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# Reading *Human Sex*

## The Challenges of a Feminist Identity through Time and Space

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**ABSTRACT** This article charts the feminist perspectives that have come out of the author's thinking on the dance performance text *Human Sex* and how this has informed her own feminism. In doing so, the author argues that a feminist agenda is shifting and dynamic but also reliant upon prior readings and interpretations that provide the point of reference for a departure to other readings and perspectives. Using autobiographical material, the author highlights the importance of considering the personal histories of subject-hood that influence a feminist consciousness and how these are the condition of possibility for making other readings. To demonstrate the shifting character of identity over time, she engages in different readings of *Human Sex* through the work of feminist theorists Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan.

**KEY WORDS** feminist identity ♦ figure fetishism ♦ gender performativity ♦ performance and memorialization ♦ politics of reading

*Human Sex* was the breakthrough piece for the French-Canadian choreographer Édouard Lock and his company La La La Human Steps. Choreographed in 1985, it garnered widespread attention for the company and marked La La La Human Steps' entrance into the international dance scene. Lock's choreographic and scenographic aesthetic was heralded as violent and oppositional and gave the company a reputation as radical dance revisionists.<sup>1</sup> Lock focused much of his choreographic attention on Louise Lecavalier, a dancer in his company. Lecavalier, whose appearance was muscularly androgynous and whose dancing was explosively risky, contributed to the revolutionary and cutting-edge feel of *Human Sex* at the time of its premiere. As the title of Lock's work suggests, the theme of this work was about the often unfulfilled character of sexual relationships between men and women.

I first saw *Human Sex* performed in 1986 and I continue to be troubled

by it, for three reasons. The first is the strong yet ambivalent identifications I have with the dancer Louise Lecavalier, who continued to figure prominently in Lock's work until her retirement in 2000. The second reason has to do with the troubling aspects of forgetting. The dynamics of forgetting are particularly poignant because during videotape viewing of *Human Sex* in 2000, a second female dancer, Carole Courtois, entered onto the televisual screen. I had completely forgotten her and this challenged my seemingly lucid memory that Lecavalier was the only female performer in that long past dance performance. The third reason combines the dynamics of the first two to interrogate my own investment in *Human Sex* as a feminist text. How is it possible to find, over the course of several years and several contradictory readings, a feminist identification in this work; both acknowledging the contribution of dancer Lecavalier while at the same time understanding the dynamics of memory that exclude her colleague Courtois from being remembered.

I do not propose to solve this problem. Rather, I suggest that having a text that one is haunted by is a useful barometer for understanding the multi-layered, complex and conflicting identification that negotiating a feminist consciousness might engender. To illustrate the dynamics of this disharmony I follow a trajectory of readings that I have made of *Human Sex*, beginning with an autobiographical revisiting of my first experiences viewing the performance live, to a reading of this experience through the lens of Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity and finally return, full circle, to debate the memorial effects of the initial live performance. Here I engage with Peggy Phelan's (1993, 1997) ontology of performance and its implication for feminist agendas. As a method to demonstrate how identity is never a finished or infallible project, I have inserted autobiographical accounts that contextualize the shifting locations and associations with these theorists and my understanding of the gendered effect of *Human Sex*. It is through these autobiographical moments that I suggest an understanding of identity as haunted.

My intention with this 'narrative' is not to arrive at a more enlightened feminist position or make a more 'correct' reading. Instead I suggest that these multiple readings illustrate the ongoing contingent character of a feminist identity and articulate a continuous development and commitment to feminism. I argue that readings are neither 'good' nor 'bad' but are made in relation to the person that we are at a particular point in time – a person whose processes of identification are immersed in the contexts of specific locations and specific human interactions. For example, while first encountered in a Canadian context, my continued theorizing about *Human Sex* is influenced by my placement within a European feminist and performance tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, I suggest that an effect of having made prior readings is that these readings never finally leave us. They haunt us, while at the same

time providing the conditions of possibility to make other readings. It is this troubling that allows me to be faithful to the readings that have frequented my continued encounter with the performance text *Human Sex* and the theorizing this performance continues to engender. In this manner, I want my account to be read as a kind of hybrid text, both detective story and ghost story, as my transatlantic feminist subjectivity roams restlessly through *Human Sex*.

