Like Greek dancers moving across the stage singing the call and response of stichomythia—the pattern of one line crossing while speaking/singing, the other waiting its turn to cross back again—so too meditations on performance and theatre perform a retracing of the alternating demands of stillness and motion, of lasting and evanescent, of exceeding and being contained. As I embark on my reflections here about bodies dancing, I find myself turned towards sound again, knowing any detour into sound will lead back to motion. If it is in the nature of sound to diffuse, it seems in the nature of people, and not just critics or spectators, to respond to the diffuse by supplying a container, by collecting. One method of containing sound involves creating an analogy: pressing the unbounded into a frame to form a more manageable allusion through supplying an image. To awaken our somewhat atrophied or simply unexercised listening muscles, a cognitive prompt seems to be required: what do you see when you hear this, what picture comes to mind? Such translation of the acoustic experience by way of the visual container can aid but can also work like limiting captions, as Walter Benjamin describes them and their overly “directive”
effect upon the work of art. As with captions so with explicating images, a visual analogue for sound works as a container, an emblem, an approximation to store in memory, in order to collate and to collect.

This kind of translation, this importing of the formless into the intelligibility and temporary fixity of a form that happens in the course of writing and thinking about sound, happens too with dance, a performed form often received as fluid and in need of an explicating legibility, a narrative or a picture. Of all the performances I attend, I am most likely to overhear someone say, “but what does it mean?” at a dance performance. And the answers or responses such a query elicits will be a conjunction of the seen and the kinetically received translated into a story, a vignette whose image becomes a part of the speaker’s attempt to describe what has happened in a kind of moving slide show, now a duet, now a solo, now an ensemble.

I remember Justin Hunt’s emphasis in his work on queer memory of Rebecca Schneider’s words about archive and knowing as a ‘body to body transmission.’ Evidence in motion making and unmaking the world of archive pertains as well to the world and the practice of spectating. Body to body transmission happening from moving bodies on stage to relatively still bodies watching seems to call forth a full-body reception in a way different to performance with text or performance from the neck up. It may be a very simple relation, we are reminded of our corporeal response because the dancers’ bodies moving in front of us stage the whole body at work. But there is no solid (static) evidence for this, only a body to body knowledge of heightened physical awareness and the cognitive connections between what I am watching and what I experience physically.
I linger on this threshold as though its frame is my body and the saddle of the door transforms under my feet into a sprung dance floor, rather than the evocative, sturdy entryway Benjamin construes. Some evidence does support my intuition about the effect of dance on the spectator, evidence provided in the results of scientific studies conducted with dancers who watched a dance performance while wearing wires that measure the brain’s response. Susan Melrose describes this experiment and its findings in her investigations of practitioner intuition. In her account, the accomplished dancer Darcy Bussell watches a performance of dance with wires set to transmit her brain’s response to what she is seeing on stage, machines at the ready to record the neurons firing. In time to the execution of difficult moves by the dancers on stage, Darcy Bussell’s neurons fire; the scientists posit that the neurons firing signal her body’s expertise, setting off little charges in response to the movements it knows how to make even as she sits to all appearances relatively still watching others dance. In her position as spectator, Bussell, according to Melrose, inhabits the space as expert spectator and as a dancer with a practitioner’s intuition, a performer’s or director’s corporeal knowledge of how to make things, a performance, a jeté, an improvised solo. The figure of a body sitting still while neurons fire and somewhere in the imagination moves are executed in time to the moving body on stage provides an apt emblem for the work of this book which suggests that what might seem a spectator at rest can in fact be a spectator in motion, practicing with what she sees and hears, exchanging knowledge, body to body transmission.

So I wonder to myself what part of my neuron collection remembers being a four-year old in the Washington Ballet
School with my Russian ballet mistress and her cane that beat both time and small bodies into shape? Or the girl who had to stop dancing because her body ballooned in high school? Or the woman who loves to just dance? Are we all sitting together in our spectatorial position, the harassed, the embarrassed and the free?

Such considerations interrupted me as I began to review how and when I noticed many more dance performances appearing in the programs of ‘theatre’ festivals. In the wake of this gradual change, I chose performances not out of an interest in dance—the lingering anger at the Russian ballet mistress kept that at bay—but out of a curiosity about what place dance might have in an international theatre festival. Two trends converged in these years, this increase in the presence of dance at theatre festivals and the references to a style of theatre termed ‘physical theatre.’ My memorable initiation into the conjunction of the physical, the gestural, dance and theatre came before my travels when the Theatre du Complicite appeared in New York with their piece _The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol_ based on _Pig Earth_ by John Berger.

Perhaps spectating resembles _flâneuring_ most in a developing instinct for what will be a particularly rich experience of performance. Some performances are like Paris, the capital of _flâneuring_: as Benjamin tells us, you can _flâneur_ anywhere, but some encounters reciprocate more than others and some cities provide an abundance of such encounters. So with the performances one passes back over into, just after I have seen it, and then as it comes back to me on other occasions years and years later. As Andre Lepecki reminds us by way of a quotation from Henri Bergson, “the past is that which acts no longer.” For
Bergson, according to Lepecki, “any act, as long as it continues generating an effect and an affect, remains in the present” (129). Moving us from the melancholic attachment critics have had as they keen over the ephemerality of performance to the demanding and recurring possibilities of an “intimacy” with the “expanded and always multiplying presents in dances, in performances,” Lepecki also offers what I take in relief as a gentle corrective to the methodology of Sebald. Admirer though I am, I often find Sebald’s melancholic remembering can at times seem to damn up the past into past, interring the affect inside the sepulchre of the language of loss.

As I sit here remembering that performance of Lucie Cabrol the exactness of the coordinates, was it 1991 or 1992, was I still living in New York, or was I back from Michigan for vacation, remains vague. But that performance continues to generate an affect and an effect; I can smell the moist earth, a smell so incongruous in the golden, acoustically sensitive wood and the plush of Alice Tully Hall. When a stir happens in the theatre going world of New York one can feel it by the mood of the crowd and see it by the recognition of those who attend the ‘important’ work, at that time Susan Sontag, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Lahr. But there is also a very keen difference between being somewhere because I read in the Village Voice or in another journal a review suggesting that the performance must be seen and being somewhere because I have been told by other itinerant spectators I trust that ‘you have to see this.’

That night the hall was thrumming. We sat smelling earth. Alice Tully Hall has no curtain as it is usually a concert hall so the moments of spectators entering, chatting, waiting commingled with looking at the earth-filled stage. Water dripped from a
spigot on stage, the lights dimmed. There in New York long before I came to Europe to live, long before I came to the UK to teach, I encountered ‘physical theatre.’ Rarely had the physical training acquired by attending Jacques LeCoq’s school in France been seen on US stages, or at least by me; certainly the majority of US actors I saw in performance tended to be trained from the neck up, a kind of acting made for screen and not for the corporeal demands of time and space on stage.

