TEXTURES
ONLINE PLATFORM FOR INTERWEAVING PERFORMANCE CULTURES

Lovers: Corporeal Projections and Ocular Demands

Stephen Barber, 20 February 2014

This essay focuses on *Lovers* (1994) the first – and last – moving-image installation work of Teiji Furuhashi, viewed within the framework of the histories of immersive moving-image projection environments involving human figures in performative movement. *Lovers* possesses an intricate rapport with previous experiments in immersive moving-image projection in relation to performance and choreography, and in turn illuminates the intimate interweaving of performance with other media, such as film and digital forms. Alongside *Lovers*, this essay will examine a film-projection experiment, *The Birth*, shown at the Japan World Exposition festival in Osaka (the event now better known as 'Expo '70') involving the work of the ankoku butoh choreographer, Tatsumi Hijikata. The final part of this essay will extend back to 1893 – one hundred and one years before the first installation of *Lovers* – to examine the originating event for all projections of moving-images within specially-designed, enclosed spatial environments: the project of the English moving-image innovator, Eadweard Muybridge, to create the first-ever space for the projection of moving-images to public audiences, through the construction of his 'Zoopraxographical Hall' at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago – a project which, like *Lovers*, shows images of naked human figures, walking, in sequential movement, and in intersections and encounters. The aim of this essay is not to situate Lovers within a static lineage of immersive moving-image projections, but rather to show that the preoccupations driving such experiments form enduring and transformational ones, that manifest themselves in very distinctive and dynamic ways that can challenge and overturn their audiences' preconceptions of the corporeal and ocular dimensions of performance.

In 1998, I had the experience, as a spectator, of being present within the spectral moving-image environment of *Lovers*. Developed in collaboration between Furuhashi and an innovative digital arts agency operating in Tokyo, Canon ArtLab, *Lovers* was installed within a range of arts-museum spaces internationally in the years following its first appearance, when it was shown at a gallery space for performance and moving-image experiments, the Hillside Plaza, in Tokyo, from 23 September to 3 October 1994. The Hillside Plaza was used, during the period 1990 to 2001, for many other moving-image installations, including a retrospective of the work of the well-known Japanese filmmaker Takahiko Iimura; that space still exists, but is now used to host corporate events and

receptions. The first installation of *Lovers* belongs to a particular moment in the development of Japanese digital art, from the early 1990s on, in which technology corporations such as Canon and NTT actively sponsored work, or provided environments for performance-focused experiments with emergent digital moving-image and virtual-reality technologies, often working closely with digital artists and performers to provide them with funding and technical support which were otherwise scarce. By 1998, NTT had opened a large-scale arts museum of contemporary digital technology, the InterCommunication Center, in Tokyo's Shinjuku district, and *Lovers* was also exhibited there, as part of the exhibition *Possible Futures*. My own experience of being a spectator of *Lovers* was at its installation within another Tokyo venue, Spiral Hall, in 1998, three years after the death of Furuhashi, and also at the end of that distinctive period of arts-curation that encompassed performance and experimental moving-image technology. The Canon ArtLab would dissolve in acrimony, after a curatorial dispute in 2001, and the NTT InterCommunication Center also experienced severe operational difficulties in the same era, though it still exists. Digital arts curation then became subject to entirely different imperatives across the following decade, the 2000s, and into the current moment.

In an interview from 1995, Furuhashi evokes the theme of *Lovers* in the context of its projection technologies: "In conventional terminology, the piece is called a multi-media installation. It uses lifesize images of nine naked performers which circle the room round the viewer; five laser discs; and seven video projectors. It deals with the theme of contemporary love in an ultra-romantic way."[1] Two of the most significant elements of the design of the installation are, firstly, that its projected sequences surround or immerse its spectator (intimately so, since *Lovers* was usually exhibited within relatively constrained confines), and secondly, that the spectator's body and eyes actively participate in determining the projection of walking and intersecting figures. A short promotional film by the Canon ArtLab, made at the time of the Hillside Plaza installation, emphasises this second aspect of the work: "Sensors in the centre of the space are activated by the visitors' presence, triggering words and images to move and react on the wall. Sensors that dot the ceiling are triggered to project messages down on to the floor, creating boundaries."[2]

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1 T. Furuhashi, interviewed by Carol Lutfy, *Tokyo Journal's* TJWeb, Sep. 1995, web, http://renfield.net/tj/9509/converse.html, last accessed: 20 Feb. 2014.