#### THE TROUBLE WITH LOUISE LECAVALIER

The time I first saw *Human Sex* performed, I was a full-time dance training student at a community college in Edmonton, the largest city in the province of Alberta, Canada. I was living in the downtown core of Edmonton after spending my teens in a semi-rural setting 20 km outside the city. While Alberta's economic base is largely agricultural, the discovery of oil about 60 years ago elevated its economic position in comparison to the rest of Canada. The city of Edmonton has a population of approximately 1 million people. Yet on the whole, Alberta is predominantly rural. These factors contributed to Edmonton's provincial and conservative atmosphere. Yet at the time, I felt I was living in an artistic and cosmopolitan bohemia. Indeed, the counter-culture feel of my lifestyle was enhanced by its contrast to the semi-rural setting I was brought up in. It was therefore a momentous event when companies touring from Montreal or Vancouver came to perform. These dance performances carried great significance for me because of what I perceived as their exoticism and sophistication. This was the case when La La La Human Steps, a French-Canadian company based in Montreal, stopped in Edmonton to perform for two nights only.

One of the company members, Louise Lecavalier was particularly inspiring and fascinating. Lecavalier was a mercurial and aggressive moving figure. This impression was compounded by a seemingly irreverent disregard for her own physical well-being, giving her a kind of macho bravado as she proceeded from one physically punishing movement to the next. Her signature move featured propelling her body into the air in a horizontal spin. The spin was repeated throughout the work, yet her descent was broken in several alternative ways, some appearing more dangerous and rash than others. For example, she launched her body into the arms of several dancers, or, more extremely, shot her body into a dancer who correspondingly fell to the floor as the force of her body hit theirs. At the most extreme, she launched into the air at full velocity, travelled a few feet in the horizontal spin and fell prone to the floor breaking her own fall. Choreographic action resumed from these feats immediately as if these astounding horizontal leaps were insignificant.

Lecavalier's representational impact was further influenced by an unconventional appearance for a dancer. Negotiating this bravado athleticism was Lecavalier's diminutive size that exhibited a defined musculature. She was petite and her body was 'boyish'. Even in contemporary dancerly body aesthetics that defines femininity as being thin and almost androgynous, Lecavalier stood out as gender-transitive. She had narrow hips and prepubescent breasts that typified the female ballerina-type, but the muscularity of her body was highlighted, casting more established representational conventions of signifying female dancers into confusion.

The confusion in reading Lecavalier's gender was further complicated by the sartorial and cosmetic choices that contributed to her stage persona. Markers of femininity such as her long, bleached blond and dread-locked hair served to define her as female. She was dressed in tight fitting elasticized trousers and a partially see-through bustier halter-top. While this dress did not immediately denote a manifest 'feminine' or 'masculine' impression, the 'femininity' of her dress was inferred by her difference to the male characters of the piece, who were depicted in more masculine suit-like attire. These masculine partners were most often represented in suits of various shades of black and Lecavalier was set apart by the intensity of her white shoulders, face and white blond hair. Yet signifiers of masculinity were also at play in Lecavalier's representation. She exhibited a blond moustache. The colour of this moustache suggested that it could be Lecavalier's own and not a cosmetic addition. The apparent 'realness' of the moustache continued the play around Lecavalier's gender identity. Additionally, a troubling of gender was suggested by the meeting of Lecavalier's 'clothing' and her 'body'. Here a female drag aesthetic came into play as the femininity signified by the bustier top she wore was parodied and stressed as artificial. Her muscular upper body was emphasized and she seemed not to have any 'breasts' for the top to hold up.

The confusion that surrounds Lecavalier's gender performance suggests instability in the category of gender. If gender is fixed and pre-given why would there be a need to have to negotiate Lecavalier's gender identity at all? This troubling of the category of gender has another effect; it gestures to the profoundly important structuring convention that gender has for determining a knowable identity and reality. Raising the debate about Lecavalier's gender is not only about the troubling of categories, but it also makes apparent the taken-for-granted relationship between appearance and reality. It questions the very assumption that seeing is believing. Lecavalier, as Butler (1988) in her essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution' argues about transvestitism, 'can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity'

(Butler, 1988: 527). Here the lack of definitive masculine or feminine gender characteristics in Lecavalier's performance troubles our notions of a gendered 'real'. And in provoking a questioning of the gendered real, Lecavalier's representational effect might provoke a questioning of the character of the 'real' itself.