Of course these reflections partake entirely of Bergson’s notion of time not past as I am certainly remembering what I now know backwards travelling by means of affect and effect. I have used LeCoq’s exercises in my classrooms; I have seen Complicite’s work again and again. But the pull towards a kind of theatre of the whole body, reanimated certainly when I saw the month-long season of Odin Teatret at the Teatro India, began in that incongruously formal setting as the actors revealed actions in gesture, themselves a living scenography.

These memories of the world made by body in performance in New York came back to me as I booked tickets for performances at festivals in the late 1990s where names known to spectators of the dance world but new to me began to appear more frequently. At Avignon there was Angelin Preljocaj and of course in part in consideration of the name of her mixed genre, dance theatre, Pina Bausch. I had seen Bausch’s company at BAM, choosing the piece because it leaned more towards theatre than towards dance, a method of choosing I once habitually exercised only now becoming clear to me as I reflect on these years where the genres became more mixed.

I wandered across those thresholds into a state in flux, once an occasional spectator of dance I soon became an impassioned
one. So much of the ‘training’ in the itinerant practice of spectating happens by accumulation, by the first curious move towards something, “the touch of a single tile—that which any old dog carries away,” that catches my eye, my ear, my body. The flâneuring becomes richer with an accumulated collection of experiences, my growing recognition that the performances that ‘spoke’ to me the strongest spoke through choreography and sound. Yet the spectator/collector has no cabinet of curiosities
beyond her own memory, more of a storage space marked by potential than a box to open in order to see an object, moments come alive again in reprise by the affect of what I am seeing or any of the coercive conjunctions that reignite memory.

Of course I realized over the years I attended performances, festival organizers might have begun to incorporate more dance into their planning for more prosaic purposes. Most dance does not need surtitles or translation; it can unfold in front of an audience in France one night and another in Poland the next, displayed in the same manner no matter the mother tongue of the dancers. Yet this mix of memory and accumulated experiences in my watching and making of performance meant that many dance performances remained present to me as Bergson suggests, continuing to affect my memory and have an effect by way of the sensorial communication in the medium itself. Somehow the genre of dance mimicked the strange mix of my contemporary moment: the half visual, half aural, half formulated, half communicated form of information we currently receive and return in the present live and the present virtual.

I took my most intense instruction as an itinerant spectator of performance and dance in Europe, indeed I continue to take instruction, from the Belgian group Les Ballets C de la B. Like watching a funhouse come to life in the bodies of characters, the members of this troupe incarnate oddities and particularities of corporeal personality and of racial and ethnic heritage and dance in, through, around, out and back into them again. Michel Kolbialka justly reminds us of how in a moment of performance a kind of border can “suddenly [be]erected in the process of conscious or accidental crossings performed by the actors on stage and the words they enunciated” (Kobialka 5-6).
His words echoed back in tandem with my memory of an early instance where Les Ballets C de La B showed me how powerfully national differences can be provoked by a small vignette in a performance of something called dance.

In a beautiful setting in a complicated show with dancers’ nationalities pinned to their bodies in the accoutrements of accent, of language, of gesture, a group of dancers come together under a faux rainfall. Audiences love it when it rains on stage. Wondrously incongruous, the very same meteorological occurrence met with bad natured grunts and the shifting of the weight of things carried in order to raise the umbrella, produces delight when transferred by the distance of seat to stage and by the distance of the unexpected outside being produced inside. Standing under an umbrella the dancers began to sing together *les temps du cerises*. While not a song I know, the tune and the lyrics elicit a semi-conscious recognition of something ‘very French,’ lilting, light, lyrical to be sung in a gently drunken night at a brasserie, even if you have never been to one, even if you do not have the faintest idea what separates a brasserie from a weinstubber or a pub.

The singing occurs at a moment in the piece after I have watched a series of intense dances where the movement, the ground on which they are operating, shifts continuously between extraordinary flips and physical turns and duets of connection and disconnection. So at first we hear the singing and cannot help but be soothed; the voices are pretty, the singing is choral and heals any rift of isolation or disjuncture between the dancers. Then one of the singers stops the others, turns to the dancer whose face ‘looks’ Asian and exaggeratedly pronounces for him, “*le temps du cerises.*” That thing with the voice that French
speakers and those who have learned their second language well can do, the half swallow of the r into the gully of the i on its way to the concluding ssss sound at the end of cerises flows out into the audience.

We laugh, I laugh. Who has not been corrected in their travels in France, particularly in Paris, by a French woman or man upholding the spoken word standard? Even those guilty of doing the correcting probably laugh. The song starts again from the beginning, the sensual pleasure of choral singing and the simple repetition of the ballad overtakes the room. Then, again the dancer, now whatever his nationality unmistakably French, or even better a French-speaking Belgian more invested in his Frenchness than the Lyonnais, he corrects the Asian fellow: they sing again, they stop again. Such a small moment in performance, perhaps five minutes at the most, but perhaps also the most vivid representation I have seen of the daily practicalities of national identity, belonging and what marks one as an outsider. By the end of the vignette, the sweet softness of the singing has paradoxically become an uncomfortable power game of correct and not, of expert and not, of colonizer and colonial.

Tempus Fugit incorporated other outsiders in its crew of dancers, for all I know they were all outsiders. I remember a very tall African-American dancer, deliberately marked as American because draped in the stars and stripes, identified as American and therefore African-American when he began to speak, and when he began to sing. In retrospect as I have now seen this company’s work for six years or so, I think how the changing collection of dancers, except for three or four founding members, makes me think that Alain Platel goes to the dancer’s equivalent of the corner where ‘dayworkers’ are waiting to be
hired, offering their diverse skills, a physical motley of tall and not, of ethnicities native to Europe and not. Thus the ensemble work often creates its power out of the wild difference in body and style and pigment and idiosyncratic physical talent.

Wild difference, what do I know about the bodies from looking at them? A fundamental question for a traveling spectator. As a spectator I am constantly watching bodies whose attributes like puzzle pieces invite me to combine them and make a picture, but the easy sliding of one piece into the curve of another may prove to have been too easy or may prove to leave gaps in between—even white can be more complicated than it looks on stage. Honoring the possibility that the puzzle pieces may exist side by side unmeshed, marked by gaps, Les Ballets C de la B insists on what gets created between. They set up moving landscapes, the patterns dissolve, a distance also remains, one made from respect. I look but I do not touch. I learn but I do not conclude as Massumi has instructed. I see/hear/feel concepts but no one applies them, and yet something about nation and encounters remains, floating on the air.

In its history as a form, dance paradoxically collects and displays, a temporary museum, an elapsing encyclopedia. I am thinking here of Mark Franko’s evocative study of the text in the bodies of baroque dancers, the show of power. So with Les Ballets C de la B the traces of the way we make nation and exclude the imperfect speakers from our linguistic shores. More recently works of dance demonstrate a catalogue of new technologies in sound at times resembling something that might be thought of as sound art.

