**Scenography, spectacle and the body of the spectator Joslin McKinney**

**Introduction: ‘giant spectacular’**

In April 2012 French company Royal de Luxe staged Sea Odyssey in Liverpool to coincide with the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic. Over three days a thirty foot tall ‘little girl giant’ and her fifty foot high uncle made a twenty three mile journey through the streets between the Pier Head and Stanley Park. Billed as a ‘giant spectacular’ it required a company of 110 with an additional 250 local volunteers. An estimated half a million people gathered to follow the performance, effectively suspending the usual weekend business of the city.

Looking at reviews and reports, it is difficult to get beyond the sheer size of the event. Alan Read was struck by the same thing when Royal de Luxe presented The Sultan’s Elephant in central London, in 2006 and he says that it was talked about ‘in terms of scale and little else’ (2006: 522-532). Read’s suspicion was that behind the numbers, the experience was empty of meaning. He admits, though, that he wasn’t actually there. Audience comments posted on the producers’ website suggest they found it to be a profoundly moving experience. One says; ‘...the most uplifting experience that I have had in a very long time indeed. I can't really tell you why it has made me so happy’. Another comments ‘I'm a writer and I cannot even think of the right words to express the experience - it was beyond stupendous, amazing, and just a bunch of glorious fun’ (Artichoke). So, not empty but almost beyond articulation. There seems to be a gap between feeling and meaning here which is reminiscent of Barthes account of the ‘obtuse’ nature of the image, ‘outside (articulated) language whilst nevertheless within interlocution’ (Barthes 1977: 60).

In Liverpool, I was part of a great tide of onlookers, gazing up in wonder at the enormous animated giants as we shuffled our way through the city. Ostensibly, the appeal of these rather anodyne figures was their size, but the visceral impact of the event seemed to contribute to a more profound encounter than was initially suggested. In contrast to Sea Odyssey, Verdenteatret’s The Telling Orchestra at the Prague Quadrennial in June 2011 was a machine-induced scenographic performance on a much more modest scale. The whole event was contained within a small gallery, and yet to me every bit as spectacular - as viscerally engaging and as moving - as Sea Odyssey*.* And, like Sea Odyssey, the experience was as stubbornly resistant to description and to explanation.

I want to address this apparent gap between feeling and meaning by investigating what I will refer to as ‘scenographic spectacle’ operates. In particular, I will focus on the role of the body in the perception of scenography. Examining my own responses as a spectator at Sea Odyssey and The Telling Orchestra, I want to explore notions of embodied experience and reflect on ways in which the experience of scenographymight go beyond thrill and dumb wonder and offer some resistance to the usual criticism of scenographic spectacle as pleasurable but empty.

Regarding terminology, I will use ‘audience’ to refer to a collective body of attendees and ‘spectator’ to indicate individual experience. The use of ‘scenographic spectacle’ refers to performances where visual images are the main focus of the audience experience and I begin by looking at the historical relationship between scenography, technology and spectacle which seems to inform contemporary attitudes and the way the body of the spectator has been positioned as a result.

**Scenography, spectacle and the body**

In Theatre Performance and Technology: The Development of Scenography in the Twentieth Century, Christopher Baugh addresses the complex relationship between scenography, technology and spectacle through focusing on the use of stage technology, machinery and effects. He notes that‘the use of sophisticated technology has been most frequently associated with spectacle, and spectacle has been consistently associated with extravagance, waste and courtly indulgence’ (2005: 7).

Whereas stage technologies have produced spectacle as ‘symbols of power and authority’ (2005:1), the ‘commercialized and commodified form’ of spectacle has been denigrated as merely ‘cheap thrills’ (2005: 7). In the Western theatre tradition this ambivalent attitude towards the work that scenography can do is often explained in terms of a tension between the work of theatrical text and that of stage images and is traced back to Aristotle but there is also discernible concern that spectacle’s appeal to the senses of the spectator is evidence of its dubious cultural value.

