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Fleshy Corporealities in Trisha Brown’s *If You Couldn’t See Me*, Lea Anderson’s *Joan* and Yolande Snaith’s *Blind Faith*

Introduction

While the focus in the last three chapters has been on actual and metaphorical indeterminate hybrid in-between spaces, the concern in this and the next chapter shifts to bodies, specifically the actual and conceptual boundaries of bodies where bodies meet space, and where inside and outside are difficult to distinguish.

This chapter focuses on the choreography of the inside/outside borderlines where bodily flesh, fluids and folds meet space in *If You Couldn’t See Me* (Brown, 1994), the dance film, *Joan* (Anderson, 1994) and *Blind Faith* (Snaith, 1998). The American choreographer Trisha Brown’s solo choreography for her naked back in *If You Couldn’t See Me* directs the audience’s attention to the flesh, folds, muscles and bone structure of this relatively unfamiliar body part (Plate 8). *Joan*, also a solo for the British choreographer, Lea Anderson, is inspired by Carl Theodor Dreyer’s (1928) film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Both works focus on Joan’s spirituality merging with her fleshy corporeality. The British choreographer Yolande Snaith’s *Blind Faith* is inspired by the work of Leonardo da Vinci, particularly *The Last Supper* (1498) and by Renaissance anatomical experiments evident in paintings such as Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp* (1632) (Plate 9).

The materiality of corporeality is central in these dances. In *If You Couldn’t See Me* spectators’ attention is drawn to the moving flesh, musculature and skeletal structure of Brown’s back by her low backed costume, by side-lighting, the plain darkness that surrounds her, and the fluidity of her loose-limbed movement style. In *Joan* the materiality of corporeality is foregrounded through close-ups of ‘Joan’s’ face and head, the use of the camera to get ‘inside’ her body, and through video
special effects. Bodily flesh, fluids and folds are emphasized in *Blind Faith* through choreography based on contact improvisation and through the dancers' portrayal of the investigation through manipulation of the near naked matter of bodies. In all three works there is much imagery of folding, and in *Joan* and *Blind Faith*, of fluid and fleshy matter such as water, wine, blood, tears, saliva and bodily innards. All pieces also make extensive use of light to highlight fleshy surfaces and to evoke mystical, sometimes trance-like moments or transformatory bodily experiences.

*If You Couldn’t See Me* is a movement based piece with no obvious references to anything outside of itself. The focus is Brown’s choreographic exploration of the performance potential of her back. The visual theatre style of *Joan* and *Blind Faith* is very different. There are references to painting, sculpture and film – both Anderson and Snaith had a visual art training1 – and the pieces are historicist and include religious references to body/soul relations and the mortality of the body. However, whether through imagery that is movement based or in a visual theatre style, all three dances explore anti-dualistic ideas that focus on female subjectivity.

The dualism of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), sees the mind and body as separate entities where the body materially occupies space and is a container for the conscious mind. From this philosophical perspective, outlined in the Introduction and examined in Chapter 10, perception is organized around a series of binary oppositions such as mind/body and self/world, where the first of the pair is associated with the masculine and valued over the second which is associated with the feminine. By putting the body at the heart of their explorations, the dances are reinstating it and its associations with the feminine as central to subjectivity. In the dances central female figures in different ways infuse the works with particular kinds of embodied energy. I argue that there are resonances between this energy and that theorized by the French post-structuralist Gilles Deleuze as inherent in the fold, and that the focuses on flesh I identify in the works can be informed by the French based Bulgarian feminist Julia Kristeva’s theories of abjection associated with the feminine. These theories are explored, together with the American theorist Susan Bordo’s feminist account of Cartesian philosophy, to aid analysis of the dances. They all allow a focus on the body and subjectivity from an anti-Cartesian perspective, although the epistemologies of Deleuze and Kristeva have very different bases. Deleuze critiques psychoanalysis whereas Kristeva draws explicitly on it, but they are both interested in new,