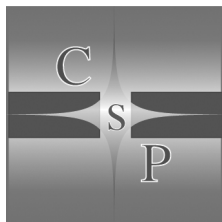


The Future of Post-Human Performing Arts

The Future of Post-Human Performing Arts

A Preface to a New Theory
of the Body and its Presence

By
Peter Baofu



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

The Future of Post-Human Performing Arts:
A Preface to a New Theory of the Body and its Presence,
by Peter Baofu

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-3520-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3520-6

To Those in the Future World beyond the Body and its Presence
in Performing Arts

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like all other previous books of mine, this book is written to challenge conventional ideas—or, in the current context, on performing arts and to replace them with an alternative and original way of thinking on the future fate of performing arts (in relation to the body and its presence).

For this reason, this book receives no external funding nor help from any formal organization or institution, because of its political incorrectness—as this is something that I often stressed (and repeated) in all my previous books.

My only reward is that pleasant sentiment of conceiving something new in the history of ideas.

In any event, I greatly appreciate the foreword by Sylvan von Burg at George Washington University.

And as always, I bear the sole responsibility for the ideas presented in this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ALD = Peter Baofu. 2007. *The Rise of Authoritarian Liberal Democracy: A Preface to a New Theory of Comparative Political Systems*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
- BCIV = Peter Baofu. 2006. *Beyond Civilization to Post-Civilization: Conceiving a Better Model of Life Settlement to Supersede Civilization*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- BCPC = Peter Baofu. 2005. *Beyond Capitalism to Post-Capitalism: Conceiving a Better Model of Wealth Acquisition to Supersede Capitalism*. NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- BCOS = Peter Baofu. 2010. *Beyond Cosmology to Post-Cosmology: A Preface to a New Theory of Different Worlds*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge International Science Publishing, Ltd.
- BDPD1 = Peter Baofu. 2004. Volume 1. *Beyond Democracy to Post-Democracy: Conceiving a Better Model of Governance to Supersede Democracy*. NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- BDPD2 = Peter Baofu. 2004. Volume 2. *Beyond Democracy to Post-Democracy: Conceiving a Better Model of Governance to Supersede Democracy*. NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- BEPE = Peter Baofu. 2011. *Beyond Ethics to Post-Ethics: A Preface to a New Theory of Morality and Immorality*. Charlotte, NC: Infomration Age Publishing.
- BNN = Peter Baofu. 2006. *Beyond Nature and Nurture: Conceiving a Better Way to Understand Genes and Memes*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
- BWT = Peter Baofu. 2007. *Beyond the World of Titans, and the Renaking of World Order: A Preface to a New Logic of Empire-Building*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
- FAE = Peter Baofu. 2007. *The Future of Aesthetic Experience: Conceiving a Better Way to Understand Beauty, Ugliness and the Rest*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.

- FC = Peter Baofu. 2007. *The Future of Complexity: Conceiving a Better Way to Understand Order and Chaos*. London, United Kingdom: World Scientific Publishing Co.
- FCD = Peter Baofu. 2002. *The Future of Capitalism and Democracy*. MD: The University Press of America.
- FHC1 = Peter Baofu. 2000. Volume 1. *The Future of Human Civilization*. NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.
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- FPHFS = Peter Baofu. 2010. *The Future of Post-Human Formal Science: A Preface to a New Theory of Abstraction and Application*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
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- FPHP = Peter Baofu. 2010. *The Future of Post-Human Personality: A Preface to a New Theory of Normality and Abnormality*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge International Science Publishing, Ltd.
- FPHPA = Peter Baofu. 2011. *The Future of Post-Human Performing Arts: A Preface to a New Theory of the Body and its Presence*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
- FPHR = Peter Baofu. 2010. *The Future of Post-Human Religion: A Preface to a New Theory of Spirituality*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge International Science Publishing, Ltd.
- FPHS = Peter Baofu. 2010. *The Future of Post-Human Sexuality: A Preface to a New Theory of the Body and Spirit of Love-Makers*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
- FPHST = Peter Baofu. 2006. *The Future of Post-Human Space-Time: Conceiving a Better Way to Understand Space and Time*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- FPHU = Peter Baofu. 2008. *The Future of Post-Human Unconsciousness: A Preface to a New Theory of Anomalous Experience*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd.
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• PART ONE •

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION—THE BEAUTY OF PERFORMING ARTS

There is no noise, only sound.
—John Cage (WK 2007a)

Two Opposing Traditions in Performing Arts

Are performing arts really supposed to be so radical that, as John Cage once said in the context of music, “there is no noise, only sound,” since “he argued that any sounds we can hear can be music”? (WK 2007a; D. Harwood 1976)

This radical tradition in performing arts, with music as an example here, can be contrasted with an opposing view in the older days, when “Greek philosophers and medieval theorists in music ‘defined music as tones ordered horizontally as melodies, and vertically as harmonies. Music theory, within this realm, is studied with the presupposition that music is orderly and often pleasant to hear.’” (WK 2007a)

Contrary to these opposing traditions (and other views as will be discussed in the book), performing arts (in relation to both the body and its presence) is neither possible nor desirable to the extent that the respective ideologues (on different sides) would like us to believe.