Aristotle acknowledges that spectacle is attractive, but it ‘is very inartistic and is least germane to the art of poetry’ (Aristotle 1969:13). The use of machines, costumes, visual imagery, sound, music and architectonic structures as part of a production can have a strong emotional effect but it is the text which carries the ‘force of tragedy’ (Kennedy 1993:5). And yet spectacle, largely through developments in scenography I would argue, has been ‘tamed’ and partially incorporated in reduced form into ‘the dominant traditions of Western theatre’ (Kershaw 2003: 601). The work of pioneering scholars of scenography such as Fuerst and Hume (1928), Jarka Burian (1971) and Denis Bablet (1977) did much to establish the dramaturgical impact of twentieth century scenographies as works of art which can be read alongside or in dialogue with the drama that gives rise to them. Scenographies are capable of making a considerable contribution to the dramaturgical impact of performance. Baugh has established that the materials and mechanisms of scenography ‘may have meanings in and of themselves, and are not simple servants to the mechanistic needs of scenic representation. They are an expression of a relationship with the world and reflect complex human values and beliefs’ (Baugh 2005: 8). Scenography can stimulate aesthetic and intellectual engagement with the world rather than simply provide a diversion from it.

There has also been concern regarding the dissipating effects of spectacle on audiences and an abiding association between spectacle and immorality (Kennedy 1993:5). Jacky Bratton shows that spectacle has been left out of accounts of British theatre history, particularly in the Victorian era, as a means of excising the bodily pleasures of the theatre. In this period scenic technologies including scrolling panoramas, dioramic effects and transformations effected through gauzes, lighting, projection, reflection, trapdoors and flying, produced immediate and visceral effects for their audiences. But spectacle was considered an appeal to baser, bodily instincts, offering a ‘theatre of pure diversion’ (Gilder in Bratton 2003: 9) and this was seen to undermine the higher aspirations of serious, literary theatre. This line of thinking harks back to seventeenth century England and Ben Jonson’s growing contempt for the extravagant scenery and machinery designed by Inigo Jones for their court masques. As the playwright, Jonson came to feel that his poetry was the ‘soul’ of the masque, whereas the scenography was merely ‘the body’; a transient and superficial stimulation of senses (Gordon 1975: 77-101). This contempt for spectacle went beyond Aristotle’s mere dismissal and seems to constitute a condemnation of what Kershaw has called ‘the carnival indulgence of the body’ (2003:601). As Bratton makes clear, Victorian spectacle was associated with the development of a theatre going public largely made up of men and women from the lower social classes; a ‘gluttonous…clamourous, ill-bred, uncouth’ new audience which was driving out the traditional playgoer (Bratton 2003: 13). Not only was vulgar spectacle was undermining the refined ideals of the dramatic theatre, it also seemed to trouble social structure. Concerns about the bodily appeal of spectacle seem both to recognise and want to deny ‘the full extremities of power that spectacle can unleash’ (Kershaw 2003: 601).

Despite the deeply intertwined roots of scenography and spectacle, the positioning of scenography as an object of scholarly interest has tended to distance it from unruly spectacle. An emphasis on the scopic nature of scenography prevalent in the mid-twentieth century accounts mentioned above, where scenographies are decoded like paintings, helped establish the idea that, contrary to Aristotle, scenography can be as artistic as the text and even, in ‘postdramatic theatre’, to exceed it (Lehmann 2006: 93-94). But this might be seen as another attempt to excise the body. Perhaps, in the attempt to accommodate scenography as a potent dramatic medium, the full power of spectacle, from which it arises, has been underplayed.

The effects produced by spectacle are registered in the viewer’s whole body and, following Gibson (1968), these sensations are orchestrated by kinesthesis. Kinesthesis functions as a means of detecting movement and position and is embedded as part of a network of sensory modalities which include vision, hearing, touch, muscle sensation and body position. In particular reference to the kinesthetic dimension of vision, Gibson says that eyes should not be thought of as ‘cameras’, but as ‘apparatus for detecting the variables of contour, texture, spectral composition, and transformation in light’ (Gibson 1968:54). This constant flux of varieties of movement and position are the means by which our senses are stimulated, allowing our body to respond accordingly. In the 1930s John Martin described a process of ‘kinesthetic sympathy’ or ‘inner mimicry’ where spectators experience muscular and emotional responses watching dancing bodies (Reynolds and Reason 2012: 19) and from this ‘kinesthetic empathy’ has come to be considered not only in relation to dance but to a wide range of cultural events including theatre, film and interactive environments. Although empathy is usually applied to intersubjective experience, the origins of the term can be traced back to Robert Vischer who in 1873 used it to describe the process of viewing aesthetic objects.