I am thinking of the one hundred metronomes in Anna de Keersmaeker’s homage to Steve Reich, three revolving objects
on stage that look like decapitated gramophones in Rachid Oursmadne’s ‘Loin,’ just two recent instances where to go see dance was to go see sound. Thus the deceptive sweet song of the deceptively pronounced *les cerises* mixes into other moments in memory made from sound and music through the bodies of those dancers. I remember beginning to feel acoustically assaulted in the course of a few years by the suddenly ubiquitous use of insect-like microphones at the mouth of actors and dancers. Not least because when those mikes are in use the sound, even the sound of speaking to and fro in dialogue, issues only from one point in the theatre, the speakers. Recorded music in performance followed the miked bodies lead, increasing in frequency in both senses, having something of the dimensions and volume of an Ipod in a room full of spectators without my being able to choose what to hear or able to control its volume.

For the most part the actors and dancers I see who have trained in Europe play a musical instrument as well as learn to do things with their voice, things that include singing, but not only. The fortunate can play an instrument well, but even the less fortunate can contribute to the making of music on stage by some form of instrumental intervention. The visual/aural cognitive convergence of hearing ensemble music played, of seeing the instruments employed, of experiencing the sound in the air all around me changes my reception of the work.

In accord with this attention to corporeal sound, Les Ballets C de la B does more than have musicians as ancillary accessories; Platel and Company incorporate musicians as players in the scene. During *Tempus Fugit*, a musician who had along with the other members of the ensemble playing 17th-century instruments been sequestered in a small balcony at the
upper left of the playing space, appeared suddenly on the floor of the stage playing his lute. I don’t remember precisely how he got there, but I remember suddenly seeing this very large man with a very large stomach, now a small mountain on stage protruding from his prone figure, holding a lute high up on his chest. A member of the company, a small Asian woman with a very high, thin voice, stepped up onto his chest, singing something that sounded like a piece from the genre of Peking opera—do I remember her as Asian because I collapsed the association of the nation and its music into the body making the sound? The musician then, continuing to play, began to revolve himself on the floor, slowly moving his body in a circle by means of his feet while she sang and adjusted herself on his stomach in time to his rotation. Memories, sounds, images collided: ‘early music,’ physical heft, the sound of singing something Asian in its high, reedy operatic tones, a human music box with the tiny dancer, that plastic one who always fascinated me not because she twirled in a tutu in time to the music but because she folded straight up and down from the feet when you opened and closed the box, surrendering herself wholly to the vertical or the horizontal. That dancer brought the plastic ballerina to odd contemporary life rotating on the top of a giant lute player.

Wandering across dance’s threshold in the company of Les Ballets C de la B I found myself buying tickets at festivals for the dance performances first where I had once chosen one or two out of curiosity about the form. Dance as a genre, as the enhanced, split, and thoroughly remodeled genre it is now, offers me as a spectator such unforgettable surprises with remarkable frequency. Such surprises can of course in the most simple way offer what Bill T. Jones’ described to me in an interview as the
‘more likely to be funded’ “Ahhh” moment, the exhalation of wonder a child might make at a circus as the acrobats progress in ever more complex movements. Yet such surprises move out of the “ahhh” to register in my body through the co-production that such revelation demands. Reception neurons fire: I am at first struck dumb by the sheer overwhelming wonder at what can be done with the body, with the bodies; then the force of my reactions gather, I begin to participate by letting all the possible interpretive connections collect and fall apart, a co-dancing in my spectatorial way. Pieces of association with meaning, with past dances, with national monikers, with racial reminders, with story, with confusion all circulate in and out of what feels not but nothing other than as Fred Moten might say an improvisation I make from the reception I did not even know I had the capacity to experience or extend.

Seduced and converted, I began regularly to visit the websites of a dozen dance companies touring Europe in order to calculate which cities it might be possible for me to travel to in order to see them. Inspired by Les Ballets C de La B, I sought out this thing called ‘dance theatre.’ I remember a September day, hot and sunny, standing in line at the box office of the Teatro Argentina in Rome, waiting for the sales to begin to Pina Bausch’s piece ‘O Dido.’ At that moment still a new inhabitant of Italy, I stood among a group so familiar I could have been home years back in the dressing room at the Washington Ballet School. Dancers, dancers everywhere, every age, beautiful young women and men turning their ankles this way and that, older women hair stretched back (the dancer’s ponytail, an androgynous marker of the traditional dancer), bodies an aging grace of one long line, new bodies too, tattooed,
differently shaped and yet still with that physical consciousness of the instrument at rest. Our notions of beauty, formed both of oppression and desire, come so clearly from what we see when. In my case physical memory includes my mother the dancer, her lean frame a standard I despaired of when a teenager, I profit from as I age. But also that rock and roll world of long-haired men in flamboyant clothes, so close to the dancer’s eroticism as they rolled across the stage with screaming guitars and gleaming taut bodies.

Lost in recollections of this sort, I stood in line waiting. Remembering now I think about the paradoxical loss convenience causes, how online ticket buying ‘saves’ me the trouble of standing in that remarkable line that morning. Under a Roman sun we waited and were rewarded with tickets to a dance performance that sold out in two hours, a doubled satisfaction for the spectator as the sense of anticipation mingles with the flash of triumph at having succeeded just in getting the ticket. What comes back to me, in between the snatches of memory of breathtaking beauty and prowess on the stage that was the ‘Tanztheater Wuppertal,’ Bausch’s company, is the contrast between two very different nights in the Argentina. That one, the theatre with its bursting tiers of boxes resembling nature-program beehives where small buzzing bodies dip into impossibly tiny holes one after another, and the other night, with Theater Basel where the theatre sat cold and unforgiving, the orchestra seats only half-full and emitting sounds of boredom and disapproval.

Being a spectator, as these pages attest, is often ‘on the job learning,’ a craft as I have implied not in terms of the competition of who accomplishes it best, but in the demands loosely offered
without pressure to accept, demands made on those who are willing to try and answer the craft of the performers in kind by learning how to see and hear. With dance, I watched in confusion: was that good, was that really good? If the habitual question ‘what does it means’ accompanies dance performances so too does the spectator proviso, ‘I don’t really know anything about dance.’ Interestingly people rarely say, “I don’t really know anything about acting.” The distance between what the performers can do when dancing and what the audience can do contrasts with the performance of a text where an actor may barely ‘act’ and an audience can have the sense that what is being done before them could, with some training, be done by them. But with dance, especially dancers in the companies I have mentioned, the distance between what the performers’ bodies can do and what most of ours can creates part of the spectator-performer relation.

