not essences in a Platonic sense, but rather in the ways they provide a 'certain divergence', a 'never-finished differentiation, that openness ever to be reopened between the sign and the sign' (VI, 153; 201).

We can thus see how exploring gender as performative is limited if we remain solely on the visual plane, for the issue is not so much about the ways in which we perceive gender, though of course the visible is taken up in the aesthesiological body, but rather about the norms which are not in themselves ultimately graspable and which nonetheless, like the little phrase, take their hold upon us and to which we respond each in our own way. The second 'sportlich' or playful (spielerisch) section of the triptych takes up this theme explicitly. In this new level, the dancers are not motivated by the sensuousness of the body as they are in the first section, but rather by exaggerations of the clichés of gender relations and dating rituals: a female (Young) and a male dancer (Nicola Mascia) engage in a duet of pulling down and up tops and underwear, with rapid and determined movements. There is no sense here of attunement to the body's measure, but rather to other lines or codes. The codes dominate, yet the dancers still frantically try to connect. What follows are a number of stylized sexual encounters. It doesn't really matter how the dancers' bodies are arranged in these pairings — the encounters are fleeting. A man in a white jacket (Mascia), naked from the waist down except for high heels approaches Young to dance with him but she continues to dance on her own. He turns to another woman (Claudia de Serpa Soares), and their feet move together to a beat other than the techno beat the audience hears. Pairings cross gendered and racialized lines, yet do not seem to challenge social codes since the gestures are often indifferent —

the norms do not belong to particular bodies. Nonetheless, there are moments where desire and tenderness show through.

This indifference is itself not indifferent. Waltz works purposefully against uniformity, and her dancers come out of diverse cultures and have different stories to tell.[33] It is precisely the differences among her embodied dancers that allows for the particularity of movements to show through. Bodies are not neutral, and this, as Kozel points out with reference to Luce Irigaray's articulation of sexual difference, is not so much about 'maleness and femaleness as much as it is about allowing the embodied, material voice of an other to exist alongside dominant discourse and practices'.[34]

Indeed, dancers can help 'make visible what was supposed to remain invisible according to a masculine logic'.[35] In S we see this in the way familiar stylized rituals are played out: one man (Millwood) tries to catch a woman (de Serpa Soares); she runs from him — he pursues her. She smiles. He catches her. They dance together and come apart. An aerobics instructor (Mascia) points to parts of his body as the dancers follow these gestures as imposed norms. We see implied violence: male dancers throwing a female dancer (de Serpa Soares) among them — we feel the menace behind this action of throwing a woman around as one might an object. These rituals establish the norms against which sexual relations appear, and what appears is that the planning and organizing of gender relations seems ultimately to fail; it does not allow for any intimacy or relation.

Though these attempts at connecting are mostly failures, the dancers continue to engage in the rituals because humans are inherently interrelational and the corporeal schema itself has a libidinal structure (MSME, 159). Perception is tied to movement and

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desire in that we perceive, are moved by and move towards that to which we are drawn. Nonetheless, it is still always the material body at stake. Waltz's choreography works against the vertical axis of classical dance that relies on the upright body of the dancer, itself often a cliché. Instead, her dancers work with gravity, mobilizing the suppleness and weight of their bodies as they move out of the vertical axis. Waltz understands this as a certain material logic of bodily flow that has certain boundaries that cannot be crossed. I find it in keeping with Merleau-Ponty's logic of the line that establishes new corporeal axes or levels from which other lines of movement are generated (SWG, 46). Even in the second section, the very materiality of the body in the feeling of its weight and physical presence juts through and belies the shallowness of coded relations, reminding us of what is actually at stake. Moreover, if we return to the first section where the initial scene dominated by the single naked body cuts away to a dancer (Grayson Millwood) holding de Serpa Soares's now limp body that he slowly undresses, we can see this more clearly. The viewer does not so much feel the surface of her body as its material weight: Millwood balances de Serpa Soares's body, turning it around and upside down in order to pull off each article of her historically dated and thus unfamiliar garments. Her body is both a thing and yet not a thing. The other dancers then also begin to shed their clothing. The viewer is not so much caught up in an erotic scene of writhing bodies, but is invited to contemplate what naked bodies actually are, and what they are capable of feeling, and touching, and experiencing.

V. Conclusion

If consciousness is the outcome of praxis and not of contemplation, and movement and perception are inherently intertwined, then watching dance film has the possibility of changing our praxis and hence our consciousness. Both film and dance are about taking up ideas in ways that cannot reduce them to words; they are always in excess of language and their meaning is in the flesh of the dance or film itself. Nonetheless, because of this intertwining structure, bodies embody meaning, in particular to the extent that they gear into and take up the structures or worlds they inhabit. Importantly, because these structures open on to one other, film as a primarily visual medium nonetheless has the potential of opening up corporeal structures or norms and reconfiguring them. Where dance is about movement, filming dance paradoxically focuses our attention on the movement that film makes possible, that of moving viewers.