In what follows I will refer to kinesthetic empathy as it operates in relation to scenographic spectacle with regard to other physically present bodies but also to scenic structures and objects. I will then show how embodied response to scenographic spectacle can be positioned as part of our response to and production of space more generally. By emphasising the bodily dimension of the perception of scenography, I want to see if I can recapture some of the potency of spectacle’s unruliness.

**Being moved in Liverpool and Prague**

The Sea Odyssey story is slight; a letter from the Little Girl’s dead father, one of the crew on the Titanic, has been retrieved from the sea bed by her Uncle, a deep sea diver. He has come to Liverpool (emerging from the River Mersey) to find her and give her the letter. Re-united, they leave together on a boat bound for the sea. The story doesn’t explain the way in which the performance worked on me. Instead, my experience was predominantly kinesthetic, formed through the interaction of three sets of moving ‘bodies’; the giants, the operators, the audience.

My first encounter is with the Uncle as he moves along Breck Road, his head above the roofs. Held by a crane extending from a mechanical digger, his arms and legs are made to move by a constant stream of operators leaping from the front of the digger to the ground. As they leap they hold on to ropes attached to pulleys which lift a foot, a hand or a knee. Then they run to climb back on the vehicle in order to do it all over again. The effort needed to make the Uncle move is tangible. All the while instructions are shouted, mostly in French, competing with the sound of a live rock band on a following truck. As the operators move, my body responds likewise. I put myself in their position and feel through my own body what it would be like to be doing what they are doing. My muscles tense and release mimicking the bodies of the operators. Their urgency and effort is compelling and I feel exhilaration as I watch their bodies leaping through the air and share their satisfaction and pleasure as effort and engineering results in animation.

The kinesthetic empathy of spectating is not confined to the mimicry of performers, though. It also embraces ‘sensorial, emotional and imaginative responses’ (Reynolds and Reason 2012: 20). The giants, trussed into the vehicles which propel them and the ropes and pulleys which animate them seem enslaved, exotic creatures. They are like Gullivers, propelled by red-coated Lilliputians. But these are tender captors; carefully lifting off the Uncle’s diving helmet; helping him drink from a fire hose, showering and dressing the Little Girl and tying on her motorbike goggles; arranging her in her uncle’s arms when they finally meet. The relationship between the operators and the giants is palpable through their inter-dependence. The giants themselves also evoke empathy. When the Little Girl moves past the Cunard building at Pier Head her head turns slowly as if to take in the crowd. Her unseeing eyes blink and her hand movements describe elegant but futile gestures. I am not empathising with the Little Girl as though she were another human being, but as a beautiful machine which generates the textures and outlines of human experience and interaction. She is only human to the extent that she arouses memories of my own experiences of human interactions.

Whilst the Sea Odyssey giants definitely do evoke some kind of fellow feeling in me, I note how small details of their construction inform that feeling as much as their (outsize) resemblance to human beings. Origins of empathy lay in attempts to consider aesthetic experience and how the body takes part in the perception of art objects. Vischer claimed:

When I observe a stationary object, I can without difficulty place myself within its inner structure, at its center of gravity. I can think my way into it, mediate its size with my own, stretch and expand, bend and confine myself to it. With a small object, partially or totally confined and constricted, I very precisely concentrate my feeling. My feeling will be compressed and modest...When, on the contrary, I see a large or partially overproportioned form, I experience a feeling of mental grandeur and breadth, a freedom of will. (Vischer 1994: 104)

Vischer is saying that the structure, scale and composition of objects finds a correspondence in our bodies and that aesthetic encounters with objects occur when we imaginatively inhabit them through the operation of empathy. TheSea Odyssey giants are beautifully carved from poplar wood and jointed like marionettes and the details of their construction are delightful. When the Uncle’s battered copper diving helmet is removed, his (horse) hair blows in the wind like a dandelion seed head. His diving suit, made from tarpaulin, buckles and ripples like sailcloth. Each consideration of the way an object is constructed or the way a material looks and behaves determines the particular way in which these objects perform for me. The quality of the materials stimulate several senses simultaneously - touch and smell as well as sight and sound - and my body responds.

