

# BODY of KNOWLEDGE

## **Performing Arts Incorporated: Poetics of Physical Labor**

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..theatre is not that scenic parade where one develops virtually and symbolically – a myth: theatre is rather this crucible of fire and real meat where by an anatomical trampling of bone, limbs and syllables bodies are renewed. Artaud

Performing arts offer unique modes of embodiment in the ways they solicit corporeal skills and elicit audience re-cognition. Actors and mimes, dancers and musicians, magicians, circus artists and puppeteers mobilize diverse embodied literacies to creatively shape live action. Genres like live coding, with its staging of computational algorithms, human gestural and inscriptive practices, and machine-rendered outputs, pursue this playful exploration of more-or-less flesh-bound processes vying for the immediacy of non- or beyond-representational presence. Spatial and temporal scales implied by a given performance, and the materials and energies it employs and deploys, are fashioned to reinforce a sense of ‘corporeal exemplarity’ (Barthes). In contrast to habitual task-driven or communications-driven encodings and decodings, the morphokinetic qualities of artistic human action demand expressive and interpretative labor, honing our ability to entertain otherwise inconceivable kinds of liveness.

This, I argue, is the role of performing arts writ large: to make corporeally manifest their poetic construals of liveness that stretch our imaginations, thence our adaptive skills to steadily evolving conditions of existence. Insofar as these manifestations convoke idiosyncratic engagements with materiality – the acrobat contradicts our sense of gravity, the puppeteer contravenes our understandings of inert objects – their appeal to cognition is productively and uniquely ambivalent. Setting longstanding and emerging performance practices in the context of debate on corporeal ‘intelligencings’ (Thrift), I will try to show how they constitute a vital, irreplaceable ‘body of knowledge’.

Antonin Artaud, *Theatre and Science*, 1948

Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, 1964

Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*, 2007