2 In 2014, the short promotional film, which would have been distributed by the Canon ArtLab in the mid-1990s in video-cassette format to prospective art-museum exhibitors of Furuhashi's art-work, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAaYEZN7EwI.

As a spectator of *Lovers*, in 1998 at Spiral Hall in Tokyo – within that soundscaped environment of slow-motion bodies that walked, ran, and embraced while simultaneously evanescing – I was struck by the sense of a volatile process of infiltration between the projected and spectatorial bodies in that space, especially during the moments at which, as the spectator approached those projected bodies, they abruptly vanished, and another figure, that of Furuhashi, moved towards the spectator, before falling backwards. I noted among the English-language texts that appeared within the projections one that read: "Do not cross the line," and another: "A jailbreak across ordinary fields is harder than over walls and wire fences." That second text brought to mind – within the projection-space of *Lovers* – the experience of Jean Genet (a great hero of transvestite and transsexual culture in Japan, from the 1960s onwards), during his incarceration as a child, in the 1920s, at the French rural prison of Mettray (a prison surrounded by open fields, rather than by walls). In one of his texts, Genet wrote: "One of the finest inventions of the [Penal] Colony of Mettray was to have known *not* to put a wall around it – it's much more difficult to escape when you have to cross a bed of flowers."[3] Genet's final book is titled *Prisoner of Love* – the same title as a love-song associated with James Brown. The preoccupation in *Lovers* with 'prisoners of love' and 'love-songs' interconnects that work with dumb type's *S/N* performance of the same era, with its focus on the potential forms of *future* love-songs. That 'love-song' preoccupation materialises in the *S/N* performance in the form of a song performed by Barbra Streisand, *People who need people*, as well as inciting the spectator's eye – and body – to traverse boundaries. Genet filmed the eyes of prisoners and wardens, peering through spyholes, in his 1950 film, with the same title, *Un Chant d'Amour*, or *A Love Song*. Fearing that a needle, directed from the far side of the cell-door, will pierce his eye and blind him, the character of the warden in that film is still compelled by sexual desire for his prisoners to look through that aperture. What he sees are not prisoners in misery, but instead, prisoners who are engaged in a choreographed sexual frenzy – they dance wildly, or are masturbating – and two prisoners communicate with each other via the wall between two cells, through which a hole has been drilled, and cigarette smoke is blown from mouth to mouth through that aperture. A future 'love-song' may involve an opening-up of flesh, in the cutting of two wrists, and the mixing of blood, as in S/N, or else the piercing of an aperture, as with that of a film-camera lens, in conjuring into existence the intersecting and intercrossing bodies of *Lovers*, which then intimately surround their spectators.

[3] J. Genet, *L'Ennemi Déclaré*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991, p. 223.

The contemporary status of *Lovers* is a potentially precarious one; it must be projected, in order to exist. It holds sparse traces, as a future 'love-song,' since it is now exhibited and projected with relative infrequency, at least in contrast to its international prominence in the second half of the 1990s. But since it was acquired as an 'art work' by several museum collections in that era, it therefore exists multiply, in editions of its constituent materials and sequences, and the corporeal presences they hold, ready for revivification. Its originating materials may also be stored archivally, but archives of projection-experiments are notably fragile ones that risk undergoing transmutations and disintegration. The current interstitial status of *Lovers* connects with an alternative title (or sub-title) sometimes used for its 1990s projections: *Dying Pictures, Living Pictures*.

A similarly liminal projection-experiment, leaving behind a precarious residue, took place a quarter-century before Lovers, in the form of the project conceived for Osaka Expo '70, *The Birth*, that involved the celebrated originator and choreographer of the ankoku butoh performance-art form, Tatsumi Hijikata. Placing Furuhashi and Hijikata together necessarily generates a salutary site of disjuncture and tension, since Furuhashi was not a great admirer of ankoku butoh, commenting in 1995: "I can't get into the mysterious profound butoh atmosphere, that profound look and mood. I'm more into how to invent the profound moment with cheap-looking materials and movements from daily life … And my choreography is more influenced by people dancing disco."[4] To trace any valid intersection between the work of Furuhashi and Hijikata, it is necessary to go back to the very beginnings of Hijikata's work, in 1959, to investigate what he originally envisaged for his emergent performance art. In his manifesto *To Prison*, inspired by the work of Genet, Hijikata wrote: "To a production-oriented society, the aimless use of the body, which I call dance, is a deadly enemy which must be taboo. I am able to say that my dance shares a common basis with crime, male homosexuality, festivals and rituals because it is behaviour which explicitly flaunts its aimlessness in the face of a production-oriented society."[5] Hijikata and his dancers notoriously worked across the late-1960s in nightclubs and discotheques, such as the Club Space Capsule in Tokyo's Akasaka district, in spectacles which prefigure Furuhashi's transvestite spectacles of the mid-1980s in Kyoto nightclubs.