The original concept which the Oslo-based company Verdensteatret used for The Telling Orchestra evolved from a boat trip to Greenland. There was no overarching narrative or any human performers, just a collection objects and mechanisms. Experimenting with the interaction of these materials provided the basis of a ‘text’; ‘As the process went on the different medias that interplay started to generate images and stories on their own - as if the construction itself was hinting to what it was capable of expressing’ (Verdensteatret).

In performance, the presence of operators is much more discreet than in Sea Odyssey*.* A single technician sits at a desk at the back of the room. The audience, too, is very different than in Liverpool. There are benches set out for them, although it is also possible to walk around the construction and view it from other angles. The durational nature of the piece (which lasts about 45 mins and is repeated throughout the day) means people drift in and out of the space, some staying only a few minutes, others much longer. There is no collective audience only a series of overlapping spectators. This experience hinges on an intense encounter between individual spectators and the construction. It takes some time, but gradually my body becomes attuned to the The Telling Orchestra’s mode of operation; its disposition, its character. As Vischer suggests, through my body I can think my way into it.

Maaike Bleeker says that seeing might be ‘closer to hallucinating’ (2008:18) and my experience of The Telling Orchestra is one where the strangeness of the work catches me up in a reverie of connecting and colliding feelings. The appeal to my senses is just a strong as with Sea Odyssey. The installation consists of an interconnected assembly of electronically and mechanically automated objects which move forwards and backwards across the centre of the construction along horizontal tracks. The kinetic construction is overlaid with projections and shifts in lighting which texture and focus my experience. Objects revolve in washes of light which have the feel of cosmic cycles of light and dark. I can feel the fluctuation of the light as it moves from bright open white to crepuscular textures and watery colours. I imagine I can feel shifts in temperature, too. At the same time as I am thinking my way into the ‘inner structure’ of the installation as Vischer would have it, I find that it is working its way into me.

Vischer’s account of empathy with objects describes the viewing body incorporating itself into the object being viewed in a way that seems to privilege the body of the viewer whereas a phenomenological view of the relationship between viewer and object is described as a reciprocal process; for example, Merleau-Ponty says; ‘Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them’ (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 125). I am pre-disposed to respond to the materials and compositions of The Telling Orchestra in the light of my previous (embodied) experience.

The aesthetic nature of the automated objects is formed by the quality of the materials they are made from; discarded material, flotsam, rubbish; old wire, metal, driftwood, rusty nails, bones. Radar-like structures scan and patrol the space. Mirrors and projections combine to create the lurch and swell of a heavy sea. I am close enough to see flakes of rust on the nails. I know what it would feel like if I were to reach out and touch the driftwood. I find myself being reminded of; Punch and Judy style fit-ups, skeletal mutant forms, a junk-littered desert, animistic fetishes (like the Kongo power figures, Nkisi Nkondi), recycled bicycles. These images and references float into my consciousness, circulate, mutate and then evaporate as they are displaced by others.

As with Sea Odyssey, the effort required to stage this performance is apparent. But this time it is the construction’s frailty rather than its size which triggers my bodily engagement. The movement of objects in The Telling Orchestra is wobbly and jerky and the thin wires that criss-cross the space seem fragile so the machine feels vulnerable and liable to break down. Indeed, the technician is on hand to step in and set it back on its way when necessary.