The possibility of Lecavalier's representation subverting gender norms made her an important representative of feminism for me. A gender transgressive figure was not confined to the constricting definitions of femaleness. At the time I began to engage with the work of Butler, I was an undergraduate doing a dance degree at a Canadian university. Coming to consciousness as a feminist in a dance setting involved seeing the inequitable relations of gendered power that circulate in this environment. While women overwhelmingly populate dance, women do not hold power in dance. As the manifesto-like provocation by Christy Adair, Valerie Briginshaw and Kay Lynn in the *Dance Theatre Journal* in 1989 suggests, 'a high percentage of women in dance is not a prerequisite for domination' (Adair et al., 1989: 28). As I became increasingly aware, more often than not it was men who received advancement and held positions of power in dance.<sup>3</sup>

It is not within the bounds of the argument to theorize fully gender inequity in dance. I introduce it here as a means to show the dynamics that were influencing my burgeoning interest in feminism. With Butler's theory of performativity I was able to conceptualize the powerful role that sociality and history played in shaping gendered inequity. Lecavalier's performance highlighted the role acculturation played in determining a gender because she failed to fit into an easily recognizable gender identity or, in Butler's terminology, performance. If gender is a performance, and Lecavalier certainly demonstrated a different, potentially new type of gendered performance, then gender is not fixed or determined but open to new performances. Lecavalier was a figure of liberation because she opened the possibility of new types of gendered performances that challenged the bounds of female dancerly identity.

Yet as I continued to think about the gender effects that Lecavalier produced, I became troubled by the apparent popularity of La La La Human Steps and the normative responses to Lecavalier's performance. Lecavalier's representation questioned gender norms, but widespread acceptance of La La La Human Steps' work on an international scale indicated that the gendered message of the work was still prescriptive of accepted modes of gendered being. Their success suggested that the persona that Lecavalier presented was also quite acceptable, employing already embedded notions about gender and reality. An established notion about gender and reality to consider is that the 'reality' of the stage can normalize the gender-transitive figure. As Butler points out in her work on drag performance noted earlier in this article, 'the sight of a

transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence' (Butler, 1988: 527). The stage, with its suspension of reality, allows for the fantastical to be a source of pleasure and entertainment rather than fear and anxiety. The site of Lecavalier's gender transgression is far more pleasurable given its theatrical context.

How Lecavalier's performance might read is also influenced by normative elements in the movement she performs. The movement that Lecavalier performs attests to an incredibly strong physique, suggesting a far more masculine appearance and bodily ability. Yet the force she uses to perform these feats suggests weightlessness and lack of direction, undermining the appearance of strength and bodily command. Ann Cooper Albright (1997) picks up this representational contradiction in her theorizing of Lecavalier. She argues that Lecavalier presents an ambivalent figure in relation to gender norms, both querying gender norms because of the appearance of her strength and muscularity, while reinforcing gender standards through movement dynamics used in her performance. Albright turns to the now famous essay 'Throwing Like a Girl' by Iris Marion Young (1990) to theorize Lecavalier's representational effects. In order to understand how movement itself is gendered, Young takes up the gender stereotype of a girl's inability to throw a baseball with force and accuracy. Young theorizes a physical gendered identity as the outcome of physically learned movement patterns that detach the limb's activity from the rest of the body. In other words, gendered subjectivity is enforced through the learned physicality of the body where women and girls learn not to take up space, or use the entire force of their bodies to effect. They learn not to project their physical intentions on to the world.

In relation to Young's theorizing, Albright suggests that Lecavalier's muscular appearance initially indicates an overcoming of this physically gendered feminine state because of the physically powerful movements these muscles produce, allowing Lecavalier the ability to launch herself forcefully into space. Yet, as Albright explains, the movements that are offered up by Lecavalier increasingly reinforce the gendered physicality associated with 'throwing like a girl'. As Albright aptly puts it, Lecavalier 'lets go of spatial intention in her movement, her dancing can take on a brutal, almost masochistic quality . . . she seems to be just throwing her body up in the air, not particularly caring where it lands' (Albright, 1997: 49). Here, while Lecavalier's appearance as physically strong and forceful gives the impression of a gender-transitive character, it is the force dynamics in her movement that reassimilate and return her transgression to normative understandings of female physicality.