[4] T. Furuhashi, interviewed by Carol Lutfy, 1995.
[5] T. Hijikata, "To Prison," in: *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 44–45.

A more tangible connection is that of the involvement of both Furuhashi and Hijikata in immersive, 360-degree projection experiments holding moving-image sequences of human figures in performative movement. Hijikata had been closely involved in a succession of performance collaborations with experimental filmmakers, such as Takahiko Iimura and Donald Richie, throughout the early stages of his work. At the end of the 1960s, he participated in a large-scale project involving a newly developed, immersive moving-image technology for the recording and projection of images, 'Astrorama.' For many years, all surviving evidence of this project appeared to have vanished. The Astrorama technology generated a spatial moving-image installation, *The Birth*, installed at the 'Midori-kan' (the 'Green Pavilion') at the Osaka Expo, which ran from March to September 1970. The Midori-kan was itself constructed by an alliance of Japanese technology corporations, to display innovations in image-projection among other technological developments, and was sited within the extensive grounds of the Expo, that formed a sub-city at Osaka's peripheries. The event – together with the Tokyo Olympic Games, six years earlier – marked Japan's new ascendancy both in media technology and in the visual and performing arts, and attracted vast crowds (over 60 million spectators in all) and international attention. World's fairs and 'Expo' events have often constituted spectacular showcases for experimental projection technologies, most notably at the event held in Chicago in 1893. As a result, Osaka Expo '70 formed an ideal context for the developers of the Astrorama projection technology, Goto Inc., to show off their new development, inspired at least in part by IMAX technology, and intended for large-format, 360-degree immersive projections that surrounded their audiences within specially designed spaces.

The inclusion of many contemporary Japanese performers, musicians and artists as participants in Expo '70 was an attempt to emphasise the event's aura of innovation; the influential performance-art group of the mid-1950s, Gutai, took part (in one of their final spectacles before the group's dissolution), and two of Hijikata's previous collaborators, the architect Arata Isozaki and the artist Tadanori Yokoo, were closely involved in conceptualising Expo '70 and issuing invitations to participants. The Astrorama film of Hijikata's performance had been shot in June of the previous year, on location on the slopes of the volcanic Mount Atosanupuri (also known as Mount Io) in north-eastern Hokkaido; the volcano, close to the caldera Lake Kussharo, remained active and emitted sulphurous steam. Hijikata's performance was shot over six or seven nights, by the team of twenty-one Astrorama technicians, including their supervising director Tomohiro Akiyama. Hijikata appears in only one sequence of the ten-minute film, as a magician or shaman, who conjures up the world as part-miracle, part-malediction; at the end of the

sequence, Hijikata moves directly towards and then leaps over the Astrorama film-camera. The film's scenarist, the poet Shuntaro Tanikawa, had specially requested Hijikata's appearance as a monstrous, grotesque figure, present at the world's origination directly through the medium of dance; other sequences for the film showed primal natural landscapes, and fragments of cities about to be destroyed. A further sequence, shot in the Meguro district of Tokyo, at Hijikata's studio – the 'Asbestos-kan' – depicts his company of dancers, naked and shot directly from above, rather than frontally; that sequence was then superimposed with images of hell, from paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and others.

The Astrorama film-camera had five separate lenses, each shooting simultaneously with the intention of creating sequences that would be multi-dimensional and sensorially engulfing. The sequences were recorded on a special 70mm celluloid film stock (an extremely large format) whose exacting development process required it to be sent to specialist laboratories in Hollywood for processing. In the Midori-kan at the Osaka Expo, the Astrorama film was screened using an ambitious system simultaneously projecting five film-reels, onto the internal dome of the Midori-kan, across five huge screens, thereby generating a 360-degree, immersive environment for its audiences. It was certainly not one in which the projected human figures in motion could be approached intimately, as in *Lovers*. An estimated 15 million spectators visited the Midori-kan during the six-month run of Expo '70, but most passed-through the pavilion rapidly, as part of tour-groups, rather than amassing to experience the projection as a collective, static audience. That abbreviated, tangential experience of traversal (both an ocular and physical transit), experienced by the spectators of Hijikata's performance on film, is one familiar to visitors to digital-image installations at contemporary art museums.