Our relation to what we see and hear, how it moves us while we engage in the practice of spectating brings to mind a work aslant to these pages on a famous art historian written by a film critic. Writing about an unpublished musing of Aby Warburg’s on the relation of spectator to movement in images from late Renaissance Florence, Philippe-Alain Michaud demonstrates how according to Warburg “in these works, the figures…depicted in rigorously static poses” contain motion because “the question of movement did not… disappear. It became internalized, designating not a body’s displacement in space but its transfer into the universe of representation, where it acquired a lasting visibility. Henceforth, for Warburg the question of movement became associated with the subject’s entrance into the image, with rites of passage, and with the
dramatizations affecting his or her appearance” (31). I have been haunted by these words since I read them. Something of the notion of the subject’s entrance into the image rings true for the spectator of performance who watches dance where static-ness is at most deliberately temporary. I am struck by the prescience of Warburg’s denotation of the activity of motion by both, and in both the beheld and the beholder having fundamentally to do with the transfer into the universe of representation. In the activity of spectating, I note how the singular of transfer that Warburg posits in the position of looking at a figure in a work of art must be augmented, made plural—would it be transference or transfers—to imply the exchange of receiving and returning throughout a performance unfolding and therefore the constant making and unmaking of a universe of representation.

Transference of a certain kind happened during the Bausch production as the watchers brought their relations as fans to the theatre. To be a fan, to be an enthusiast is a spectatorial position most writers about performance, especially scholars, tend to bury under an analysis of the phenomenon of popularity or to contain masking the surge of affection by the tone of the writing, cooling down the language to make it sound impartial. But as a fan, I can sometimes be more discriminating, my expertise born of love is still active, and sometimes I demand more of the beloved because I have made it my devoted business to see and hear every production. The heat of that room full of Bausch fans came back to me two weeks later as I entered the palpably cool Teatro Argentina with plenty of unsold seats to see another dance theatre company do a production called The House of Bernarda Alba as part of the RomaEuropa Festival. I had forgotten the Lorca play and
had never seen it staged, so I reread the text in anticipation of the production. Such an action prior to seeing also changes the shape of reception; I ‘hear’ the words echoing from my reading as I watch or hear in the theatre. I remember being curious about a dance performance that announced itself as an adaptation of a single play, wondering what the relation of the choreography to Lorca’s text might be.

A festival like RomaEuropa that occurs every year during the autumn months in the same city attracts both regular theatre subscribers and those waiting for the ‘international’ season as well as tourists passing through. The Bausch had not been part of RomaEuropa as I might have expected, but instead had come to Rome following its premiere in Palermo. Tickets to *House of Bernard Alba*, however, a part of the RomaEuropa (and therefore more experimental) could also be purchased as part of the year-long Teatro Argentina subscription in which most of the offerings were more standard Italian theatre fare.

So there I sat, only a week or so after seeing the adoring Bausch fans in supplication from box to orchestra, sitting in the same theatre now transformed by the lack of buzz, reading the description of the work I was about to see. The program anticipated a work that would include music played on electric guitar influenced by Jimi Hendrix as well as an attention to the unspoken spoken not only of the written text danced, but of the spoken in signed text. Composer Helmut Oehring, the program narrated, grew up in a household with two deaf parents; in the choreography of the work he added two characters onstage to represent his deaf parents. As I read the mottled connections the program described, my heart sank while the signs of disinterest around me fed my misgivings as I waited for the
performance to begin.

Thinking back to that night, dwelling here again in the affective present Bergson posits, I consider how mistaken the festival organizer’s choice to stage this production in the Argentina. At its finish, I sat stunned and then rose to applaud wildly among the desultory sound of indifferent applause. All the way home we talked of the brilliant performance we had just seen, of the work and how it surpassed in so many ways that of the Bausch; unfair as comparisons are, we were like friends of the losing team, fervent in our outrage and in our praise. Lorca is a master of longing, infused into his transvestite creation of women characters who articulate his own suppressed desires. On stage, Schlämer played the grandmother, embodying himself a contemporary and visible representation of Lorca’s crossdressed interpretations. He had choreographed a piece that crept up under my intrigued watching banishing any fear of the odd mix not working. I heard those distinctive, harsh-sweet, Hendrix-like riffs, and found it an incongruous and apt music for a population of women perpetually in mourning for the lives they may not have, have not had, will never have.

Dance both told and repressed the girls’ story in Alba, appropriately articulating and disarticulating as the confusion of desire and the inevitability of maternal control grew. The dancers who danced the daughters, moved away and against the stern control of the mother. The mother was danced by a woman who could not have been more than three-foot tall. Dressed in a 19th-century Spanish habit of black widow’s weeds, she had stepped, intentionally or not, out of Velasquez’s Las Meninas, this Swiss group invoking for a moment the baroque Spanish court for an Italian audience, and inevitably for me a
visual trigger to the memory of Foucault’s dioramic essay at the opening of *The Order of Things*.

Like the slowly turning figure on the revolving mountain of a lute player in Les Ballets C de la B, so in this production one emblematic moment lives vivid in my memory, the affect and effect enduring. I watched in dread and wonder as a simple, visual movement, and not only visual since accompanied by the dissonance of the concentrated chaos in homage to Hendrix’s style of guitar, broke open Lorca’s story. The daughters from the first had danced their varying relations to the mother, some submissive, some reluctant, some rebellious; at some point she orders them to the back of the stage. They stand as if caught in a lineup in a police station, frozen, guilty. The mother raises her hand and rests it against the back wall, at first it is not clear what she holds, but then she begins to draw her hand along and as she does a white line forms. She is holding chalk. As she reaches the first of her daughters, one by one, the women all drop down under the line she is drawing at the height of her shoulder. They have to bend their bodies, contort their true physical length in order to fit under the mother’s chalk rule. And as I watch the line implacably drawn catch and subdue each of the daughters the multiple inferences appear, at first the most obvious followed by the interpretations provoked beyond the obvious: I see a dance that infers the condition of stilted, misshapen, broken female bodies under patriarchal, Catholic, Franko fascist regime, and then the inference extends into associations of women caught under the regime of ballet/modern dance and its cadaverous customs, of girls still under the thumbs of disappointed women everywhere. As always the choice will be ours as spectators, to receive the piece as just a dance, meaning nothing or little, or to
let the possible connections reverberate in time to the amplified strings, shape changing, revealing new sounds in time and space.

Was this the moment that hooked me? Did I from then on follow dance like a convert? I cannot remember now exactly but the change in my habits as an itinerant spectator did indeed happen because I found myself admiring what dance could do. The shaping of spectatorial taste, as I began to learn with Mario Martone’s programming of the first year of the Teatro India, depends upon collaboration with artistic directors and theatre managers as well the more acknowledged influence of the work of performers and the accumulation of experience in seeing different forms, different genres. A regular spectator for the RomaEuropa festival, I buy the abbonamento, the Italian word for a subscription, but a word that always pleases me in its echo of the English, abandonment, not the one you suffer at the loss of another, but the one you initiate by surrender to what is coming. So I abandon myself to a set of performances as I choose my list; for RomaEuropa, if I choose ten works inevitably three or four will be dance as Monique Veaute, the artistic director of the festival until 2007, created the narrative of her festivals, now continued by her successors, from the international companies bringing dance theatre, contemporary dance and all the dances in between.