Moreover, choreographer Édouard Lock chooses Lecavalier's body as the primary representational agent of this violent and transgressive aesthetic. It is Lecavalier who performs over and over again the horizontal turning

mid-air leap. It is this move that immediately identifies both Lecavalier and the company. As Scottish dance critic Christopher Bowen notes, La La La Human Steps is 'a Quebecois company renowned for the gravity-defying horizontal pirouettes of its star dancer Louise Lecavalier' (Bowen, 1998: 21). Yet this incessantly recurring move, the signature mark of Lock's company, does not seem to be recognized in terms of the violence it does to the body of Lecavalier. The inability to read the violence done to Lecavalier's body in Lock's aesthetic reminds me of Sara Ahmed's (1998) comment about the implications of postmodern aesthetics. In the context of Peter Greenaway's film *Baby of Macon* (1993) and various readings of this film, Ahmed highlights the problematic link between the postmodern aesthetic of transgression and its foreclosure of responsibility to the representational means it uses to communicate this aesthetic. Ahmed theorizes that the violence done to the female character in the form of a brutal rape is made invisible in critically affirmative readings of this film because the rape is decontextualized and 'read' instead as a postmodern aesthetic of transgression. The invisibility of the rape as rape forecloses any analysis of its potential for reinforcing dominant cultural ideologies, such as violence against women. As Ahmed warns, 'the non-seeing of the violence becomes constitutive of postmodernism . . . violence is not seen precisely because of the way in which postmodernism is seen through the assumption of transgression' (Ahmed, 1998: 189). Using Ahmed's example, the focus of transgression, allows the violence in Lock's choreography itself to lose materiality. It becomes a ghost not seen by the viewer. The violence inflicted upon the body of Lecavalier is both symbolically and literally erased. Thus transgression becomes the conduit to this aesthetic and serves to erase how the aesthetic is constituted through and by a violence acted upon women, upon the body of Lecavalier.

Another concern was raised for me when I returned to review the entirety of *Human Sex* on video. In the winter of 2000, I received a video tape of *Human Sex* from a friend in Edmonton. The video was of a 1990 copyrighted performance of *Human Sex* filmed during a live performance. It was an otherworldly experience for me because I had not seen this material in its entirety since the initial live performance. Instead of viewing the performance with a context of transgression amid 600 other spectators, I had recently moved to the northwest of England to begin doctoral study and was sitting alone. I was surprised to find that there were crucial elements that I had not remembered. This performance was violent. Gender differences and inequalities appeared to be reinforced rather than questioned. The work now seemed dated and nihilistic. The viewing left me feeling empty in the face of my memory of the initial viewing, which I remembered as having been all but these things. Even more important was the appearance of another female performer, Carole Courtois, who not only featured in at least half of the video, but who had

also toured and rehearsed with the company in Lock's initial development of the piece. I had forgotten her. She was gone from my memory of *Human Sex*.

#### MEMORY, PERFORMANCE AND CAROLE COURTOIS

After viewing the video of *Human Sex*, I was troubled by the failure of my memory and concerned by what I feel was my failure to witness correctly. My 'discovery' has thrown up some questions about the problems of witnessing performance and the role of memory. It is this 'discovery' that motivates the second major reading of the feminist implications of *Human Sex* in this article and it does this through a discussion of the effects of forgetting within the dynamics of performance. What I am concerned to discuss, introduced earlier through Ahmed's work, is the dynamics of 'non-seeing', particularly in regard to its relationship with memory. These dynamics, I suggest, lie in understanding the way that Lecavalier is produced as a signifying force. I use recent theorizing both on the role of memory in performance and a discussion of figure fetishism. In bringing these two areas together I want to think about why it was that I failed to remember the dancer Carole Courtois. This failure to remember might be specific to me, yet people I have questioned who saw *Human Sex* in La La La's 1985–6 tour also failed to remember her. While *Human Sex* is now a relatively obscure piece of dance performance, I suggest there is a pressing need to consider how and why certain performances memorialize some things rather than others. How is it that Lecavalier continues to be remembered and others forgotten? In other words, what bodies are actively forgotten in order that hers might be 'materialized' in memory?

