

Dance in Translation: Subjectivity, Failed Spectatorship and Tolerance

Serap Erincin

New York University
E-mail: se556@nyu.edu

Abstract

Roland Barthes' concept of *punctum* informs this analysis of crosscultural spectatorship of *Solum*, a performance by Mustafa Kaplan. Series of *puncta* stimulate spectators' interpretations in live or mediated performance where meaning is mostly layered in the visual. The *puncta* "prick" moments from spectators' memory and consciousnesses. They are not within the imagination, but within the images. A "writerly" – as Barthes would call it- performance, such as *Solum*, asks the spectator to multiply the meaning(s) inherent in it, in a constant process of production – or reproduction - each time the performance meets the spectator(s). Spectators, by accepting failure in recognizing the creator's meaning in a performance, engage in a project of subjectivity, and reveal their cultural identity during this translation process. Understanding the process of (mis)translation helps build tolerance.

Keywords: *Performance translation, dance translation, translation of the body, cultural translation, mistranslation, cultural memory, crosscultural performance, spectatorship, tolerance, mirror neurons, senses and affect*

They are like ourselves," he replied. As you might have expected. Naturally. Why should the process of likeness stop or be contradicted here? Why should those telling, representing the scene, not be equated with those they are talking about? Why should they not serve to endorse the conformity of their words? Unless it is that they have been set up as equivalents by the identity, the principle of identity, governing their discourse. Or that they come by this "likeness" – they who are like ourselves who are ourselves alike – through a regulated alternation of replicas in which interference and the background noise of the conversation are turned down, right from the start.
(Luce Irigaray¹)

In an essay on the politics of participation Susan C. Haedicke examines the active involvement of spectators in efforts to empathize with the situation of refugees seeking asylum in the European Union. She explains that this educational theatrical activity aimed at creating a "moment of emotion which opens the doors of a misunderstood

¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 259.

universe... and gives the keys to a better understanding of the world of the exile.”² At one point in her essay she states that Elaine Scarry “argues that identification with the plight of the Other, what she calls ‘spontaneous imagining,’ will not in and of itself reverse anti-immigrant feelings. Those calls for tolerance and acceptance, must be accompanied by constitutional and legal measures.”³ What is it that is missing for the impossibility of total identification with the situation of another even when their situation is embodied through participation in theatrical practice “in the form of role-playing”⁴ or when the “I” and the “you” become intertwined”⁵ ?

Classic and contemporary texts on acting techniques have been built on the understanding and assumption that emotions can be widely recognized through facial expressions. Archetypal forms have been developed in certain theatre systems to communicate these emotions to the spectators, so they can *empathize* with the characters they are watching. Recent neuroscientific studies indeed offer explicit explanations for the mechanics of this kind of empathy – one that is produced while looking at another person, that is, built during spectatorship- through an explanation of certain neurons firing in the brain. However, empathizing does not necessarily mean that their situation is understood, that they are granted *tolerance* and *acceptance*. In fact, for Augusto Boal, empathy “is the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theater and related arts.”⁶ In this article, I will attempt to make an argument that it is for this very reason; this very impossibility of communicating one’s situation to an other, that performance is indeed a tool for building tolerance and acceptance among different cultures, peoples, and individuals. In doing this, I am going to use Roland Barthes’ vocabulary to analyze spectatorship in performance. I will also consider the issue of spectatorship with regard to a specific performance; *Solum* by Mustafa Kaplan – an internationally renowned dancer and choreographer from Turkey.

Roland Barthes subtitled *Camera Lucida* “Reflections on Photography.”⁷ He wrote it in the three years between his mother’s death and his own. Throughout the book he takes the position of the *spectator*⁸ and engages in the discussion of a number of photographs. He writes, “The *Spectator* is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs.”⁹ He calls the person in the photograph, “a kind of little simulacrum,” “the *Spectrum* of the photograph.” He chooses the word *spectrum* because it adds “the return of the dead” to the photograph. His reference to “simulacrum”, a copy without an original according to Jean Baudrillard, also implies the connection to the dead, or the dead moment. According to Ron Burnett, the title of Barthes’s book *Camera Lucida* is a “play on Camera Obscura”¹⁰... The deliberate ambiguity of the term *Lucida* allows Barthes to look at photographs both for what they are, and as triggers for

² Susan C. Haedicke, “The Politics of Participation: Un Voyage Pas Comme Les Autres Sur Les Chemins De L’Exil,” *Theatre Topics* 12/2 (2002): 2.

³ Haedicke, “The Politics of Participation,” 104.

⁴ Haedicke, “The Politics of Participation,” 107.

⁵ Haedicke, “The Politics of Participation,” 109.

⁶ Haedicke, “The Politics of Participation,” 109.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Second ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 42.

⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 9.