After Expo '70 had closed, in September 1970, most of the extravagant pavilions were abandoned and left to deteriorate into ruins, despite the vast expense entailed in constructing them. Several years later, the site, including the Midori-kan, was almost entirely razed, and converted into a suburban commemorative park for the citizens of Osaka, with Expo '70's emblematic 'Tower of the Sun,' designed by the artist Tarō Okamoto, standing at its entrance. The Astrorama projection technology proved too complex and expensive for the massive commercial exploitation which its designers had envisaged, with the result that it became immediately obsolete; the original celluloid film-cans containing the film of Hijikata's performance were then stored-away, and forgotten, until researchers from the Center for the Arts at Keio University in Tokyo re-located them, forty years later, in the Osaka storage-facilities of the Sanwa Midori-kai alliance of technology corporations, whose previous incarnation had sponsored the Midori-kan. The film had been preserved over those four decades more through oblivious neglect than

active conservation; its status was that of the stored-away detritus of the now-defunct Astrorama projection technology, rather than that of a vital moving-image document of Hijikata's performance work. In that sense, the Astrorama film survived as an aberrant form of archival entity; if *Lovers* had been preserved in the same way, it would have been as a manifestation of mid-1990s video and laser-disc technologies (and of their imminent obsolescence), rather than as a unique work of performance art. To revivify the Astrorama projection of Hijikata's performance, in its spatial and immersive dimensions, would involve reconstructing the vast environment of the Midori-kan, whilst recreating the space of the *Lovers* installation forms a less challenging project, requiring only the reactivation of its archived components.

The final part of this essay moves still further backwards in time, to the very first moving-image projection – within a space created especially for spectators – of sequences of walking, running and intersecting human figures. The projection took place at another Exposition event, in Chicago: the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, for which the moving-image innovator Eadweard Muybridge constructed a building – part performance exhibition-space, part proto-cinematic space – in order to project his sequences of figures in movement. As with the projection environment of Hijikata's filmed performance *The Birth*, Muybridge's experiment is one for which almost all traces of the projection-space have been lost. Only two photographs still exist of the facade of Muybridge's building, the 'Zoopraxographical Hall,' and none of the interior of the space itself.

Muybridge was the first moving-image innovator to envisage a specially constructed space, to be entered by spectators, who – in conditions of darkness – would then experience moving-image sequential-projections of human figures performing acts of walking, of encountering one another, even embracing one another: an experience intimately close to that of the spectators of *Lovers*, a century later. Muybridge's work as an inventor focused on the performative gestures and movements of the human body, especially in situations of crisis and malfunction; he experimented with the ways in which those gestures connected with moving images, in the form of projections that could surround their spectators, and thereby instigate unprecedented visions and sensations. He began experimenting with immersive, 360-degree image-environments as early as 1878, fifteen years before his Chicago projections. At that time, his focus had been on urban space, rather than on human figures. He assembled large-format photographic panoramas of San Francisco, and installed them in such a way, within an art-gallery space, that they surrounded their viewers, inducing a sense of topographic disorientation. During the same period, he also began experimenting with moving-image projection for spectators, using sequences of images transferred onto glass discs; he constructed a

projector, which he called the 'Zoopraxiscope,' to animate those images. In 1884, he was commissioned by the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, to use multiple, high-speed cameras to capture images of human bodies, as well as animals, in sequential movement. Over a span of three years, he created more than twenty thousand sequences, including those of figures who pivot and turn rapidly, as also occurs in the *Lovers* installation. Muybridge directed and choreographed his human models specifically as performers, who undertook pre-set acts of performance, rather than isolated gestures or improvisations. The filmmaker Hollis Frampton commented on the excessive nature of Muybridge's project and its axis in acute repetition: "Quite simply, what occasioned Muybridge's obsession? What need drove him, beyond a reasonable limit of dozens or even hundreds of sequences, to make them by thousands? … Time seems, sometimes, to stop, to be suspended in tableaux *disjunct* from change and flux. Most human beings experience, at one time or another, moments of intense passion during which perception seems vividly arrested: erotic rapture, or the extremes of rage and terror came to mind."[6]