Certainly, a concern about memory and what is remembered is particular to performance as a method of meaning dissemination. Theatrical events have become understood as both singular and fleeting because there is no sufficient likeness that can be generated to represent the experience coherently. While the very same performance may be given the next evening, this performance is a new and distinct experience to the one the night before. While the script or choreography may be the same, the way in which the performers engage with it will change, as will the composition of the audience that comes to see it. If re-experiencing a performance is impossible in the same way as seeing a film over again is, discussing how and what is remembered and the value of this remembering takes on a certain importance. Indeed, recent work in performance theorizing has discussed how to understand the way in which performance has been characterized and the meaning this has generated. Some of this theorizing has negotiated the role of memory and forgetting in positing the significance of performance.

Peggy Phelan (1993) opened up debate on the role of memory in relation to performance. Phelan's project explored the often unexamined psychical effects of performance and how performance structures identity. She argued that identity could not be assumed to be a finished project culminating in a whole sense of self. Rather, identity was continually reworked in its negotiation between the self and an other. Phelan argued for an understanding of identity as a loss rather than a completion: self-knowing and self-understanding are always negotiated in relation to an other. As Phelan poignantly explained:

Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other – which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In this declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being. (Phelan, 1993: 13)

For Phelan, theatrical performance demonstrates the role of identity as loss most effectively and intensely. Phelan suggests that performance disrupts normalized conventions of identity, precisely because the other, in this case the performance, disappears. Performance challenges the viewer's processes of self-knowing because performance fails to generate a copy by which the viewer's identity can continually be assured. Phelan's project is rooted in a political agenda of changing contemporary identity power relations that she sees as restrictive. This motivates her to theorize the transformational potential of identity loss in the non-reproducibility of the performance. The one off status of the theatrical performance disrupts normalized conventions of identity and reproduction, precisely because it makes loss more apparent. Here, the standard forms of identification take place in the way performance can be said to disappear, fade into memory and thus resist and even question standard understandings of reproduction.

Considering Phelan's theorizing of performance in relation to my ongoing engagement with the performance text *Human Sex* brings up some concerns. Courtois's presence on the video tape and her absence from my memory of the live work suggests that some memories endure more than others. What are the implications of this forgetting in the context of Phelan's assertion that theatrical performance should be valorized because it resists reproduction? In order to illustrate the means by which performance troubles the self-being of the subject, Phelan suggests that the status of performance is ontologically non-reproductive. In this she means that performance's 'being' is unstable and resists reproduction because of the rapid rate at which its 'presence' fades. The non-reproducibility of performance, she suggests, is linked to the way in which performance cannot save anything; it does not leave anything

behind to denote that it was present. Because of this non-reproductive status, performances disappear and fade into memory. Yet in relation to *Human Sex*, after the event of the live viewing, I was left with a memory. This memory's significance has sustained my interest for a number of years and as such is a form of reproduction. It is a form of reproduction that I suggest is continually reworked and renegotiated yet what if it was a memory that also perpetuated the forgetting of Courtois?

Several thinkers have engaged with Phelan's work on memory.<sup>4</sup> Philip Auslander's (1999) work on liveness considers Phelan's critique in terms of the dynamics of the juridical. Citing several law cases in which the recounting of memory becomes a privileged site of knowledge production, Auslander demonstrates that memory does indeed have importance and does not avoid regulation. He argues that the status of memory is not acknowledged enough in Phelan's work. As he writes, 'inasmuch as memory is brought into the legal discourse as both a policed site and a mechanism of regulation, Phelan's proposition that memory eludes regulation and control, . . . seems true only of materials stored in memory *and never retrieved* from it' (Auslander, 1999: 154; emphasis in original). Auslander highlights, in contrast to Phelan, that memory does not elude reproduction. Rather, memory has effects on the interpretation of an event. Moreover, the particulars that are remembered are accorded status precisely because they are and can be remembered. What is remembered and what is forgotten have consequences for the importance granted a memory. I suggest that to value the ontological difference of performance as a present that dematerializes or disappears is almost to condone a kind of amnesia of the past and the future. If performance is to be valued because its representational means dematerializes and disappears, this valuation problematically allows for the disappearance of Courtois. It was only in viewing the video tape of *Human Sex* that I can re-encounter her and remember her.

The moment of the performance is unrecoverable but memories of that performance continue. How is it possible to consider the effects of that memory over time? I suggest that the performance, while unrecoverable, cannot be cut off from the conditions that make certain memories possible. While I agree with Phelan's point that that performance prescribes representational situations that cannot be reproduced in the same way as other forms of representation, there needs to be a consideration of the means that allow certain things to be remembered and others to be forgotten. Moreover, the status attached to the circumstances that are remembered and the circumstances that can be allowed to be forgotten also needs consideration.