¹⁰ And as such refers to the history of the medium of photography, to its origins as a device which transformed the three-dimensions of the ‘real’ world into a flat surface.

bringing out the inner light of thinking and interpretation.”¹¹ Barthes offers two crucial words in describing his “human interest”¹² in the photographs. The first is *studium*. According to Barthes, *studium* is the “average effect, almost from a certain training” that puts his interest in many photographs. He borrows this word from Latin. The word “doesn’t mean, at least not immediately, ‘study,’ but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity.”¹³ *Punctum*, on the other hand, is the element that will “disturb the *studium*” by piercing and pricking its spectator. This is a piercing without an intention – an intention on behalf of the photographer, or the subjects photographed. It is inflicted completely at the “unconscious authority” of the spectator of the photograph. The *punctum* allows Barthes throughout the book to multiply the inherent meanings in the photographs he describes. The *punctum* is the agency that allows “the inner light of thinking and interpretation” to come out. (I will talk more about the framework for this interpretation in the following pages - for it is important that it is not a free association practice or methodology such as a Rorschach test.)

Barthes identifies the agencies of his subjective analysis of the many photographs described within the book by employing this word, *punctum*. *Camera Lucida* is a theory of photography, a theory of art, and a theory of communication. Here, I use it also as theory of the dynamics between subjectivity and production of meaning in cultural practice. Extrapolating from his discussions of the photographs, his concept of *punctum* allows me to analyze the communication between a live or mediatized performance and its spectator. In performance, meaning is mostly layered in the visual. The *puncta* are within everyone’s sight. When people watch performances, they read and interpret them guided by their personal and collective history, experience, and background. It is the series of *puncta*, in the series of images that they look at that stimulates these interpretations. The *puncta* “prick” moments from our past and consciousness. The *puncta* are not within the imagination. They are within the images. They trigger the interpretation, the thinking process—as Burnett suggests. The meaning layered onto the work is produced in the moment the *puncta* meet the spectator’s mind. Yet the meaning interpreted from it, the production of the spectatorship is subjectively determined. Later, I will provide a few examples to support this suggestion by looking at the spectators’ responses to *Solum*.

Camera Lucida is a “poesis.” I use “poesis” in both senses of the word; Barthes’ writing is extremely poetic. It has the effect of an elegy. Yet, his writing is also a process of creating theory. Barthes’ little book made me ponder how photography constructs our imagination of a time we do not own - whether it is in the past, present or future. Images in photography, film or performance allow us to be spectators to an event or situation that then become embedded in our memory. With a focus on questions of spectatorship, I went back to Barthes’ poesis of how he went through the photographic images of his mother looking for the one that represented her best. I was struck that my mother’s childhood is a past absent from my imagination. My father’s childhood, on the other hand, presents itself in many film-like scenes, each only a few seconds. I know, though, that the memories I have of my father’s past are confabulations. These memories were produced in the spaces of imagination. These spaces were created from

¹¹ Ron Burnett, *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media, and the Imaginary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

¹² Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 26.

¹³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 26.

the many childhood photographs of him, and the many stories I heard from his parents. These childhood photographs documented his existence from the day he was born. I've looked at them countless times, so I've never needed to imagine what he looked like. I put together images of him in the pictures I have seen, with the stories I have heard from my paternal grandparents, and animated many of these scenes in my mind. Or perhaps, as Barthes says, they "animate me."¹⁴

My mother on the other hand, exists for me as a person who has never been younger than sixteen. Her family was completely scattered among different lands and cities. I have never seen a single photo of her living with her parents. This is a non-existent past to me. All I know is that she and two of her siblings lived with their uncle. I have never been close to either one of my mother's parents. I have never heard stories of my mother as a child from them. My mother barely mentions her childhood. There are no elements that would help me be a spectator to that time of her life. Nothing to prick or trigger my imagination. Yet, I wonder a lot how this woman, that I (and not my sister) resemble not only physically but also physiologically, looked when she was a child. We look alike. We wake up from nightmares with the same screams. We get sick, happy or sad in the same way. We hold hands when we walk on the streets. I hold a similar hand, a similar skin. My mother is my ancestor. Did her childhood look like mine? John Berger says, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe in."¹⁵ If I seriously researched and traced relatives who would possibly have a picture of my mother as a child, if I become introduced to it now as opposed to when I was a child or an adolescent, I will have a completely different experience. I will become a spectator to a different past. I, as a grown-up will probably see a different *punctum* in the photograph. My experience would be contextual. It would depend on the environment in which I would look at this photograph. It would depend on the time of my life at which I would come across this photograph. Barthes writes,

Now, in the photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it... no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the Photograph, my certainty is immediate...¹⁶

According to Barthes, a photograph "testifies to the absence of the object and gives incontestable evidence that it has existed."¹⁷ Barthes explains: "Hence the Winter Garden Photograph, however pale, is for me the treasury of the rays which emanated from my mother as a child, from her hair, her skin, her dress, gaze, *on that day*."¹⁸ As such, I am forever deprived of the rediscovery Barthes had of his mother by looking at a photograph of her as a five-year-old.¹⁹

¹⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 20.

