

koosil-ja
in conversation with Michael Portnoy via SkypeText

koosil-ja: Hello Michael!

Michael Portnoy: Hello! How are you?

koosil-ja: I am feeling okay. Downtown LA, Saturday, very quiet. Still fatigued from last night's show, but feeling content. And beautifully sunny here.

Michael: What is the show you're doing there?

koosil-ja: The Wooster Group's North Atlantic presented at REDCAT.

Michael: Ah, nice

koosil-ja: Yeah it takes my whole being. It's fun and feels good to work in it.

Michael: So! Let's talk about your upcoming show in NY.

koosil-ja: Delighted.

Michael: What are you wearing in it?

koosil-ja: Do you mean costume-wise or is this a metaphor?

Michael: Ha ha, let's start with the costume.

koosil-ja: I am working with three dancers: Melissa Guerrero, Elise Knudson, and Ava Heller. They all wear black running pants, those tight fitted ones. And black tops.

Michael: Ok, and why are they on the stage?

koosil-ja: They are on stage to create movement (image) and also data to explore the realm of the body and the function of image. To create a networked body.

Michael: What is the piece about exactly?

koosil-ja: It is about researching movement and visible and invisible aspects of body and developing digital media specific to the result of that research while studying Gilles Deleuze's philosophy.

Michael: What questions were you asking yourself during the production of this piece?

koosil-ja: I want to make sure that what I am working on in this project is clear to the audience. For this reason and also my own interest, my work itself is a process: The stage becomes a laboratory. But this doesn't mean that the work is not finished. It means that we create the work on stage each time we perform and show to the audience the sources and tools with which we create the work and how we use them.

Michael: What are you exploring in this piece?

koosil-ja: I have to repeat this. I am exploring researching movement and visible and invisible

aspects of body and developing digital media specific to the result of that research while studying Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. We use Live Processing, a performance technique and video system to create movements unique each time the dancer practices. I create a networked flow and body with movement and digital technology.

I approach the performance space in a way to best serve the audience and to expose our process. One of the Chicago audience members wrote to me as followed. It is an excerpt:

The notion of the experiment as a framework for dance / the notion of the performance space as a laboratory is exciting to me; it was particularly useful to see that there was no differentiation between backstage, offstage, onstage, or even really what "front of house" might mean - though we were all facing in a single direction -...

Michael: Tell me about the invisible aspects of the body.

koosil-ja: If reality is measured by image, what do your eyes see and your brain decides to recognize, what do you subtract, in order to recognize one from other. We see body through image and inside the body we hear thoughts and feel emotion. They tell me who I am. But there is a subconscious of the body and there may be "before-subconscious" of the body (that is immanent and which doesn't know who I am because they are not yet "educated" or "trained" or "capitalized") that is ready to become anything you desire. I want to get touch with this body and dance with this body.

Michael: Explain to me technically how Live Processing works.

koosil-ja: With Live Processing in general, dancers see multiple video movement sources and mimic the movements, combining the movements in real time. The dance score is created for each project specifically, however the fundamental rule is always applied, which is to filter-out attributions like narrative and politics and just depict the movement as pure data. The body becomes an open conduit for the information to pass through and the dancer's perception can be reinitiated.

When the dancer's body encounters the bodies in the video sources, the two form a more powerful whole. Sometimes, one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts. Live Processing depoliticizes body and movement. It creates a networked body made of real and virtual. The dancer becomes a pure potential to create new movement, while the realm of body is constantly questioned.

Michael: What was your approach to organizing the video sources?

koosil-ja: I tried to access movement as image of body and they are all equally beautiful. I paid attention to images of the body occurring or existing in close proximity to my everyday life. So there were bodies that were posing to sell products, advertisements, posters in street and at subway stations and in magazines, in the hospitals. I took pictures of them. Then I went on to collect images of bodies in a book of the Louvre's collection. Then videos of traditional dances I rented from the Performing Arts Library or downloaded from Youtube.