The whole thing is underscored by an assembly of sounds; the live sound of motors whirring; recorded sounds from a radio between stations; and various shrieks, whooshes, crashes and cracks. Communications start up and then break down. The rhythms of the movement are created by objects shuttling back and forth, like a malfunctioning loom or an eccentric railway interchange. The drama comes from the way momentary combinations of objects, lighting and sound seem to relate to each other. Every so often the machine throws up, seemingly at random, a connection or contrast of material or movement, a scenic gesture, which arouses in me a sense of recognition, but something so deep-seated that it is hard to grasp. Indeed, trying to make intellectual sense of the performance as it is happening seems to interfere with the reciprocal process of attending to the The Telling Orchestra. It is only after the performance that I can start to pick out particular feelings and responses.

**The spectator’s body in space**

During a performance, we are not necessarily aware of attending to the individual components of scenographic spectacle; the conditions for kinesthetic empathy are based on a tacit and embodied knowledge of the world. Our individual and internalised experience of the way people and things behave in relation to us is part of the way we are constituted as spectators and as social beings. Our embodied mode of behaviour, or *habitus*, is learnt as a set of dispositions, or one’s place in the world. It is a dialectical relationship evoking reciprocal action; habitus is both produced by and itself produces social practice and it contributes to our experience of spectating. As Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd point out, in the theatre; ‘the activity of watching is an ongoing process of physical adjustment and response to other physically present bodies’ (2004:194). But the influence of habitus does not only only apply to the way we recognise and respond to other fleshy bodies. The built environment is also complicit with the process of habitus because our surroundings, architecture in particular, construct the ‘representational frameworks’ the structures of power and meaning, within which we live our lives. This process of learning one’s place in relation to our surroundings is ‘not cognitively understood but rather internalised and embodied’ and seems natural (Dovey 2005: 284). Through our bodies, we adjust and respond to structures and objects not just to ‘physically present bodies’ in the process of spectating (Wallis & Shepherd 2004:194).

In Liverpool, people are packed on to the streets and leaning out of upstairs windows. It is an effort to find a decent vantage point. People are using cameras held above others heads to extend the viewing possibilities. As I am watching, I imagine the event from above, a bird’s-eye view where the streets are clotted with bodies, streams of people filtering through back streets to the next vantage point. The presence of the giants animates the streets and buildings of Liverpool. They move past buildings redolent of Liverpool’s prosperous past; the Liver Building, the Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Authority Building and through streets showing scars of recession in their boarded-up shops and vacant plots. I am looking up beyond the usual eyeline to the tops and edges of buildings, seeing Liverpool from unfamiliar angles through bodily and spatial experience. My view of the city, its past and its present, has been opened up through this performance.

Henri Lefebvre’s model of the way space is produced describes a constant interplay between three different perspectives of space; conceptual, physical and imaginative. ‘Conceived’ space is space as it is conceptualised by ‘scientists, planners and …and social engineers’. This perspective reflects dominant ideological positions. ‘Perceived’ space, on the other hand, is that which is experienced through our actual daily practice of space, at home, at work, in our environment. It is inscribed in our bodies. A third space which is ‘directly lived through its associated images and symbols’ overlays these first two perspectives of space. ‘Lived space’ is an imaginative and subjective space which tends towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs’ (Lefebvre 1991: 38-39). This trialectic model of space helps to explain how, at an embodied level, we can negotiate ideological and material structures of space.

Among Guy Debord’s objections to ‘the spectacle’ of late modernity and capitalism was this: ‘The spectacle is the self-portrait of power in the age of power’s totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence’ (Debord 1994: 19). But Lefebvre suggests that lived space offers a way of resisting the totalising spectacle. Lived space provides ‘the narrowest leeway’ (Lefebvre 1991: 50) to consider utopian possibilities, the opportunity to think in ways different than those determined by the dominant concepts of space and the everyday reality of spatial practice.