¹⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series*, Reprint (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 8.

¹⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 115.

¹⁷ Margaret Iversen, "The Positions of Postmodernism" *Oxford Art Journal* 12/1 (1989): 31-34.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 82.

¹⁹ It is impossible not to recognize the fact that, advances of the digital age we live in can fail Barthes theories hypothetically. Photographs can easily be manipulated, even fabricated now. Ironically, as much as Barthes is associated with postmodernity, I see his project in *Camera Lucida* as a product of modernity. What complicates his theory on the other hand, as I suggest here, is not a product of postmodernity but rather a more advanced or a higher modernity.

People's interpretation of an image, or a series of images such as in live or in mediatized performance through film, is a process of experience. They are, like any experience, formed contextually and subjectively. What is seen, the visible, is perceived and given meaning to through the filter of the spectator's consciousness. Here is one of the primary definitions for *subjective* in the Oxford English Dictionary, hereafter OED:

Relating to the thinking subject, proceeding from or taking place within the subject; having its source in the mind; (in the widest sense) belonging to the conscious life.

The key part in this definition is that something subjective has its source in the mind. *Mind* is a complicated word. Interestingly, the key words in OED's primary definition of mind are *senses* and *memory*. The first definition says that mind is "senses relating to memory," the first subcategory for this definition says mind is "the faculty of memory." The second one (which is more interesting to me considering my mother's absent childhood in my *mind*) suggests mind is "that which is remembered, a memory; the memory or record of (a person or thing)." The second definition of mind says it means "senses relating to thought" in certain uses described as those "expressing the action of thinking or the occurrence of a thought, idea, or intuition." The fourth definition is the most detailed. According to this, mind is the "mental or psychic faculty". It is:

The seat of awareness, thought, volition, feeling, and memory; cognitive and emotional phenomena and powers considered as constituting a presiding influence; the mental faculty of a human being (esp. as regarded as being separate from the physical); (occas.) this whole system as constituting a person's character or individuality.

So, something subjective has its source in the mind, in the senses relating to memory, or thought. A sense is a physical experience, such as seeing. Of all the senses, vision is the most associated with seeing. Interestingly, *vision* can refer to that seen beyond what is perceived with the corporeal, the eye. Vision suggests an experience. People experience subjectively. Vision has its source in the mind, in the senses relating to memory and thought – which are again experienced subjectively.

A performance is primarily experienced through vision. As Vittorio Gallese writes, "to navigate in our social environment we rely basically on vision."²⁰ A spectator is in a constant state of production of meaning. Sight is in most cases given priority in performance analysis. The subjectivity of vision needs to be remembered in creating performance, as understanding the process of the spectator can allow the creators to have more control over the effect of their performances.²¹ Paul Kottman, in his essay "Memory, *Mimesis*, Tragedy: The Scene Before Philosophy" talks about the play *The Fall of Miletus* by Phrynicus, as one that represented "historical events within living memory."²² This play was performed only two years after the events that led to its creation. Kottman argues, "The play presented something that the audience members themselves remembered, and in so doing both brought about and confirmed this living

²⁰ Vittorio Gallese, "The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8/5–7 (2001): 34.

²¹ Such research has been started by certain scientists looking at the medium of film as examples. One such essay, "Neurocinematics: The Neuroscience of Films" written by a combination of scholars in the fields of psychology, neural sciences and cinema studies tries to assess the effect of different styles of filmmaking on the spectators by using MRI technology.

²² Paul A. Kottman, "Memory, *Mimesis*, Tragedy: The Scene Before Philosophy," *Theatre Journal* 55/1 (2003): 84.

recollection.” He notes that spectators were weeping, and referring to the accounts of Herodotus tells us that the playwright even ended up being fined for causing such sadness to the spectators by reminding them of the disaster, and the play got banned. Perhaps it is possible to categorize this play as a documentary play, then. If not, it is certainly not the only play that makes spectators cry whether they are depicting recent disasters or not. However, Kottman goes on to say that the cause for the sorrow of the audience had to do with this auto-documentary aspect of the play. He says, “rather, it seems that their lamentation was the result of a shared recollection of a suffering that was theirs – *oikeia kaka*, “something bad that touched home”; the play “reminded them” (anamnesanta) of what they already remembered.”²³ He goes on to suggest that if the play was performed today or a century after the death of its creator, “weeping from a shared memory would be an unlikely result.”