Sara Ahmed's (2000) work on the figure of 'the stranger' provides an important point of departure for addressing the concerns about memory. While not framed from a specific engagement with the effects of

memorializing performance, Ahmed's theorizing on figure fetishism provides a possible understanding of the dynamics involved in the process of remembering and forgetting. Ahmed demonstrates the means by which fetishization is used to establish western, national identities. What is significant for me in Ahmed's argument is her analysis of how 'the stranger' works as a figure and the implication of this association. For instance, Ahmed's working of Marx's commodity fetishism suggests that a process of fetishization works dually to displace social relations of labour onto an object and to convert fantasy into figure form. Ahmed suggests that the combination of displacement and fantasizing erases the social relations of labour. These invested effects provide a 'cutting off' of figures from the social and material relations of their existence, and the consequent perception that such figures have a 'life of their own' (Ahmed, 2000: 5). This investment in the figure as denoting a life 'cut off' from social production, Ahmed concludes, also cuts the proposed figure off from the histories that determine how it is valued and its labour threshold.

In relation to *Human Sex*, the possible effects of figure fetishism can also be thought to work in shaping what is remembered and what is forgotten. Lecavalier's body and persona is overdetermined by her appearance as strangely gender-transgressive. This overdetermination produces a situation where the meanings associated with her become separated from the material and social dynamics of the performance itself. Here 'Lecavalier', the figure, signifies in excess and externally of the performance. 'She' becomes cut off from the performance. 'She' becomes the performance itself. The process which separates her from the performance also sets her 'figure' on its own, a path that, as Ahmed notes, leads 'her' figure to a semiotic life of her own. The separation of performance contexts and figure depicted produces a disconnection and disassociation from the materiality of the performance.

It is how the fetishized figure itself becomes the performance that then can also be connected to what can be remembered about the performance. The strength of the overdetermination of Lecavalier's body as gender-transitive works to delimit the performance so that the primary memorial process focuses on her as a figure of transgression, eclipsing the memorialization of other characteristics of the performance. The fetish figure comes to stand in for what is and can be remembered of the performance. In this dynamic, the other female dancer, Carole Courtois, is placed beyond the reach of memory. Surprisingly, Lecavalier and Courtois share similar visual characteristics. Courtois is also petite and like Lecavalier departs from standard ideas about dancerly femininity, by appearing extremely muscular, especially in the upper body. In this respect, Courtois could also be interpreted as ambiguously placed in relations to normative gender characteristics. Yet she is shorter than Lecavalier and she wears

more typically feminine make-up than Lecavalier, highlighted by overstated red lips. Courtois is curvier than Lecavalier and the 'feminine' attire she is wearing is not as ironic as Lecavalier's in that she fills out her costume more. Additionally, Courtois is a far less luminous figure as she has dark hair. Informing all this is the fact she does not perform the same kinds of movements that Lecavalier is asked to do. Courtois's characteristics, in comparison to Lecavalier's, may allow her performance to fade and in this forgetting, one performance becomes more important than another.

In arguing for an oppositional visual politics that incites because it actively fails to appear, Phelan notes that 'active disappearance usually requires at least some recognition of what and who is not there to be effective' (Phelan, 1993: 19). What remains is trying to understand the many nameless female dancers populating dance institutions who disappear from the memory because there is a failure to recognize a 'what' and a 'who'. How can Courtois ever be marked if part of her significance is that her representation fades from memory? In this way, what Phelan seems to leave out in her consideration of the disappearance of performance is a further acknowledgement of the 'histories of determination' (Ahmed, 2000: 5) that influence the remembering (and forgetting) of certain gendered performances. The histories of gendered meaning that impinge upon any interpretation make the performance never quite there, never quite as maniacally charged as Phelan suggests. The performance is always somewhere else in the past of other remembered performances. Accordingly, performance is a circulation of representations of representations that are informed by the histories of determination that affect what can be understood as a representation and what cannot, what can be remembered and what cannot. Live performance, while potentially disruptive in its ephemerality, is partially dependent on the histories of determination that structure the possibilities of its representational form and its memorialization.