What is it I think now that dance can do? And is it dance or is it the companies who move in the ample and suggestive space between the forms of art employed in dance such as performance, music and sport? I return to the moment in Lucie Cabrol when it seemed to me that I began to profit from a form of watching like an echo or reverberation. A performance delay that rather
than producing disconnection or extraneous noise became for me a line tossed out for my imagination to grab and then be hauled into another space, of recognition but a recognition only possible in a collaboration often threefold: a moment of confusion, the dawning clarification, the interpretation(s). Words can do it too. But the writer must know how to obfuscate what we think we know in order to produce delay or be able to create a story whose arc includes the delay of surprise.

On stage with Lucie Cabrol it came in the contortion of several of the performers’ bodies, as the actor playing Lucie occupied herself strangely, seeming to pick nits off their arms and backs and legs. I watched, confused, waiting for some sign or word of clarification, then she swung her imaginary bucket and moved to the next body and I thought, perhaps just in the moment in which the actors themselves revealed it in words, blueberries. It could easily sound like an obvious LeCoq exercise, make yourself a blueberry bush for your partner to cultivate, and for those who knew Complicite’s work for years no doubt it might have looked like one. But for me this memory articulates the awakening of another form of translation—not unlike the one I have considered earlier about language and the varieties of watching, hearing and making meaning across tongues or space and the collaboration of spectator, container and meaning—a translation of physical energy into the temporal accumulation of meaning. Girls trapped under Catholic mothers and their priests, the implications then move out into a more reverberating form of revelation, the line thrown towards my imagination that can be grasped as I am pulled into interpretative reflections about matters more weighty and more current, matters existential and consequential beyond the ‘subject’ of the piece I am seeing.
Oddly I return to the early modern notion of the emblem to account in some sense for the form of memory I store and retrieve in these sound/image/action moments of performance. Or perhaps more precisely a 20th century version of the emblem multiplied and put into motion by Abby Warbug in his ‘montage-collisions’ of drawings of triumphal arches juxtaposed with a wheel of a chariot next to an apse with a round window under an architectural drawing of a simple doorway. You have to put them next to each other to see them, and then your eye moves, you move, the motion across forms—forms perhaps created centuries apart—animates what you know so that what you know encounters what you don’t and
sits down for tea. When I saw the figure of the dancer on the stomach of the musician—I cannot even precisely remember whether she did more than make the incremental movements with her feet that kept her balanced as he turned himself in a circle—I remembered the folding feet on pointe of the little plastic dancer in the music box. I heard an impossibly high Asian opera-like tune, and I heard the staccato plunks of the little raised metal knobs hitting against the tips of metal fingers to play a faded and outmoded tune of an era of ballerinas.

Through the practice of spectating and in particular while at performances of dance, I learned to look for the line thrown out towards my imagination memory, to let the seemingly unrelated images, moves, sounds be set next to one another, to see what they would make. In a like manner, scholars of dance had released me from relying on the false security of the object of the play text, the object to be understood, when I had been trying to account for what performance could do in early modern theatre. Such a position of flâneuring, of the collaboration of allowing oneself to be found by an interesting doorway, began to affect my reception of any kind of performance; I no longer let the lead offered in performance dangle ungrasped—unless I consciously dropped the line because the force of the tug was weak or too jerky to provide the steady pull into revelation and reverie. The motion of the collaboration I describe does not have to be initiated only by wild energy in choreography, rather the ‘still-act’ that Nadia Seremetakis describes in her work of a “reflexive anthropology of the senses” can offer this line in an exquisite tension as it pulls taunt over time, a pressure consistent and promising, that makes us change our own time in our seats to accommodate
how what is being made is coming to us and being returned.

Thinking of lines thrown out I am reminded of deliberate lines made on stage in ‘Paper Doll’ a work by Padmini Chettur juxtaposed in my mind against the chalk discipline of Bernarda Alba. The heat and extroverted power of repressed and suppressed female bodies corralled by Lorca’s evocation of confinement shapes the energy of frustration in contrast to another group of women, also in line, who make the most minute gestures and small actions of motion across the space often connected one to another by the hand. In Bernarda Alba the women hit up against each other like dodge’em cars, the angles sharp and cutting, in ‘Paper Doll’ connection and contact progress minutely: the hand of a dancer against the cheek, the head bent to the side and then slowly rotating in the hand so that the head comes to rest on the palm, an action happening over and over again in a defining of the space inch by inch, the bodies barely moving. The confinement here is shared by watcher and makers alike; we have to learn again how to go slow. The work uses repeated gestures made excruciatingly slowly like the silences William Forsythe describes in his Company’s work Forehand, silences that “were designed to make the audience aware of their collective attention.” The sound, some kind of metal scraping against metal, filling the smallish auditorium used for dance performances at the Parco della Musica in Rome inevitably invokes Cage as the dance inevitably awakens memories of Merce Cunningham’s precise minimal choreography.

Who knows whether my associations match those of the choreographer and dancers? What is clear from the disquiet around me as we watch is that the Italian audience expected
something else from this ‘Indian’ choreographer and her ‘Indian’ dancers. People leave; the line thrown out and pulled taunt slowly, slowly, the pressure almost indiscernible might be one of the most difficult for a spectator to accept, to have the patience or trust to wait. On previous nights I had seen two other works of dance in this dance festival Equilibrio, both banal and relentlessly obvious. Watching Chettur’s dancers, I remember having the spectatorial experience of resting, undoing one of my habits of watching in its need to be stimulated, exercising another that found the ‘still-acts’ about women, about community and separation, about the danger of the one-dimensional and flimsy in a world of scissors and rocks slowly accumulating.

Among those refusing the line, I surmised later when I eavesdropped on conversations around me after the performance, were many who had expected a dance resembling the cheery exports of the most commercial Bollywood genre: bhangra made in time to catchy, loopy music, beautiful South
Asian women in sparkles, silk and ankle bracelets made of bells. What a moment of ‘montage-collision’ then when the group of women already on stage when we entered begin to sketch the slightest movement with their elbows, or stand transfixed moving a foot forward and to the side again and again, dressed in simple white shifts and accompanied by metallic echoing coming from the speakers. Had the dancers’ intent been to awaken us to the shallowly buried national assumptions made by the most shallow of encounters in a moment of film caught on television—a section of a traveling Bollywood extravaganza, the incorporation in British contemporary film of the contact between Asian and Anglo-Saxon cultures of soccer and dancing—it would have done its work within the first ten minutes. My own instinct and my participation in accepting the offer of the recognition of the still told me that this was a group doing its aesthetic work, a work having political and cultural effects, but one focused on concentration and precision in craft.