I find his statement unsettling in many ways. While it may have been true that in this case the play may not have produced similar feelings at other times, it seems to me a highly misleading idea to suggest that an artistic performance has only as much moving power as its historically realistic and contemporary relevance. What is the point of talking about art that transcends its time and space then? As it is possible that all of the spectators were crying because of their memories of the same events watching the play two years after they occurred, they probably all had different experiences of them, and thus what *pricked* them were different moments and aspects of the play. Even if everyone was saddened in the same degree by the same action, that still does not determine that this play would not have “touched home” within a community that has a separate but similar, or an entirely different experience. It is the very multiplicity of relevance that has made many plays, but especially many of these ancient Greek ones “timeless.” Jonathan Birringer says: “I feel that it is impossible for us to grasp ‘history’, the passage of time and of momentous events, except emotionally, viscerally, as it sometimes happens when we witness a powerful performance we don’t understand but for its bodily and affective impact on us.”²⁴ A lot of art, whether it is a scene in the theatre, or the movie theatre, or a painting, or something that is painted within the imagination such as a few sentences from a novel, bring tears, smiles, anger, or sometimes simply some warmth to their spectators, and it is not always so easy to define what exactly it was that pricked that certain feeling or the inexplicable crying upon what one looks at.

Barthes argues elsewhere that, in the absence of an “author-God” to control the meaning of a work, interpretive horizons are opened up considerably for the active reader. As Barthes puts it, “the death of the author is the birth of the reader.”²⁵ If, using Barthes’ semiotic language, one considers images, whether still in photographs or flowing in performance, as texts, then all spectators become possible active readers that look up to these interpretive horizons. As Margaret Iversen says, “photographs are texts, or better, the site of a complex intertextuality.”²⁶ It is helpful to remember Barthes’ elaborate distinction between a *readerly text* and a *writerly text*. In *S/Z* he proposes:

²³ Kottman, 85.

²⁴ Johannes Birringer, *Performance on the Edge: Transformations of Culture*, New ed. (New York: Continuum, 2005), 5.

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 148.

²⁶ Iversen, 32.

Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value; what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text. ... the writerly text ... Further, its model being a productive (and no longer a representative) one, it demolishes any criticism which, once produced, would mix with it: to rewrite the writerly text would consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference. The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, ... How differentiate this mass once again? Here, we require a second operation, consequent upon the evaluation which has separated the texts more delicate than that evaluation, based upon the appreciation of a certain quantity – of the *more* or *less* each text can mobilize. This new operation is *interpretation* (in the Nietzschean sense of the word). To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it.²⁷

We can apply Barthes' concepts of production of meaning in reading to theories of performance and spectatorship and propose the use of these concepts in the production of meaning – referring to meaning produced through mostly vision – in performance.²⁸ As such, in a “readerly” performance it is assumed that there is already an inherent meaning, and through performance this meaning is translated to the audience. On the other hand, a “writerly” performance, such as *Solum*, asks the spectator to multiply the meaning(s) inherent in it in a constant process of production – or reproduction - each time the performance meets the spectator. In support of this, I am now going to introduce a few examples from the spectators' accounts of this performance. (I will broadly and liberally interpret Koichi Iwabuchi's statement “New cultural technologies open new possibilities for the consumption of media texts by audiences,”²⁹ and discuss the spectators' reactions to the recording of *Solum*, that was watched on a large projection screen, as applicable as reactions to a live performance, even though I realize the experiences of the spectators would be altered by other factors resulting from and contributing to the liveness of the performance.)

(Mis)interpreting the *puncta* in *Solum*

I watched the recording of the performance *Solum* with ten people³⁰ who were at the time taking courses in the Department of Performance Studies in the Tisch School of the

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 4–5.

²⁸ It is surprising that even though Barthes introduced these theories over three decades ago, the concepts have not often been borrowed by the theorists studying intercultural performance where one of the biggest questions is production of meaning. In fact, on the contrary, the spectator, who would be the substitute if not the equivalent of the “reader” in the examples of Barthes, has been most neglected in discussing intercultural theory by the hegemonic European theoreticians in this area. I do not have space to further employ Barthes' model in *S/Z* to performance theory in this paper, however, I think such application can be very useful in terms of liberating the constraints around the production of meaning – by the spectator-in performance theory.

²⁹ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 25.

³⁰ These scholars were a combination of Ph.D. students and MA students and a visiting scholar who had a Ph.D. They were from Europe, the Americas, and the Far East. They had all been in New York for at least

Arts at New York University. I wanted to hear their interpretation of the piece. I was specifically interested to know if there were specific images, gestures, or movements that “pricked” them. I also wanted to know if there were any moments they related to culturally. In naming these moments that “pricked” the spectators in a different way than the other spectators and the author’s intention, I will borrow the word *punctum* from Barthes.³¹ Rey Chow writes the following while critiquing Chinese cinema and discussing film as ethnography:

To intervene in this deadlock, I will in the following pages argue for a redefinition of ethnography by explicitly linking ethnography with translation. Before doing that, I will explain how a focus on visibility as such is really the first step toward a dismantling of the classic epistemological foundations of anthropology and ethnography. ... I think it is by focusing on visibility that we can come to terms with the subjective origins of ethnography most productively. In other words, I do not think that an ethnography alternative to the one we have been criticizing can materialize simply through a call for “self-consciousness” – “let’s look at ourselves, our language, and our assumptions more carefully” – ... in the vision of the formerly ethnographized, the subjective origins of ethnography are displayed in amplified form but at the same time significantly redefined; what are “subjective” origins now include a memory of past *objecthood*– the experience of being looked at– which lives on in the subjective act of ethnographizing like an other, an optical unconscious.³²

I have talked to the spectators that watched *Solum* extensively discussing many elements of the performance, their lives, and if we were in groups reflecting on the other spectators’ experience of the performance, similarities and distinctions. Chow’s observation has considerably served in the selection of the few moments of these conversations that I am reflecting here. I am in no way suggesting that this was ethnography, yet for the purposes of this article I have opted to focus, in those accounts, mostly on the visual elements of the performance that connected to the autobiographical accounts of the spectators. I also sought to discover the relations between these autobiographical accounts and the cultural backgrounds of the spectators. Chow also asks:

Does cross-cultural “translation” not challenge precisely the scholarly mode of privileging the verbal text? If translation is “transactional reading,” must the emphasis fall on “reading”? What if the emphasis is to fall on “transaction.” And what if the transaction is

six months at the time, yet they all had different cultural backgrounds. The Europeans were from France, Germany and Bulgaria. One person was from Korea and another from Japan. There was one person from Brazil and another from Puerto Rico. Of the US nationals, one was Greek-American, another Native American, and another was half Spanish. I did not translate the text or the songs in *Solum* before or during the viewings. I also gave very limited background information about the artist and the performance. Of the ten people, only one, Julie Perrin (the Ph.D. from Paris), was already familiar with the piece. She had seen it at a festival in France. Some are interested in dance studies and some have a theatre background, but just fitting to the nature of performance studies, there are a lot of different backgrounds and a lot of the people are “in between” areas of study. The one thing that they shared was their connection to *Performance Studies* at Tisch.

³¹ I have not come across another word in the field that could serve the explanation better. If there is no such word, it may be a gap. I have come across two complexities in using *punctum* in performance: The first is the kinesis of the image, in that it is a moving image as opposed to the stillness of images in a photograph. The second is the scale, the size of the images, in performance we interact with larger images, as opposed to photographs that are often smaller.

³² Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 179.

one between the verbal text and the visual image? ... can we theorize translation between cultures without somehow valorizing some "original"?³³

I consider the conversations regarding the interpretation of the performance by the spectators an act of translation. I tried to keep Chow's question in mind while narrating the translations, the responses of the spectators even though I did at certain times reflect upon the intentions of the creator of the performance to make certain points.

For Karina³⁴, the first *punctum* was the image of the few rubber bands blocking Kaplan's mouth. Karina explained that slaves in Puerto Rico were muzzled. For her, the main questions in the piece were "who has control of the body?" She thought it was a piece rooted in *slavery*. One *studium* in *Solum* is Kaplan cutting the rubber bands he put around his face. The *punctum* in this scene for Karina, were the marks that remained on his face. They reminded her of the scars of the power inflicted on this person.

The slave imagery Karina had on her mind are people wearing muzzles, with strings attached to their necks. She says slaves were taken like that when they were sold. I ask when she got exposed to such images of history in Puerto Rico, she says "since elementary school, there is always history of slavery." She does not have anyone in her family who has an image of that. It is a collective history. There is no concrete personal familiarity to those images for her. On the other hand, Karina's grandmother is of African origin. She says:

My grandmother worked in a coffee plantation from 5 am to 6 pm, and they paid them 25 cents, for a whole week of working. There is a relationship. I relate that hard labor with the muzzle obviously. And that is directly related to my family history and you could say Puerto Rican history as well.

Karina presents the personal memory she acquired from the stories of her grandmother, and connects it with her cultural memory of slavery in Puerto Rico. Her words remind me of the following quote from Adam Frank's book *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man*. Frank quotes from Flores:

Because cultural memory imbues narratives with meaning, they are also involved in the formation of identities. As narrative resources, cultural memory emerges as objects of memory (that) are shared, further enhancing their utility as identity markers and makers.³⁵

I wonder if there is a link that can be made between Flores' statement and what José B. Capino, in an essay considering spectatorship in cinema studies, invoking film theorist Judith Mayne, writes about spectatorship:

... [it] is not only the act of watching film" or "just the relationship that occurs between the viewer and the screen, but also and especially how that relationship lives on once the spectator leaves the theater." A consideration of spectatorial practices at all-male adult theaters requires adding to Mayne's definition the idea that what happens inside the theater

³³ Chow, 192.