Needless to say, the challenge to these opposing traditions in performing arts does not imply that performing arts are worthless human endeavors, or that those fields of study (related to performing arts) like aesthetics, acoustics, communication studies, psychology, culture studies, sociology, religion, morality, and so on should be rejected too. Of course, neither of these extreme views is reasonable.

Instead, this book provides an alternative (better) way to understand the future of performing arts, especially in the dialectic context of the body and its presence—while learning from different approaches in the literature but without favoring any one of them (nor integrating them, since they are not necessarily compatible with each other).

In other words, this book offers a new theory (that is, *the transdisciplinary theory of performing arts*) to go beyond the existing approaches in a novel way.

If successful, this seminal project is to fundamentally change the way that we think about performing arts, from the combined perspectives of the mind, nature, society, and culture, with enormous implications for the human future and what I originally called its “post-human” fate.

The Body and its Presence in Performing Arts

A good point of departure is to define the term “performing arts” at the outset, which, in accordance to one definition, refer to “those forms of art which differ from the plastic arts insofar as the former uses the artist's own body, face, and presence as a medium, and the latter uses materials such as clay, metal or paint which can be molded or transformed to create some physical art object. The term 'performing arts' first appeared in the English language in the year 1711.” (WK 2011)

However, the term “performing arts” should not be confused with a related term “performance art,” in that the latter refers, more generally, to “a performance presented to an audience,” which “may be either scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation,” and “can be live or via media; the performer can be present or absent.” (WK 2011a)

In this more general sense, “performance art” can be “visual arts” in some cases but “performing arts” in others.

With this clarification in mind, “performing arts” can be re-defined in this book for a more systematic analysis in terms of two main features, namely, (a) the body and (b) its presence—to be discussed below (and summarized in *Table 1.1*).

The Body

In the re-definition of “performing arts” for this book, the term “body” here refers to three main characteristics, namely, (a) the physical body, (b) posture/gesture, and (c) makeup/costume, as described below.

The Physical Body

The first characteristic of the body in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *the physical body*.

In the case of humans (and, in many cases, animals too), the physical body “mostly consists of a head [including the brain], neck, torso, two arms and two legs, as well as numerous internal organ groups such as respiratory, circulatory and a central nervous system.” (WK 2011b)

There has been a conventional prejudice against “the body,” in that it is to be of less value when contrasted with the mind, soul, spirit, etc. For instance, “in the views emerging from the mind-body dichotomy, the body is considered in behavior and therefore considered as little valued and trivial in comparison to mind, spirit or soul.” (WK 2011b; J. Kim 1995; R. Young 2005)

This “mind-body problem” remains “one of the central issues in the history of philosophy, which asks us to consider if the brain and the mind are identical, partially distinct, or related in some unknown way. There are three major schools of thought concerning the answer,” as shown below: (WK 2011c; W. Hart 1996; A. Lacey 1996; P. Churchland 1989)

- “Dualism”—“holds that the mind exists independently of the brain.”
- “Materialism”—“holds that mental phenomena are identical to neuronal phenomena.”
- “Idealism”—“holds that only mental phenomena exist.”

And “in cognitive psychology, physical bodies as they occur in biology are studied in order to understand the mind, which may not be a physical body, as in functionalist schools of thought.” (WK 2011d)

In any event, in the context of performing arts, the physical body is very important, because of the use of facial expressions, sounds, and so on in performance, for instance.

Posture/Gesture

The second characteristic of the body in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *posture/gesture*.

The word “gesture” refers to “a form of non-verbal communication in which visible bodily actions communicate particular messages, either in place of speech or together and in parallel with spoken words. Gestures include movement of the hands, face, or other parts of the body. Gestures differ from physical non-verbal communication that does not communicate specific messages, such as purely expressive displays, proxemics, or displays of joint attention. Gestures allow individuals to communicate a variety of feelings and thoughts, from contempt and hostility to approval and affection, often together with body language in addition to words when they speak. Gesture processing takes place in

areas of the brain such as Broca's and Wernicke's areas, which are used by speech and sign language.” (WK 2011e; A. Kendon 2004; J. Xu 2009)

And the word “posture” refers to “the different positions that the human body can take. There are several synonyms that refer to the human position, often used interchangeably, but having specific flavors,” as shown below: (WK 2011f; DC 2007; F. Wittels 2005)

- “Position”—“is a general term for a configuration of the human body.”
- “Pose”—“implies artistic or aesthetic intention of the position.”
- “Attitude”—“refers to postures assumed for purpose of imitation, intentional or not, as well as in some standard collocations in reference to some distinguished types of posture: 'Freud never assumed a fencer's attitude, yet almost all took him for a swordsman.'”
- “Bearing”—“refers to the manner, of the posture, as well as of gestures and other aspects of the conduct taking place.”