Simon Shepherd has applied Lefebvre’s model to Victorian working class theatre goers. The governing principles behind the way the architecture of the theatre and the auditorium is conceived reflects a society which is ‘both stratified and well-organised’. In the auditorium itself, the perception and perception of theatre going is defined; ‘occupying a seat that has been paid for in the company of others to watch an entertainment’. And alongside both of these perspectives, the ‘lived’ experience of the evening out is focused on the extent to which the entertainment ‘produces and satisfies expectations’ (Shepherd 2007: 101). Shepherd notes how the space of the auditorium produces different viewing positions and, therefore, different dispositions towards the event. Depending on their placement some will feel ‘at the centre of things’ whilst others will feel themselves to be ‘at the edge of this immensity’ (2007: 99). These feelings are produced in some tension with the brightly lit and ‘orderly’ auditorium which ‘sustains an ideological assumption: that open access to art will lead to appropriate, well-managed, behaviour’ (2007: 102). At the same time, audiences arrive at the theatre ‘with the spatial experience of the rest of their lives’ (2007: 101) and this also shapes their experience in the theatre. The cramped tenements and factory conditions in the everyday lives of the Victorian working class could be expected to have contrasted with the depiction of expansive and brightly lit bourgeois spaces on the stage. The bodily and psychic experience of a spectator outside the theatre informs and frames their experience inside, but the interaction of the various spaces which inform their habitus is not resolved and they are not wholly ‘disciplined by the soft furnishings of knowledge and power’ (2007: 103). In this reading of the spectator’s body, the interplay of conceptual, physical and imaginative spaces resists complete absorption into the spectacle of Victorian theatre and the dominant modes of power and control it represents.

The conceived space of Sea Odyssey seems to draw on familiar instrumentalist narratives about the value of art experiences including facilitating wider access and participation, economic impacts through tourism and developing Liverpool as a culturally vibrant, creative city such as those articulated through Liverpool European City of Culture 2008 (see Impacts08). From this perspective, this ‘giant spectacular’ might be seen as little more than an exercise in marketing Liverpool. For me, the perceived space of Sea Odyssey is situated somewhere between the experience of being in a tightly-packed and well-behaved crowd and the evidence of the effort, organisation and ingenuity that has made the event possible and the extent to which citizens of Liverpool have been involved in its realisation. The focus of my experience of perceived space are the giants and their operators. But other spaces, conceived and perceived, from Liverpool’s history also inform Sea Odyssey, for example the city’s links with the transatlantic slave trade and the deprivation and disenfranchisement of areas of the city resulting in riots in the 1980s. These spaces seem to be at odds with a ‘giant spectacular’ but they are brought into play through my lived space of Sea Odyssey. The images and feelings that I have described above present themselves as part of the stream of my lived experience of the performance. Images and feelings, non-verbal symbols and signs arising from this lived space interact, cut across and, occasionally, displace the other spaces of the performance. Potentially an anodyne and rather sentimental event, the mobilisation of conceptual, physical and imagined spaces in Sea Odyssey serves to gently but productively trouble the premise of this simplistic pageant.

The space of The Telling Orchestra is by contrast, produced more quietly. It is conceived as an art experience where my participation as spectator relies on me attuning myself, my whole body, to the installation. Seeing it as part of Prague Quadrennial, international event celebrating ‘performance design and space’ serves to underline this expectation. Meanwhile, conceptual spaces which The Telling Orchestra seems to refer to are also brought into play, especially, to my mind, the fragile balance of the environment, waste and pollution generated by industrial societies, the threat of global warming and Greenland’s strategic position as a US base for a missile defence system. My perception of the performance, despite others being present, is as an individual. It is situated in an underground room, beneath a busy gallery space, and the white walls and simple benches placed in front of the installation make it feel like a modest chapel. It takes me a while to adjust to the rhythm and texture of the performance. At first the scale the objects and the nature of the structure they perform within belies the nature of the performance as spectacle. But gradually the hold of these small objects offers a contemplative, almost hallucinatory experience as the performance accrues an excess of extraordinary, strange and unsettling images. These images multiply and mutate. I can’t keep track of their meanings; they exist suspended in a potent density of bodily impulses, emotions and empathies.

As Kershaw points out, the chief weakness of spectacle, especially from an activist’s point of view, is that the power of spectacle cannot easily be harnessed; ‘just as the source of its energy is a multiplicity of creative voices, the people’s pleasures unleashed, so it has no immediately overt political direction, as it operates centrifugally, dispersing its excess’ (Kershaw 2003: 602). The Telling Orchestra disperses excess. It generates images, feelings and potential meanings that I can’t manage. They go beyond what I can keep hold of, process and recall.