The program notes I read, translating from the Italian, itself probably a translation of Chettur’s speaking, seem to confirm this intent as she is quoted describing the dance in its evocation of the “line of paper dolls like those we played with as children taking life in front of us…they represent a perfection but one that is two-dimensional in a form that can be torn easily, the figures can be separated, fragmented…the dancers are perennially suspended in tension between closeness and distance… each dancer makes her own moves in isolation but the moves affect those near her.” In an odd addition transforming momentarily the program note into the intimacy of the epistolary, the choreographer adds her cautionary P.S. “For every concept I want to express, I choose the language of dance. I hope this text does not project a significance
where none exists. Instead the significance is created in an almost casual way inside the dance itself.” Indeed if the music animates memories of Cage then the choreographer’s insistence on the casual may be in homage to Cage and Cunningham’s dedication to the random and to chance. Thus in a visually direct way the lines thrown out to me in these moments of performance become the hands joined to make closeness and distance in a line of paper dolls, as Chettur reminds me the offer of such collaboration between spectator and performer can be remarkably casual and entered into as a flexible contract. Or as seemed to be true for many in the audience, the tension of possible revelation was never on offer, blocked by lack of interest or by expectations of another kind of encounter entirely.

When I began writing about performances in Europe, I remember too well my own expectations of a categorical nature. Armed with a project and the funding for it, I watched for hints about the nature of a ‘new Europe’ performed for and to its conjoined citizens in member states and states awaiting member state status. Instead my encounters at festivals, watching performances in many different countries in Europe, in the UK have always been inflected by moments implying a representation of nation sometimes erupting violently or as often seeping through the production implying nation but rarely becoming the set contours of a delineated border. Ironically what remains is not categorical, but the category itself, a pile of ideas, movements, sounds, traditions organized in a specific corner called France or Italy or Europe. So my supposition that many in the audience for Chettur became restive and finally impatient because their expectations of an offering from an Indian choreographer were not met remains a form of spectatorial intuition, a trained
guessing based on years of seeing performances in mixed national company.

Another early moment in my experience of watching a mixed national company amidst an audience of mixed national company comes back to me, juxtaposing itself again like a Warburg visual project on memory and association to the written lines about choreographically shaped lines you have been reading. This moment in performance had more to do with my entrance into a space of willing spectator, or more precisely my reluctance and resistance to it, and fear. At the time I was teaching in a villa owned by the University of Michigan outside Florence. I remember that night I went out into Florence, a trip of about 20 kilometers though depending on the increasing traffic from suburb to centre a trip that could take up to 45 minutes or as little as 15. On the west side of the city in an abandoned train station the dance company Fura del Baus were performing in a festival with the suggestive title, FabbricaEuropa, meaning Europe made up, fabricated or even the factory of Europe. I had yet at this point to move from the academic tenure-track trajectory of critic to the trackless independent scholar with the desire to make performance, had yet to know the pull of the concentration for days on end I explored with performers not knowing what would come of the physical work, the textual explorations into sound. I watched as my companion entered the cavernous space of playing for the performance of Fura del Baus and immediately moved forward toward the action while I hung back and assessed the space for a place to stand. Only a few minutes into the piece the nature of interaction between performers and audience had become clear: as the dancers wheeled the tower of Babel through the
vast, abandoned space, we had to cede our bit of the floor or be caught under the wheels of the machine of the multilingual. While playing with language, comprehension and bafflement, the performers also seemed to commit acts of violence on their bodies and, at least potentially, menaced any bodies in the way. Flour was thrown, water dumped, whips cracked.

I remember being frightened, it seems so odd to me now these many years on, but I remember my primary concern was not to find myself in a space where I would be a) visible as an entity picked out by the performers and therefore suddenly made visible as well to the audience, and b) required to interact with the performers spontaneously. As a teacher I improvise all the time, I do now; but at that time I had yet to experience the freedom of caring more about the potential of what might happen in a moment of encounter than about my inability to overcome my shyness at the idea of an uncontrolled, unscripted interaction. So I scanned the room and with a cunning born of desperation realized that the huge speakers necessary for the noise Fura del Baus were making demarcated spaces where the company certainly would not be dumping water or hurling flour, the economy of replacement would not allow the nightly ruin of equipment as it might were they rock stars in a stadium of thousands.

I am struck again thinking about my instincts that night of the ways our own habits of self presentation and self protection figure in spectating. Can I sit quietly and without agitation during a durational performance that unfolds as if it were a casual encounter in a subway tunnel? Can I move around a space observing without needing to leave as soon as a lull occurs in the perceived action? These questions half formed
and always reforming accompany the spectator engaged in seeing different kinds of performances, under the banners of dance and live art, as the contracts, the lines thrown out by performers for the spectator's imagination to catch, the casual nod of possibility, “yes I might enter into this or yes I might see what you are beginning to make” pass back and forth, sometimes acknowledged in the moment, recognized later or consciously refused.

The confrontive nature of the Fura del Baus ‘dance’ performance in Florence reveals to me these many years later my own distrust then of my capacity to survive being visible in an encounter which generally I could experience hidden, if not in the dark, certainly not directly addressed by performers or incorporated into the movement. Again Rancière and his forms of emancipation for the spectator come to mind in the “capacity of the anonymous, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everybody.” Rancière moves this idea of anonymity along by suggesting such a capacity, for freedom and for engaged interest, comes “through unpredictable and irreducible distances” (279). In my experience, a workable distance has nothing to do with the actual spatial configuration: one can be “too close” sitting at the back of a theatre and at a distance while standing beside the performers. But often confrontation as a mode of making performance stops at the self-satisfied point of seeming outrageous, a point that does not offer the kind of distance Rancière delineates as a space of anonymous freedom. In that Fura del Baus performance many years ago I had not yet learned a capacity for either the freedom of the anonymous (which fears neither being visible or invisible) or the pleasures of unpredictable distance.
Fura del Baus themselves cultivated an aura of being outrageous, a contemporary and in our age more deliberately market-savvy version of the rumors of experimental playing accompanying the tour of ‘Il Living’ in the 60s as the Living Theatre were known in Italy. I remember reading the day after my night in the ex-stazione Leopoldo in the Florence section of La Repubblica about the spectator who had been taken to the hospital having been injured at the performance. She exhibited the kind of appetite for experience that often makes seeing experimental theatre and performance in Italy a joy, telling the reporter that her injury did not matter at all, it had been an astonishing experience to be at the production and she was content, if a little bruised. Working as I was then teaching a group of young students who had been trained by their culture to look for opportunities to find fault and prosecute someone for it, I wondered how ‘the risk factor’ in the US would be costed out by the insurance company of any theatre for a Fura del Baus piece.

