

artpress

CYBORG

ACTUALITÉS

L'art extraterrestre
Cinéma : Chantal Akerman



TRIMESTRIEL N° 25

MAI / JUIN / JUILLET 2012

BILINGUAL - ENGLISH / FRENCH

DOM 10,75 € | TOM 1500 XP
BEL./LUX./ESP./ITA. 10,80 €
CH 18,50 FS | CAN 15,50\$CA | USA 13,99\$
GR 12,40 € | MAROC 90 MAD
UK 7,70 £ | PORT. CONT. 10,90 €

M 09559 - 25 - F: 9,50 € - RD



on screen. Like the “abject,” the “object” body is in triangulation with the subject, but acts as its “other,” often controlled, observed or “subjectified.” Often gendered or racialized in contrast to the white, liberal male subject, the “object” bodies within cyborg theatre are frequently the “body into which ideas have been inscribed and transposed.”³ The Wooster Group’s mediated performance style—their framed and fragmented bodies playing out on stage and multiplied on screens, their mediated shaping of race, identity, and gender constructions, and their technologically driven staging—epitomizes this category for me. In Scheib’s *World of Wires*, the object bodies play out the ideas, tensions, and fears of living in a highly mediated world and the possibility of being between worlds—the physical one we live in and one simulated, a world of technology. The piece begins as a film does, a scene projected upon a huge “fourth” wall that covers the stage space. This projection is our only entry to what is going on backstage, but transforms when the wall suddenly crashes down, to change the perspective on what and how we see. The projected image is replaced with a schizophrenic looking back and forth between the actual actors and their projections now transferred onto smaller screens on-stage. Deciding where to look and whether the actors are themselves or their simulated “others” foregrounds the spaces in-between—are they (we?) live or simulations? Who controls this shifting terrain? Who have we become amidst the ongoing technological noise? The audience is reminded, perhaps cautiously, of the diminishing space between our physical and virtual realities and whether in or outside of technology traces of one imprint upon the other, moving toward the cyborg.

3. BROKE HOUSE

Cyborg theater’s “subject” bodies are “frequently in closest proximity to the technologies surrounding them,”⁴ often immersed within projections, or merging with on-stage images, and New York-based Big Art Group’s on-stage bodies are enmeshed, inextricable from not only the on-stage technologies mediating their lives (in *Broke House* the characters are being filmed by a documentary maker, projected upon the many screens covering the stage), but also from the U.S. technological world at large, constructed by digital exchanges and media-driven politics. The “subject” bodies of cyborg theatre are embodied subjects on stage, but characters not constricted by a sense of humanist subjectivity, but open to future integrations. Big Art Group develops work that challenges notions of American cultural identity; their characters move through scenarios that cannot be divorced from their technological surroundings. *Broke House* is a Chekhov for the twenty-first century; a biting meditation on an eroding nation symbolized by the deconstruction of the skeletal frame of the characters’ house over the course of the show. Faced with foreclosure and certain homelessness as the house is taken apart around them, the characters yearn for something more: “I want to go to Nigeria” proclaims Irene. Part *Three Sisters*, part *Gray Gardens*, these characters take on what is around them: “the raw materials and the players themselves become deformed into a new formlessness, and enter a transitional state of potentiality.” Intertextuality collides



The Big Art Group
Broke House 2011
(Ph. DR)

with a kind of hyper-identity as drag queen showgirls in large blonde wigs pose in costumes made from black plastic bags (attempting the effect of “Fassbinder in the style of Paul Verhoven’s Showgirls”) and characters spontaneously transform the cardboard walls into wearable housing. The filmmaker documents it all, reminding us of our own constructions, of “the house’s” construction. In the moment of “Occupy,” scene headings such as “Economy vs. Empathy” or “Collapsing New Spectacle” seem to encourage a new look at the bodies and technologies driving these forces. Big Art Group produces a new “subject” which fearlessly engages with all bodies—abject, object, subject—to produce cyborgian possibilities of a more ethical and interconnected future.

Cyborg theater identifies and proposes a means of analysis for the shifting relationships between bodies and technologies continually drawn together, already merging into new formations. Whether we embrace technology or we do not, human bodies have become conditioned by a relationship with technology that guides how our bodies move and operate. A mediated world requires a reconsideration of how our bodies intersect and integrate with the technologies surrounding them. Cyborg theatre rehearses possibilities for the emergence of a future, and hopefully more radical, cyborg-subjectivity.

Jennifer Parker-Starbuck is a Reader in the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance at Roehampton University, London. She is the author of many performance essays and reviews and recently published *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). She serves as Assistant Editor of *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* and Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*.