In his specially constructed projection-space at the Chicago Exposition in 1893, Muybridge projected his Philadelphia sequences, along with newly created sequences, from glass discs. He had been planning a large-scale projection tour – extending across Japan, India and Australia – but abandoned it, in order to participate in the Chicago Exposition, which appeared to offer him an unprecedented arena to demonstrate his innovations. Since no pre-existing building constructed uniquely for the projection of moving-images preceded it, Muybridge had to imagine that space entirely for himself. His plans for the building's facade indicate that he envisaged a spectacular form, with classical columns, inspired in part by ancient Greek and Roman theatre architecture; the building stands in splendid isolation in his plans, without the presence of other, competing Exposition attractions. His projection-space was around fifty by eighty feet in dimension, constructed from brick, iron and wood. When Muybridge describes the building, in promotional material prepared for the Exposition, he gives the impression that it had appeared almost magically or spontaneously, without human intervention. He refers to himself in the third person: "He delayed his Far Occidental expedition and returned to Chicago to find a commodious theater erected for this special purpose on the grounds of the Exposition, to which the name of Zoopraxographical Hall had been given."[7] Almost nothing is known about the interior space of Muybridge's building; in the absence of any

[6] H. Frampton, "Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract," in: *Circles of Confusion*, Rochester NY: Visual Studies Workshop, 1983, p. 79.

[7] E. Muybridge, *Descriptive Zoopraxography*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1893, p. 2.

writings on the subject by Muybridge himself, or any eye-witness accounts, it is simply not known whether he projected his sequences immersively, around the interior walls of the space. Since he possessed only one projector, he would have needed to rotate it, in mid-projection, through revolutions around the space, in order to do so. All that is known with certainty is that Muybridge himself stood alongside his projection surfaces (or screens), as a corporeal and vocal presence, and narrated his sequences of figures-in-movement to his audiences. It is also certain, from attendance figures for the Exposition's many attractions, that the project – in financial terms – was a disastrous failure; Muybridge drew only very few spectators into his projection space.

As with the Osaka Expo '70, the Chicago Exposition was an immense undertaking, lasting for six months. Its total attendance was around 27 million – around half that of Expo '70 – but the number of exhibitors with whom Muybridge was competing was huge: 65,422. Every exhibitor in Chicago had a new technology or a new spectacle of some kind to display, often with far greater promotional resources and within much more extravagant buildings than Muybridge. In that architectural and promotional context, Muybridge's projection-space generated only a negligible presence, despite its extraordinary ambition and innovation as a seminal site for moving-image projection, in the form of an experimental laboratory for future visual technologies. Only halfway through the duration of the Chicago Exposition, Muybridge's projection-space was closed and demolished, and razed without trace; its location was then rapidly re-occupied by another exhibitor and a new building – the 'Pompeii Theater and Panorama' – containing a painted panorama of Pompeii during its destruction by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius. As with the Osaka site of Expo '70, that of the Chicago Exposition would also rapidly disappear, first abandoned, then largely destroyed by a fire, several months after its closure. Muybridge undertook no further experiments in moving-image projection after his experience in Chicago; he scaled down his activities, returned to his home-town of Kingston-on-Thames in England, and bequeathed his entire personal archive of projectors, images and documents to the town's library on his death in 1904.

The traces and survival of immersive moving-image experimentation, around projected bodies in performative movement – from Muybridge's 1893 projections of human-figure sequences, through the 1970 Astrorama immersive projections of Hijikata's choreographic work, to Teiji Furuhashi's 1994 *Lovers* installation, and extending into the present moment – are often precarious, their status subject to erasure or reactivation in new, contrary forms. They depend upon memories and documentation which are flawed, partial, or even non-existent. Archives of performance projections often comprise fragmented detritus, fissured by time, and imprinted by disparate approaches to documentation, rather than

source materials for acts of flawless reconstitution. Such archives themselves possess engulfing spectatorial demands, and precipitate transits in flux across the histories and spaces of performance. They also indicate that whatever appears to be a contemporary, immediate new-media technology conceived for incorporation within performance can, very rapidly, appear obsolete and vanish – but then resurge aberrantly in a new manifestation, often with original and compelling imperatives for its future spectators. All resilient performance-traces demand attention, even when their resilience is the result of accident or chance. In exploring the dynamics of innovations in performance cultures, and the preoccupations and intentions of their creators – such as those which drove Furuhashi's *Lovers* – it is always essential to view together the event of performance and its surviving moving-image documentation, together with the pivotal role of the human body which intimately interweaves them.