**The ‘paradox of spectacle’**

Kershaw sees that the ‘paradox of spectacle’ is that ‘it deals with the human in inhuman ways’ (2003: 594). Where spectacle might offer a response to our contemporary world and the ‘way power circulates through the human’ (2003: 606) is through what he calls ‘spectacles of deconstruction’ which encourage reflexivity and help us to see our predicament, that is ‘the continual disappearing act of the subject’ This process, where humanity is present at the ‘heart of spectacle’ needs to be a process of ‘continually recognising and reproducing mutual vulnerability’ (2003: 611).

Our capacity to experience and recognise ourselves in relation to other objects is already informed by embodied understanding in the kind of reciprocal or reversible process which Merleau-Ponty describes (1993:125). Elizabeth Grosz says that this is notion of reversibility which is based on the way a ‘material subject’ belongs to a ‘material world’ (Grosz 1994: 102). The position of phenomenology (and psychology) is to consider the experience of the body from inside out. Meanwhile, a complementary view of the social body (such as that offered by Lefebvre) looks at the relationship between the world and the body as an ‘outside in’ process where the body as a social object is marked by ‘various regimes of institutional power’ as it is ‘a receptive surface on which the body’s boundaries and various parts or zones are constituted, always in conjunction and through linkages with other surfaces and planes’ (Grosz 1994: 116).

Contrasting my experience of Sea Odyssey with The Telling Orchestra highlights these two tendencies; in the first my experience is predominantly that of myself as a social body (from outside in), whereas in the second it is a phenomenal body experience (from inside out) that best seems to describe what happens. But as Grosz points out, these two perspectives are like the two sides of a Mobius strip. Markings left on the social body can leave traces deep in psyche whilst the phenomenal experience does not stop at the level of the subject but informs our interactions with others. Tracing the outside of the strip leads one directly to its inside without at any point leaving its surface (1994: 116-117). Here then, we can see that the body as a social being and the body phenomenal entity are inseparable and that the potential of spectacle to ‘reproduce mutual vulnerability’ (Kershaw 2003: 611) is realised through the apprehending the spectacle from inside out and from outside in simultaneously.

Perhaps we need to return to Victorian fears about the dissipated body to find another way to think through the power of spectacle. Outside the theatre, there were plenty of examples of the use of spectacle in this era to establish power and authority of the ruling hegemony. One of the most striking was the Great Exhibition of 1851, a display of technological prowess and the reach and authority of the Empire, housed in a vast glass and cast-iron structure; the original ‘Crystal Palace’. But in the theatre, vulgar spectacle which stirred up an excess of feelings threatened docile acceptance of the social order. The sensuous pleasure of spectacle was, on the one hand, evidence of its triviality and a distraction from pastimes deemed more refined and improving by the ruling classes. On the other hand, the direct appeal to the body by-passed moral judgement and produced an ‘uncouth’ audience (Bratton 2003:13) which potentially disturbed or even challenged dominant representations of power. The dissipated body surrenders and dissolves into the spectacle so that it might, paradoxically, be more open to the multiple ideas and influences that it may, in its centrifugal and excessive way, throw up. Looking at contemporary rave culture, Shepherd considers the ‘ecstatic body’ pleasurably engaged with a process of ‘losing themselves in the scene’ (Shepherd 2006: 175). But losing oneself is not the same as escaping entirely from the body and the material world. Instead, a process of dissipation might be considered to be a process of opening up to new encounters and, therefore, being resistant to, or at least troubling, dominant modes of spatial production.

The unruliness of scenographic spectacle is found in the way it makes a direct appeal to the body of the individual spectator at the same time as it communicates images and ideas held in common. It is also found in the way spectacle generates multiple fertile associations, feelings and memories, the way it does not separate the superficial from the profound or the sentimental from the precise and clear-sighted. It is through unruliness that scenographic spectacle can be seen to be capable of deconstructing our relationship to the world at the same time as it draws on it.

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