What Fura had provoked in me those many years ago came back to me when I entered the entirely conventional vestibule of the Teatro Valle in Rome to see a piece by the Romanian director Silviu Purcarete about Rabelais. Though it had not been so many years since that night when I established my safe, if extremely loud, haven of giant speakers as a space from which to look without being involved, a combination of spending several years in Italy as an independent scholar and spectator and beginning to work again as both teacher and director meant that I had assumed my equal place in a performance space, comfortable with moving, waiting, watching, leaving and staying. I had an extra lilt in my step as
I walked into the foyer that night; I had seen Purcarete’s *Titus Andronicus* in Stockholm years back. A performance always recurring in my memory from back to front because of the truly shocking experience at the end when, assuming the play was over—we had applauded wildly, people had bowed—I exited the double red doors only to find Aaron the Moor writhing on the floor, trapped in a huge fishing net, the one he had been captured in during the finale, the one that provoked memories of Iago suspended over the crowd in the opening and closing of Orson Welles’s film *Macbeth*.

One might say Purcarete takes Brian Massumi’s formulation of Bergsonian notions of space as a retrospective construction and places it, startlingly, in practice. The foyer after *Titus Andronicus* became in the surprise and discomfort of the outcast Moor, that non-heroic Shakespearean moor, the one who does not nobly die, a retrospectively constructed performance space; the boundaries of having left the theatre and the fiction unsettled and undone. For *Cousin Pantegreul* Purcarete introduced retrospective construction early on: I walked over the threshold, spied intriguing shapes in the usually empty space made for people holding drinks and programs, and moved immediately towards them. Cardboard boxes the size of those made for moving refrigerators and freezers were scattered about the foyer. When I reached the side of the first box, I saw several holes covered by colored plastic cellophane. The invitation was clear, ‘look here’. No longer in need of a safe haven from which to watch others interact, I pressed my eye immediately, willingly, to the plastic. A hand holding a flashlight suddenly popped up and made me jump; I hit back at the cardboard box in turn and laughed.
I remember about five boxes, most set on their sides except for one suspended upright. In one I saw a body covered in floating bits of cauliflower, in another, various limbs, in another, a body floating in water and alongside it a mixture of sliced vegetables. The outside of the boxes were painted with designs from Bosch, Arcimbaldo, invoking Rabelsian times with the colors I did not even know until then I think of when I think of Rabelais, red, bright red, orange, and black. Just trying to tell the tale of what happened in this piece I mark the difference between what I think of as theatre, the extraordinary moments visual and aural of the kind of theatre I have seen since I began wandering as a spectator, and what friends, some colleagues and lots of students think of as theatre: a reproduction of domestic scenes of duets, trios and quartets speaking intensely or cynically or blithely to each other. Even the ‘extreme’ theatre of writers like Sarah Kane or the early work of Mark Ravenhill follows along an action, speech, dialogue trajectory. The mixed categories of European theatre, and here is a rare instance where I think the national term actually holds, complicate what can in the US and UK form the, often snobbish, assumptions contrasting those who only go to see ‘performance’ with those who go see ‘theatre.’

Naturalism as a strategy continues to dominate UK theatre. Even experimental performance work in the UK often strikes an itinerant spectator as a deliberately casual form of naturalism, “it’s not real we are going for but we won’t pretend we are pretending either.” Purcarete like many working on the ‘Continent,’ an outmoded phrase that oddly still obtains, tends to stage the pretend as a mode of transparent transformation of what we think we know, or what we know at the back of our watching minds, until the alchemy of the expressionist or
experimental or theatrical renders the knowing more clear and less formulaic simultaneously.

Walking through the mists of the alchemical spirit rising from those boxes in the foyer, I entered the next phase of reconfiguration and surprise in the main hall of the Teatro Valle that night. My dance with the boxes an inviting prelude, I took my seat anticipating a Purcarete style of physical performance, extraordinary stage pictures that did not make themselves in order to be admired but made and unmade themselves in a process of suggestion, tender care, frightening supplication, excess and precision. In an extension of the refusal to make a boundary out of the beginning no curtain hung over the stage, instead a pile of rubble, sand perhaps, perhaps corn, and a skull with a bone next to it on the edge of the stage. As I sat about midway back in the orchestra, the space contracted and extended according to the desire of the players, aided by a curious attentiveness from that audience awakened by the preliminary play in the foyer. At the very back of the stage there was a table with a large number of actors sitting, their backs towards us. We waited, some people chatted, some people made that noise so perverse and oddly satisfying in a setting where the performers or the nature of the opening of the production clearly breaks the usual conventions of spectator to stage: despite clear signals contrasting the opening to a traditional piece of theatre, many of the spectators ‘shush’ their neighbors, compulsively working to produce the proper behavior accorded a body on the stage in a performance space, despite the confusion about whether a ‘play has started.’ Five actors join those already at table; retrospectively I realize these are the bodies from the boxes, dried off and ready to perform.
The Valle eschews the usual opening announcement, “Signore, signori inizio lo spettacolo, vi preghiamo spegnare i cellulari,” nothing but a loud bang on the table then rhythmic slaps like drumming. A ritual sound, a ritual site, bodies joined together at a table for a meal. I think about the heft of Rabelais, the thickness of the book itself, the giganticness of the character, from when I first felt I had to read him in order to understand Bakhtin’s welcome theory of the carnivalesque. In this performance, Purcarete and company seem to release this mythic figure out of the implied words, sounds and sights—graphic Rabelais. Called away from the table by a bird trill or a cricket’s music, some kind of delicate signal, the players move toward the mound of rubble, where a wee bush sprouts: they discover the skull, the bone and then suddenly a foot, attached to a body, the revelation has begun.

They unearth a skinny, ordinary looking young man who seems befuddled. Most of the actors/performers have eccentric, arresting faces, anything but ordinary. Throughout the performance, the faces continue to astonish. In rest, as they are, they are amazing enough, varied, vibrant, and particular. In action and acting they become masks, transformed and transforming. The body—might he be a corpse we are made to wonder—is picked up, put on a table that with his weight transforms to something like a gurney. Then the entire cast—one holding a huge apparatus (later to become a huge funnel) like a hospital light over the body now draped in cloth—begins to watch as the two men in aprons, surgeons, cut into the body and extract a morceau choisi, a tiny little strip of an organ which they dip in sauce and eat, then they cut for the liver, a huge slimy piece of meat extracted.
While watching delighted I am reminded of the motif of anatomical fascinations painted on the side of the cardboard boxes, haunches, incisions, etc. And while hearing the traditional moan of half disgust, half intrigue at the pantomime of cannibalism, I think of the piece I wrote about a comic, indeed almost Rabelaisian 19th-century burlesque play where the cannibal pot figures centrally both in its usual discomfort/attraction towards a cultural other and in its theatrical place as desired communal meal. Here with Purcarete I am seeing the mimed display of the all too articulated feast that forms the vengeance of Titus. The idea of cannibalism tested in performance, what I can not resist thinking of as dinner theatre, has a tradition long enough and frequent enough to give the lie to the taboo or at least to suggest that the ‘idea’ of dining on one another is appealing enough to play with in an experimental space of representation.