In the case of dance in performing arts, for illustration, a posture refers to “a position of a dancer or a mutual position of a dance couple assumed during a dance. Describing and mastering proper dance positions is an important part of dance technique.” (WK 2011f)

Makeup/Costume

And the third characteristic of the body in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *makeup/costume*.

The word “makeup” here refers to that which “is used to assist in creating the appearance of the characters that actors portray,” as in theatrical makeup, and it can include the skin, rouge, eyes, lips, and other areas of the body of an artist. (WK 2011g)

For instance, “in Greek and Roman theatre,...Thespis, considered to be the first actor, used white lead and wine to paint his face. In medieval Europe, actors altered their appearances by painting their faces a different color. Performers who portrayed God painted their faces white or gold; actors playing angels painted their faces red. During the Renaissance, actors were creative and resourceful when making-over their faces. They used lamb's wool for false beards and flour as face paint.” (WK 2011g; BOE 2009; T. Maginnis 2008)

And the word “costume” here refers to wardrobe and dress in theatre, film, dance, and the like which “can help actors portray characters' age, gender role, profession, social class, personality, ethnicity, and even information about the historical period/era, geographic location and time

of day, as well as the season or weather of the theatrical performance. Often, stylized theatrical costumes can exaggerate some aspect of a character; for example Harlequin and Pantaloon in the *Commedia dell'arte*.” (WK 2011h)

The Presence

In the re-definition of “performing arts” for this book, “the body” does not perform in abstraction but occurs as the “presence” (of the body) in certain contexts, which can be understood in relation to four main characteristics, namely, (a) audience, (b) stagecraft, (c) space-time, and (d) environment, as described below.

Lest any misunderstanding occurs, it is important to clarify at the outset that the term “presence” used in this book should *not* be confused with a seemingly similar term used in the literature on “the metaphysics of presence,” which refers to a tradition in Western philosophy to emphasize “the desire for immediate access to meaning, and thus built a metaphysics or ontotheology around the privileging of presence over absence.” (WK 2011qqq)

For instance, Jacques Derrida carried out a “deconstruction of this metaphysical tendency in philosophy. This argument is largely based on the earlier work of Martin Heidegger, who in *Being and Time* claimed the parasitic nature of the theoretical attitude of pure presence upon a more originary involvement with the world in concepts such as the ready-to-hand and being-with. Friedrich Nietzsche is a more distant, but clear, influence as well.” (WK 2011qqq)

In contrast, the term “presence” used in this book has nothing to do with the metaphysics of presence and merely refers to the different contexts in which the body has to show itself so that a performance can take place in the area of performing arts.

Audience

With this clarification in mind—the first characteristic of the presence (of the body) in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *audience*.

The word “audience” refers to “a group of people who participate in a show or encounter a work of art,...theatre, music or [others]...in any medium. Audience members participate in different ways in different kinds of art; some events invite overt audience participation and others allowing only modest clapping and criticism and reception.” (WK 2011i)

The study of audience is known as “audience studies,” and “audience theory offers scholarly insight into audiences in general. These insights

shape our knowledge of just how audiences affect and are affected by different forms of art.” (WK 2011i)

Stagecraft

The second characteristic of the presence (of the body) in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *stagecraft*.

The word “stagecraft” refers to “the technical aspects of theatrical, film, and video production. It includes, but is not limited to, constructing and rigging scenery, hanging and focusing of lighting, design and procurement of costumes, makeup, procurement of props, stage management, and recording and mixing of sound. Stagecraft is distinct from the wider umbrella term of scenography. Considered a technical rather than an artistic field, it relates primarily to the practical implementation of a designer’s artistic vision.” (WK 2011j)

In general, “stagecraft is managed by a single person (often the stage manager of a smaller production) who arranges all scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound, and organizes the cast. At a more professional level, for example modern Broadway houses, stagecraft is managed by hundreds of skilled carpenters, painters, electricians, stagehands, stitchers, wigmakers, and the like. This modern form of stagecraft is highly technical and specialized: it comprises many sub-disciplines and a vast trove of history and tradition.” (WK 2011j)

Space-Time

The third characteristic of the presence (of the body) in performing arts to be introduced here concerns *space-time*.

The word “space” here refers to different spatial arrangements of a performance. For instance, in melodrama, there is the convention, in which “the good fairy enters from stage right (from the audience’s point of view this is on the left) and the villain enters from stage left (right from the point of view of the audience). This convention goes back to the medieval mystery plays, where the right side of the stage symbolised Heaven and the left side symbolised Hell.” (WK 2011k)

And the word “time” here refers to different temporal arrangements of a performance. For instance, in dance and music, John Cage and Merce Cunningham (2000) made good use of “chance operations” with the help of *I Ching*, the Chinese book of changes, as Cunningham himself thus confessed: “Cage took it to work in his way of making compositions then; and he used the idea of 64—the number of the hexagrams—to say that you had 64, for example, sounds; then you could cast, by chance, to find which