NOTES

[1] This paper is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Christine Fielding (1962–2014), who taught me much about movement and being moved. Thanks to Kim Dority for her helpful discussions of dance.

[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Man and Adversity' in Signs, edited and translated by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 230–2; originally published as Signes (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 292–4. (Hereafter Si; translation modified.)

[3] Erin Brannigan, Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6. See also Brandon Shaw, 'Sitting-there: Embodied Perception, Kinesthetic Empathy, and Reading Pain in Dance Spectatorship' (Dissertation for University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2012).

[4] Waltz's company is called Sasha Waltz & Friends, and she understands her works to be co-productions.

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Le Monde sensible et le monde de l'expression: Cours au Collège de France Notes, 1953, edited by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert and Stefan Kristensen (Geneva: Mētis Presses, 2011). (Hereafter MSME). Translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

[6] Sasha Waltz, <u>S</u> (Arthaus Musik, 2011); Sasha Waltz, <u>Gespräche mit Michaela Schlagenwerth</u> (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2008), 67. (Hereafter <u>SWG</u>.)

[7] Ulrike Traub, <u>Sasha Waltz: Die Körper-Trilogie in Theater der Nacktheit: Zum Bedeutungswandel entblösster Körper auf der Bühne seit 1900</u> (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2010), 339.

[8] Harrier Dreier, in reviewing <u>S</u> concludes that 'one forgets that the actors are naked and wonders when one leaves that one is dressed oneself' (my translation). Cited in Traub, <u>Sasha Waltz</u>, 339.

[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Sensible World and the World of Expression. Extract from the Fourteenth Lecture from the 1953 Course at the Collège de France', translated by Bryan Bannon, <u>Chiasmi International</u> 12 (2010), 35 (SWWE); <u>MSME</u>, 170.

[10] In French, <u>sens</u> (sense or meaning) refers to both direction and meaning, in other words also to meaning as movement.

[11] 'Bonus material: Interview with Sasha Waltz', <u>S</u>, 23–1:23. (Hereafter, Interview.)

[12] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in <u>The Primacy of Perception</u>, edited by James E. Edie and translated by Carleton Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 183; originally published as <u>L'Œil et l'esprit</u> (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 74. (Hereafter EM.)

[13] See Samuel B. Mallin, <u>Art Line Thought</u> (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996). Mallin writes about the line with respect to choreographer Pina Bausch's dance theatre. I draw on his insights as well as his body hermeneutics for this study.

[14] Levels are primarily spatial providing the orientation or relational logic against which things, people and relations appear. The first level is the body as the 'system of anonymous "functions"' (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, translated by Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 265).

[15] Emmanuel Alloa, 'The Diacritical Nature of Meaning: Merleau-Ponty with Saussure', <u>Chiasmi International</u> 15 (2013), 170, 174.

[16] Alloa, 'The Diacritical Nature of Meaning', 169.

[17] Merleau-Ponty, unlike Saussure, distinguishes between 'the empirical use of already established language' and 'its creative use' (<u>Si</u>, 44; 56).

[18] Luca Vanzango, 'The Many Faces of Movement: Phenomenological and Ontological Questions concerning the Relation between Perception, Expression and Movement in Merleau-Ponty's Lecture Course on The Sensible World and the World of Expression', Chiasmi International 12 (2010), 119.

[19] Hieronymus Bosch, triptych with the Garden of Earthly Delights, oil on panel, central panel 220cm by 195cm, side panels, 220cm by 97cm each (Madrid, Museo del Prado, c. 1504).

[20] 'Ipse dixit et facta sunt,/ ipse mandavit et creata sunt' (Erwin Pokorny, 'Hieronymus Bosch und das Paradies der Wollust', Frühneuzeit-Info 21:1+2 (2010), 23).

[21] Pokorny, 'Hieronymus Bosch und das Paradies der Wollust', 26.

[22] Vanzango, 'The Many Faces of Movement', 119.

[23] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Film and the New Psychology', translated by H. Dreyfus and P. Dreyfus, Sense and Non-sense (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 68. (Hereafter FNP.)

[24] Vivian Sobchack, The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4.

[25] The brackets are in the source text.

[26] Brannigan, Dancefilm, 21.

[27] Dorothea Olkowski, 'Deleuze and the Limits of Mathematical Time', Deleuze Studies 2:1 (2008), 14. (Hereafter DLMT.)

[28] Brannigan, Dancefilm, 185.

[29] Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, 'Conscience et expression', in MSME 28–9, 26. My translation.

[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 255; originally published as Le Visible et l'invisible (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 308. (Hereafter VI.)

[31] Stefan Kristensen, 'Le mouvement de la création. Merleau-Ponty et le corps de l'artiste', Alter: revue de phénoménologie 16 (2008), 248.

[32] Susan Kozel, Closer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 35.

[33] Traub, Sasha Waltz, 324.

[34] Kozel, Closer, 62–3.

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[35] Kozel, <u>Closer</u>, 64.