In Cousin Pantegruel the extraction of parts works by having all the cast move up around the body and lift the sheet after the sawing to reveal another bit come out. Bodies huddling around something out of view in order to then stand back and reveal may seem an antiquated form of theatrical play and pretending, but I note my own position as I lean forward. My spectatorial desire metaphorically pushing the bodies aside to see what, simultaneously, I do and don’t want to see. Especially when the big saw is used on the head (during this violent slicing, we see the feet and legs shake in the air) and a cauliflower like shape appears on a plate that an actor begins to eat with a fork. Like Rabelais’s recurring trope of outsizedness, an exaggeration that cannibal-like feeds on itself, so now on stage a body anatomized produces more than human parts. The bits extracted begin to
resemble the miraculous and abundant, first a saxophone, a recurring instrument for the rest of the performance. Next come a cellist and a cello impossibly folded up onto a chair to be lifted high out of the body cavity, then a violinist with a violin. When put down onto the stage both musicians begin to play. All creation comes from illusion/all illusion comes from creation. The actions are a demonstration of invention.

As I think about it now I realize the work had a score, not only a musical one, but a performing score, each section a component of the fugue the work created in its revelation by building. For all of Rabelais’ excess, the fugue, while such a controlled and 18th-century notion of composition, seems apt because the excess works by precise repetition, the mess a mess recycled and reinvented into the next passage by the performers. Though all the actors have dynamic presence, two of the older men particularly dominate. One dresses up in half transvestite wear, a loopy hat with flowers, a huge white gown, a cap under the hat that looks like the 17th century depictions of men on their way to bed. Sat at the end of a long table, this figure begins to eat. Having a spectator’s need to connect the name of the piece to what I am seeing, I wonder if this is the cousin of the title. As I ponder who he might be, the performers begin a passage, an unforgettable one.

The dancer on the mountain of lute player, the women dropping under the chalk line of their minuscule, monstrous mother, recur in memory alongside another line thrown out towards me, another line made on stage before me. Susan Stewart might identify my fascination with these instances as that pull of desire longing makes in the narratives of the miniature and the gigantic. I know well that longing propels the
flâneur and the spectator, the siren call of the threshold keening at a pitch that draws the body beginning to cross. So I pitched forward in my seat to watch as under the table actors hold two long strips of muslin that look to be about one foot and a half wide, the same two strips of muslin also make runners across the table top. I look at those pieces of cloth, a moment of hesitation where in stillness they look merely like decoration, no hint of what they are doing there—I am in the blissfully suspended state of patient expectation. I know better by now than to rush revelation, instead I can savor the satisfaction that comes from a practitioner’s ability to delay my recognition. So I participate in the dilation of performed time by paying particular attention to two muslin strips on a table before me.

Then the movement begins, an ingenuous simplicity: an actor steps onto the muslin strip, makes a noise, and the actors under the table begin to pull. When the strips move, the actor who holds a bucket, moves the length of the table. As each actor reaches the gorging character seated at the head of the table, he or she gives a yelp signaling the actors under the table to stop pulling on the strip. A humanly made machine, no source of power beyond hands and feet, truly magical to watch. Why, I wonder now, why is the scale of the humanly made so attached to revelation for me? Am I as before imagining not my dancing body in this case, but my performing body doing what I see before me? Have the technologically made tricks been rendered banal as they have multiplied on stage leaving the physically made to seem the new invented wonder? Could this be one reason for the popularity, nay the employable category, of ‘physical theatre’ over the last decade? Meanwhile the stakes rise as the actors upend their buckets into the funnel affixed to
the mouth of the character in white. Each new influx of liquid is
greeted with the sound of air pumping as the belly swells under
the white gown. When he is almost too large to move, he gets up
and begins to dance.

Purcarete’s performers punctuate all manner of their
play by singing. In one scene, two particularly gifted singers
harmonize while with their hands they transform the notes of
the song into filaments that they pull out of their mouths and
extend into the air, manifesting waves of sound constantly
present and constantly hidden. In another movement of this
Rabelaisian fugue, the actors employ two goblets and a long
plank of wood: two women sing with the plank held in their teeth,
they circle around and so does the plank upon which the two
goblets balance. Four other planks work like controlled seesaws
in the background as the actors add, to the beat of an inaudible
but absolute measure, more glasses to the plank suspended
between the women. In order to place these glasses, the actors
move themselves up the suspended planks and begin to slide
down the other side. Actors behind them lift the plank from the
ground, momentarily arresting the motion of the seesaw so the
suspended actor can place another glass on the rotating, singing
wood. When there are perhaps 12 glasses, the plank is set on the
head of the actor who heretofore has crouched under the plank
at its center twirling the wood on top of his tongue even as the
two women keep the ends in their teeth. Now he balances the
plank on top of his bald head while the actors tune their glasses
and then play a tune, familiar to us since we heard it earlier in
the performance, on this glass harmonica precisely constructed
in time and out of physical movement.

Completing the symmetry of play before, during and in
the finale, Purcarete returns at the end of the performance, Rabelais-like, to a finale of the stomach. An actor beats his sticks and the others take their cue to prepare. The four table tops are placed at the front of the stage, one actor has a huge baker’s scoop full of flour and a pitcher of water. The sight and the sound of excess, mounds and mounds of flour begin to be kneaded into dough, the ‘bakers’ call for flour or water according to need. We watch the quotidian, seemingly non-theatrical process of bread making while music sounds. Action begins to build behind the bread maker, the actor—whose body produced the saxophone, the musicians, all the wonders before us in the beginning of the piece—is stripped and laid upon the table. The bread maker spreads the dough, now kneaded and rolled out into huge circles upon the naked body of the actor. It’s dinnertime again. The company pushes the man encroute into the huge red light of a baking oven offstage.

On our way into the play, next to the last box filled with water, vegetables and a body, I remember seeing a man in a Homburg, a black overcoat and a white scarf and dark glasses. I noted him. Though it was not impossible that this was an eccentric Italian playgoer, in that way that intent is communicated without words, I had a sense he was part of the show. He returns, appearing in the main aisle of the theatre, walks up the stairs and sits down by a huge figure made of bread in the shape of a man. He begins to eat, he throws some bread over his shoulder to the hoard of actors behind him, the act of an aristocrat to his retainers. His presence is menacing and absolute and the performance ends.

I find myself here on a rise over the landscape of dance and physical performance, the path plotted unexpectedly ending
in a theatre, with a piece not categorized under dance and yet using the body as an instrument of making, telling, doing and alluding. Even as I move across the landscape molded out of the practice of spectating, topography created from forms of post-performance reflection that might be considered the reverse of performance rehearsals, I marvel at how often where I thought I might travel, the shapes of the hills and the rolling of the earth beneath my remembering feet, dissolves in the moment of arriving at coordinates plotted by spectatorial attention rather than categories of media or genre. The line grows taunt, I wander on as I remember backwards, making the ‘still-act’ or fomenting ‘temporal insurgency’, one phrase Serematikis’, the other Moten’s, both radicals who insist upon the sensual nature of understanding what has been experienced, what has been sounded, what has been seen, what has been missed and must be lingered over, again and again, at the threshold.