³⁴ Karina Claudio-Betancourt was a Masters student in the Performance Studies program. She is from Puerto Rico. She has traveled to several countries in Latin America.

³⁵ Adam Frank, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man: Understanding Identity Through Martial Arts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 186.

before, during, and after the film is equally important.³⁶

What I am trying to argue supported by the above statements is that what we see in the images we look at in a performance is not independent of who we are, and who we are is very much composed of our cultural memory as well as the moments contained in the time that exists from birth to right before, during and even after the performance. Similarly, who we are is not independent of the images we look at; our reactions to the images in performance change who we become. Like the time we spend looking at them, the images also become part of our past, our memory, our experience.

Myrton,³⁷ like Karina, adds to the discussion of cultural memory and identity. He saw a lot of images of Native American practices throughout *Solum*, especially dances; it seems like a lot of the images he relates to are gestures that are performances of *manhood*. In *Solum*, a few times there were two chains of rubber bands hanging from the arm and the neck. He says, in the *Sun Dance* and the *Ghost Dance*, two chains were fastened to two points on the chest, and the person is suspended from them. The idea is that self-inflicted pain will bring spiritual enlightenment. Such *rites of passage* are not unique to Native American cultures. Kaplan is not in such extreme pain when pulling the strings away from his body. However, for Myrton, that is where the *punctum* lies. He says “That theme was continuous throughout the performance for me.” Myrton’s both involved and invested in, yet also alienated and distanced from the Native American practices. This reminds me of Deborah Kapchan’s statement on cultural memory. She writes:

Cultural memories live in the body as presence... we are also always involved in the coming to terms with cultural identity, the codification and objectification not only of other cultures, but of our own.³⁸

Can performance spectatorship be another place for coming to terms with cultural identity? By accepting the failure in everyone finding out the meaning inserted by its author in a performance, and looking for the meaning in a “writerly” manner, spectators become involved in a process of understanding their identity.

Myrton’s most interesting comment was: “The connection to Christ was so prevalent throughout the performance.” He saw images of Christ and the cruciform when Kaplan was upside down or when he had his arms to the side. Kaplan is not Christian and he has always lived in a predominantly non-Christian culture, and although he surely has been exposed to images of Christ, this does not carry much symbolism in his environment. Myrton’s mother, grandmother, and great grandmother on the other hand went through the assimilating boarding schools, and they identify as Christians. Even though at several points he saw a connection to the Indian spiritual beliefs, Myrton does not talk much about it. He says “people don’t want to admit it’s wiped out they want to rebuild it, but it is a lost cause, as is the language. If you don’t have the people to speak it, same with religious beliefs ... A lot of elders are stopping

³⁶ José B. Capino, “Homologies of Space: Text and Spectatorship in All-Male Adult Theaters,” *Cinema Journal* 45/1 (October 1, 2005): 50.

³⁷ Myrton Running-Wolf was also a Masters student in *Performance Studies*. Myrton is Native American. He does performance work related to such themes. He is extremely well-informed in Native American history and certain artistic and ritualistic practices.

³⁸ Deborah Kapchan, “Possessing Gnawa Culture, Displaying Sound, Creating History in an Unofficial Museum,” *Journal of Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean* 7 (2003).

teaching gestures to the grandchildren because they lost their connection.” On the other hand, brutal memories seem to be much fresher in Myrton’s memory. When Kaplan was holding the extended rubber band that looked like a cord, and he tilted his head to the side, Myrton thought of how Native Americans were lynched.

For Marcos³⁹, the main theme in the piece is *self-restriction*. He thinks there is a lot of *empathy* with people who are being restricted by something else that is not self-restricting; there is the idea of control all the time. He sees the physical suffering as restriction. He thinks Kaplan being leashed and mutilating his body are more symbolic manifestations of being restricted by something else, enslavement in a figurative sense. However, Marcos points out that it is very clear Kaplan does that; he ties himself to something and comes back. He can do that, whenever he wants. He can break the rubber bands whenever he wants. He thinks of self-inflicted pain also, but he says he relates it to something else. He sees it as an experiment: “How much can a man stand? So seriously... never funny, never posing. Everyone played with rubber bands... using rubber bands to hurt someone, on yourself, around your finger thinking how many rubber bands can I put on, before it starts hurting?” That tension he connects to this tradition of self-inflicted pain “like in a ‘Jackass’ tradition”, he comments. He also was reminded a lot of the Native Americans from Brazil:

There is a certain relationship we have with them. They use these huge ornamentations that will enlarge the mouth or the ear... or spikes that go through their cheek and eyes... Why do they do that? It hurts so bad... one thing is like painting your skin, the impression is that it hurts all the time, of course it doesn’t. It looks like it’s always hurting. I was like, why are you doing it to yourself?