In considering what might be done about remembering forgotten others, I am not trying to argue for the importance of such technologies as video documentation. Indeed, like Phelan and others,<sup>5</sup> I am deeply suspicious of the cultural force that seeks to fix the 'ontological being' of the performance too strongly within verbal or visual frameworks of understanding. I am also not suggesting that video and the live performance are similar representations of *Human Sex*. Indeed, they are diverging media for the dissemination of danced representations. Their means of representation have different effects. What I am advocating is that we assess more carefully the implications of various representational forms of performance. We need to understand more carefully what such representations allow and do not allow so as to understand the interrelated effects they produce for larger systems of value and status. The way in which

performance is involved in the larger questions of status and value that circulated in social and cultural formations is, for me, clearly and pressingly the 'political' of performance.

## CONCLUSION

In using autobiography I have been concerned about the way it imposes a narrative teleology. My progression through various readings of *Human Sex* might read like a progressive narrative to an ever more enlightened and refined understanding of *Human Sex*. I am critical of this possibility and have used autobiography rather as a means to show the cumulative and discontinuous effects of subjectivity. *Human Sex* continues to trouble me. I continue to identify with Louise Lecavalier's strength and energy while simultaneously recognizing how a mythology around her gender transgressiveness takes on a life of its own.<sup>6</sup> Making a choice is impossible. Identity is unfinished: we do not arrive. It is a process of comparing oneself to others, including one's other previous readings and their investments. I make this evident in the way my readings of *Human Sex* have changed over time.

In closing, I suggest that my conversations with *Human Sex* open the possibility of a ghostly encounter with identity and memory. This is an encounter that does not presume the integrity of the subject through its affirmation of a definitive reading position or definitive process of memorialization. Rather, it suggests that reading positions are ever only partial and open to rearticulation and transformation. Therefore, my story of *Human Sex* is a story that is not yet finished. Indeed, it is a story that may have no 'end'.

## NOTES

1. A review in *Ballett International* of La La La's performance at the Holland Festival in 1985 commented: 'Édouard Lock's production *Human Sex* marks something completely new in the theatre-dance of today. . . . The punk dance from Montreal is the expression of a very sincere new dance generation' (Vanschaik, 1985: 28). Similarly, Jochen Schmidt reporting from the Vienna Dance Festival in 1986, also in *Ballett International*, commented: 'Édouard Lock's choreography *Human Sex* . . . stages a coarse, brutal but extraordinarily powerful punkrock-dance. . . . Not everyone likes this type of dance. But I was highly impressed and not only because it is completely unparalleled' (Schmidt, 1986: 34). Alastair Macaulay, reporting on Montreal's International Festival of New Dance in 1985 in *Dance Theatre Journal*, writes of Édouard Lock's choreography for *Human Sex*: 'Lock is reputed to be an original, not markedly influenced by anyone in the modern-dance world' (Macaulay, 1985: 27).

2. La La La Human Steps is not a European dance company. Yet the company have toured extensively through Europe since very early in their history. *Human Sex* was performed at international dance festivals in both Holland and Austria in 1985 and 1986 respectively. La La La was regularly featured at London's Dance Umbrella Festival through the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Present European dance makers such as Belgian Wim Vandekeybos exhibit a strong aesthetic inheritance to the early work of Lock. For a description of Vandekeybos's work, see Mary Brennan (1997).
3. This type of gender inequity and its causes are also strongly highlighted by Christy Adair in her groundbreaking monograph *Women and Dance* (Adair, 1992). Similarly, Elizabeth Dempster (1995) provides an important discussion about the linguistic mechanisms that produce gender inequity.
4. See also Murray (1997).
5. See for instance Harris (1999) and Martin (1995).
6. Lecavalier as 'gender-transgressive' continues to circulate and make appearances in curious places. In Philip Green's 1998 monograph about Hollywood cinema, called *Cracks in the Pedestal*, he references Lecavalier's cameo in Kathryn Bigelow's 1995 film *Strange Days*, linking this role as a sadistic muscular killer with a performance by La La La Human Steps in 1989. He details the final moments of this piece, which ended 'with the lead male dancer flinging himself into her [Lecavalier] arms, at which point she lifted him above her head and held him there like a weightlifter pressing weights' (Green, 1998: 400). What is striking for me in this description of Lecavalier is that it comes almost 10 years after seeing Lecavalier perform and in a book that is focusing on film. Here Lecavalier as the representative of a mythical type of gender transgression continues to circulate and, again to echo Ahmed's theorizing earlier, takes on a life of its own unconnected to the actual dance production.

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