I organized them in categories:

- 1) Advertisement
- 2) Collections of paintings (from 13C to 17C) of Louvre
- 3) Traditional dance (around 13C to 16C)
dances from various regions of African, Tibet, Middle East, and India. All dancers have a close relationship with music.
- 4) Advertisement (bodies on the floor)

- 5) Legong Dance (Indonesian)
- 6) Peacock Dance (North Indian Indigenous Dance)
- 7) Vietnam, various bodies
- 8) Three dancers (friends) improvising wearing black mask, top and pants to remove identities.

Michael: And why these particular categories?

koosil-ja: I found that in each category there are unique movements. Advertisement bodies have exaggerated torques and animated hand gestures. Legong Dance has articulated pelvis motion and shoulder movement, intense hands and finger shakes, often bent legs, many small fast steps, and funky joint popping! Peacock has this amazing occasional disengaged drop of weight, long spiral turn, sudden head move and shakes on lifted bent legs. The bodies in the Vietnam images were deformed and often in squat position. They are very particular and technical. For bodies in the painting in the collections of Louvre I paid attention to each composition of body in space and reposition them by mixing with the various traditional dances.

Michael: Can you elaborate on this depoliticization of the body, why this is important?

koosil-ja: It is important on a personal level. For practice, it helps me to open to movement vocabularies and styles which I've never danced before. The dancers escape from being coded by constantly overlapping their body with other bodies in the video sources through practice of Live Processing, while disregarding all the attributions: age, gender, geographic and cultural signifiers.

Michael: A body is on stage performing these movements. A particular body. I'm trying to figure out how one escapes the politics of that body, the significance of a particular body performing movements from other bodies.

koosil-ja: By not staying in one type, category, style, school of movement. By constantly overlapping with other image of body. Escaping from being coded by being mercurial.

Michael: But can one escape the associations of their particular body, their presence, their essence?

koosil-ja: Whose associations? Let me put it this way. Yes, I can escape from anything I want, but I have to keep pokerface. (It is a vicious society out there and I have to play their game.) I can't stop anyone from associating my body image to a particular social coding. But presence and essence have different function. They are a result of subtraction, body without an external image in space. Dance Without Bodies (2006) was very much to explore these degrees of reality: presence, body, and image of real and virtual.

Michael: A monkey is on stage dancing like a deer. It is still a monkey, no?

koosil-ja: Depending on what is monkey to you. It would raise a question of what a monkey really is, after she walks on all fours, barks like a dog, sighs like a human, and continuing with unexpected behaviors. A definition is formed by subtracting one data from other data. Definition of monkey is what is not monkey.

The dancer, Melissa is always Melissa. She is ready to dance anything she wants to recognize in the video sources. Her body gets dense and large, stomping the earth like a primitive being when she overlaps with one particular image, and the next moment she stands in the body of Mona Lisa without the smile. The changes continue throughout the work. What I enjoy the most are these differences of her being and the vivid world of Melissa formed by these differences. And the best part is she is not aware of any of the things she does.

Michael: Are you after a kind of neutral body then as a medium?

koosil-ja: (Some of the readers may feel tiresome to hear this kind of big obnoxious word straight out from a book, but...) I am after Deleuze and Guattari's *Body Without Organs*. I am after an experimentation of uninitiated body (that awaits in the body you know) that is ready to be anything you desire. A potential, before the image. Before society, education, politics. Even before "I" as "self" is detected by radar of your own consciousness.