When I ask him if he ever asked them, Marcos says he read a lot of interviews, and that they always say it’s ornamentation. Another *punctum* for him is the hood Kaplan puts on. He says he read a lot of graphic novels: “the image of this guy wearing the hood and this deformed face ... beams coming out of the hood... I saw this so much.”

When Kaplan put the bands all over his face, Areum⁴⁰ immediately saw this as someone suppressed or oppressed by society. For her, the *punctum* was the moment when he tied the rubber bands to his legs. She thought that he cannot break off the boundary, that he cannot control any part of his circumstances. The lines that remained on his face were another *punctum*. They showed her that this person was “caged in.” She also saw how his environment takes part in his life:

When he finally freed himself from rubber bands... there is this Korean saying- you can’t control everything in your life, environment takes part in your life. And the remnants of the rubber bands reminded me, he got rid of them, but they are still in his

³⁹ Marcos Steuernagel is a PhD. student from Brazil. He interprets the piece very differently from both Karina and Myrton. He also sees images of slavery but he does not focus on it in the same way. Marcos is familiar with the work of European dance artists like Xavier Leroy and Jerome Bel. For him Kaplan’s piece is of that tradition. He sees it as a very European/American conceptual performance art. He grew up in a very Western culture, between the ages of 3-7 he lived in Chicago, otherwise in a big city in Brazil. According to him, his was a pretty American culture, like in the big cities in Brazil, but his mother is from the North East and there “it is very different,” he says. I ask him if he would define it as *individualistic*, he concurs.

⁴⁰ Areum Jeong was a student in the Masters program too. She is from Seoul, Korea. She was born there but then lived in New Jersey from ages two to seven. She went to a women’s university and got her degree in English Literature. She brought up oppression against women and lack of feminist scholarship in Korea.

face. ...When he puts on the rubber bands, he transforms into something totally different.

She talks about Korean masks that have rough textures; they show exaggerations of grief, pain. Areum explains that mask dances are very political, that they are used to expose the bad deeds of people in administrative positions like governors. "When Kaplan put the rubber bands on his face it reminded me of the exaggerated grimace."

Another *punctum* were his arms that were spread on the ground. That reminded Areum of the traditional beating position in Korea:

When they punish someone, and this would be a public punishment, the person would lie across the ground, his arms spread across, legs put together and they would beat him. This is the typical beating position, think of the Christ position face down... and they are beating on top of your back or your hips.

Areum says she got a very political sense of someone being caught in a system or society and trying to free themselves. She remarks that even after he cut the bands, she could not see a complete liberation, that it was an attempt to liberate himself. I ask her what kind of a society Korean society is for the women. She replies that on the façade it is very Americanized, but that it is still very conservative: "women are still regarded as people who must do the cooking, kitchen work and everything ... in the countryside gender discrimination is much worse."

Niki⁴¹ responds immediately to Areum. Regarding when Areum said she did not feel the sense of liberation after Kaplan cut the rubber bands, Niki says she felt totally the opposite. Her *punctum*, the moment after he cut the bands, was a complete liberation. She mentioned that when Kaplan's nose got disfigured because of the rubber bands, she thought of Greco Roman statues with a bump in their nose. This also reminded her of images of a jail. She thought of Guantanamo Bay. She says there "people led people with masks on their faces." For Mica⁴², another European American, the *punctum* was the moment of total distortion in Kaplan's face. She thought it looked like a disease, like smallpox. Mica says her Spanish mother always told her of how this disease used to leave scars on people.

Ralph⁴³ said that, as soon as he saw Kaplan putting the rubber strings around his face, he remembered that this was something he did with his friends as a child. Perhaps

⁴¹ Niki was also a Master's student in Performance Studies. She is a Greek-American. She says there were parts of her life when she felt Greek and then she would feel American until she finally accepted her identity as Greek American. She is a thirty-one year-old gay woman, yet she only came out a few years ago. I ask her whether there are huge differences between the Greek community here as opposed to the big city life in Greece. She says there is a huge difference, that the Greek-American society here is very conservative. She gets very surprised when she goes to Greece and sees the gay movement there. According to her, the Greeks who moved here did not open up, and preserved the mentality they had decades ago.

⁴² Anne Michele Goldin, (Mica) is half Spanish, half American. She is a Spanish dancer. She has lived both in Spain and in the US. She was a Master's student in Performance Studies.

⁴³ Ralph Fischer is from Germany. He is studying Theatre in Vienna, Austria. His dissertation is on walking. He was a visiting scholar at Tisch's Performance Studies. Nadezhda Savova (Nadia), is a doctoral student in the Anthropology Department at Princeton University. She was taking classes in Performance Studies at Tisch through the consortium. She is from Bulgaria and has been in the United States for six years. The third person from Europe, Julie Perrin from Paris, has a Ph.D. in Dance Studies. She was also a visiting scholar in the Performance Studies program.