Michael: Is this idea of the "uninitiated body" related to your idea earlier about the "virtual body"?:

koosil-ja: Yes and Virtual body is just a name I use to call the body without image in space, like thoughts, feelings and so on, that everyone commonly possesses. I use Digital technology to externalize these invisible aspects of the body. Uninitiated body is something of a bad translation of Deleuze & Guattari's *Body Without Organs*. I hope that the dancers will practice BWO (Body Without Organs) through Live Processing. I use "Transcoding" principles for programming to create an interactive function between the dancers and the 3D avatars and environment we built. The dancers wear a Wii remote to control 3D avatars and environments they live in. The musician Geoff Gersh played music live for *Part 1: Movement Research*. For *Part 3: SLUM*, he sits on a chair on stage and meditates. We take his brain wave out and send it to MAX MSP (<http://cycling74.com/> - Max is a visual programming language for music and multimedia developed and maintained by San Francisco-based software company Cycling '74) and give a kinetic function to the sound installation which taps the wall of DTW. This is the only music for *Part 3*.

Michael: Wow! And the audience is watching these avatars on video screens?

koosil-ja: Yes. This is to me the networked body of the dancers, Rob Ramirez's ingenious MAX/Ogre (3D engine) programming, and the image of the bodies in the 3D world. The dancers dance while Live Processing the same video source from *Part 1*.

Michael: What is this 3D world like? Did you want it to escape signification too?

koosil-ja: I used clichés of our society to build the 3D world. My 3D creator team built a slum, and three avatars who live in Slum: Desire who is a dancer never leaves her room, Hack, orphan thief/Robin Hood, lives in the basement of Slum, and Strata, an old man lives in the streets of Slum. So I built the clichés to be on the same page with the audience, then I mess with them for a good cause. We separate out the elements of construction of the signifiers.

Michael: So this virtual world constructs a kind of abstract narrative then?

koosil-ja: Yes and no. Clichés are made of a bunch of codes, because of the Real Time interactive operation of the 3D engine, and I am not using 3D technique to build a perfect copy of the reality but to pay attention to the codings of the reality, the visual elements of the 3D are made crude and codified, in order to reduce the size of the file, so that the performance of the 3D engine would be smooth. Sometime it is just an indication of what it is. Finally to answer your question, there are enough clues left to the audience to form a narrative, if and when they would be needed. But for us, each scene and event is built for experiment: connecting the dancers body with the avatar's bodies through their movement using digital technology. The liner progression puts the experiment in a timetable of a performance flow. The goal of *Part 3* is to create networked bodies and world.

I want to mention about the Music for *Part 1*. Please read the text below written by the composer, Geoff Matters.

Following the themes of "processing" used in creating the movement, Geoff Matters composed

the music by applying various processes to the same source material. In particular, the traditional dances used during most of the show were originally performed to traditional music. Geoff took the original soundtrack from each traditional dance clip and used software to create new soundtracks. Some parts were filtered and mangled, other parts were analyzed and reconstructed. This allowed us to precisely retain rhythmic, melodic, and tonal elements of the original while replacing the traditional instrumentations and palettes with contemporary ones. I then mixed in other audio elements and further processed some things in the video editing timeline. Some parts of the music were studied and are painstakingly recreated live by Geoff Gersh, while accompanying parts are pre-recorded.

By creating the music in this way, it is neither a random juxtaposition nor a heavy-handed accompaniment. There is a tight relationship between elements of the music and elements of the movement, but the modified instrumentation and nature of movement mixing when Live Processing abstracts things. As with the movement, attributions (politics, history, prejudice, etc.) are removed.

Index:

Blocks of Continuity/Body, Image, and Algorithm consists of three parts.

Part 1: Movement Research

Part 2: Technical Break and Calibration

Part 3: Slum (Networked bodies and world)

A list of video sources for Part 1

Dance 1 Solo: footage from a movie "Worth By Chance" by Su-Yeon Gu

Dance 2 Solo: Legong, Peacock, and Advertisement

Dance 3 Trio: Steel photos of paintings from Louvre collections (13C to 17C), Traditional Dances (Africa, Tibet, Middle East, India,

Dance 4 Duet: Legong and Advertisement A

Dance 5 Trio: Vietnam and Advertisement B Advertisement (bodies on the floor)

Dance 6 Solo: Three dancers improvising wearing black mask, top and pants