Ralph has discovered the *studium*, since in the text of *Solum*, which he put together much later than the production, Mustafa Kaplan writes:

When I was a kid, I used to find small shiny stones and swallow them. I don't remember when I stopped doing this. A friend of mine had tried to circumcise himself with a pair of pliers. I also remember that I tried to lick the lime off the newly painted walls ... as a group, we would stuff our noses with grass, and try to make it bleed... I don't know why we played all these games on the body...I guess it was more about playing, discovering and curiosity than about making it hurt...⁴⁴

Julie and Nadia agreed they played such games with rubber bands, and ropes. Embodying others' emotions produces emotions in us, even if the situation is an imagined or fictitious one.⁴⁵ Although Kaplan did not perform any pain with facial expressions or sounds, almost everyone seeing the piece commented on how much pain he must have had. They had, however, different connections to how this performance of pain pricked them.

Nadia has been profoundly affected by the part when Kaplan creates an instrument with the bands and sings with his disfigured mouth. "Most striking ... will never forget his mouth and still singing. I was imagining tortured people," she says. She is deeply impressed. I inquire as to whether she witnessed much during the Balkan wars. She has not; she only heard stories of nearby Kosovo. Suddenly she says, "But I thought more of Latin America, uh now I remember, not the Balkans, in Chile, I had an experience with a woman that survived torture and she had this scar from here to here (*shows her mouth*)." The woman Nadia remembers is an artist.

Julie, the dance scholar, is the only one who theorizes on the intentions of Kaplan in building the piece. It is evident that she has trained herself to think in this way. She looks for the intention of the artist. During a separate discussion, she tells me that she does not think there can be numerous meanings for the piece. She is perhaps not allowing herself to see the *punctum*. It seems she speaks from a higher place, that she can speak the language of conceptual art Kaplan uses. This place that is objective, according to her, is very subjective, because the meaning present for Kaplan in the piece is also subjective (indeed her interpretation of the piece does not match Kaplan's). *Studium* is identified with learning, training, analysis. Julie's training tells her to stay within the limits of the *studium*. The *punctum* pricks suddenly, it rebels against theory, it rebels against whole areas of training. It is the element that personalizes the image. In the absence of the *punctum*, images do not become as memorable.

Victor Burgin suggests each photograph signifies on the basis of a plurality of heterogeneous codes. Some of these codes, such as the "kinesic" codes of bodily gesture are not all peculiar to photography – so they can be applied to performance.⁴⁶ Burgin writes, "the question of meaning therefore is constantly to be referred to the social and psychic formations of the author/reader."⁴⁷ When people look at an image in performance (whether they see it within a frame or not) they are not independent of their own history, experience, belief systems, struggles, cultural backgrounds and

⁴⁴ Mustafa Kaplan, *Solum* in Serap Erincin, ed., *Solum and Other Plays from Turkey* (New York: Seagull Books, 2011).

⁴⁵ Bruce A. McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies," *Theatre Journal* 59/4 (2007): 563.

⁴⁶ His statement was what encouraged me to apply Barthes' vocabulary to kinesic images.

⁴⁷ Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), 143-144.

intellectual and philosophical inclinations. *Objectivity* loses meaning here, as it would mean people's interpretations would get infected with no previous opinion or judgment. This seems impossible. Humans tend to give meaning to what they see. This meaning is highly conditioned by everything they learned before. Such knowledge may have been acquired through experience, or exposure to the teachings of a culture or society at large. As the spectators' responses to *Solum* demonstrate, humans respond differently to events. We need to be able to understand, accept and build tolerance for these differences. In *Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation*, Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that "the performing arts have this special quality; that the works they deal with are explicitly left open to such re-creation and thus visibly hold the identity and continuity of the work of art open towards its future."⁴⁸ Perhaps it is possible to read Gadamer's statement with spectatorship in mind, and think that each performance is simultaneously multi-translated every time it is performed within the microcosmos of each spectator.

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Dansul în traducere: subiectivitate, ratarea audienței și toleranță

Conceptul de *punctum* al lui Roland Barthes ne ajută în această analiză a spectatorului transcultural în *Solum*, într-un spectacol al lui Mustafa Kaplan. Serii de *puncta* stimulează interpretările spectatorilor în spectacole live sau mediatizate unde înțelesul este adesea stratificat prin vizual. Aceste *puncta* scot la suprafață momente din memoria sau conștiința culturală a spectatorilor. Un spectacol „cult” – cum l-ar numi Barthes – precum *Solum*, îi cere spectatorului să multiplice înțelesurile inerente, într-un proces constant de producție- sau reproducere- în care de fiecare dată spectacolul se întâlnește cu spectatorul. Spectatorii, acceptându-și incapacitatea de a recunoaște înțelesurile creatorului spectacolului, se angajează într-un proiect al subiectivității, și își revelează propria identitate culturală în timpul procesului traducerii. Înțelegerea procesului traducerii greșite cultivă toleranța.