

Light and Body: a Co-evolutionary Process

by Roberto Gill Camargo

Light and body work together, as a whole. When we are in theater, we don't see light and body as separated things. One may be seen through the other. Light and body are two physical realities related each other, one affecting the other, at the same time.

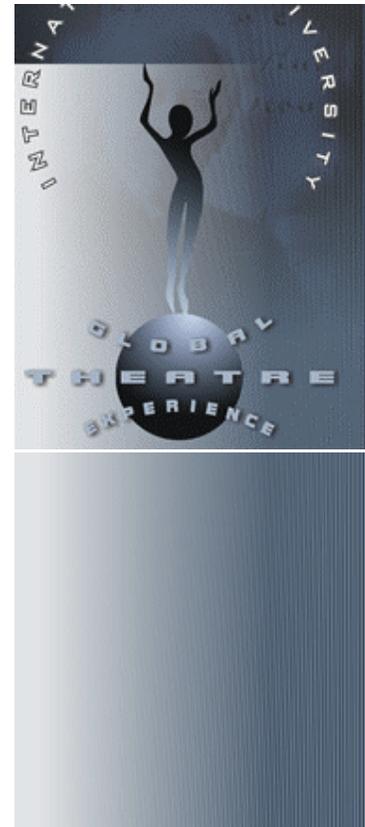
Here we have a process of exchange: the light affects the body, and the body affects the light.

The light modifies the body that modifies the light. The result is a dialogue of negotiations and exchanges that go on, incessantly. The both processes are tied in unavoidable way, as co-dependent instances.

The light affects the body and starts to make part of it. The body contains information that change when it receives information coming from the light. These relations may be changed according to some circumstances, such as the presence of another body in the situation, or else the use of filters and fogs as means of light transmission.

The body is not a place waiting for outside information. It exists by itself, with its own information. Every information that comes from the environment dialogues with the pre-existent information of the body. So, the body is something that builds itself in the coevolutionary changes with the light. This process says that the body results of the exchanges between itself and the environment: the crossing of information that are in the body and those which comes from the light.

The body is not a means by which the information simply passes (KATZ & GREINER: 2005, 131). Or else, it is not a means with the simple function of conveying information coming from outside. The body is not somewhat determined by someone or something; on the contrary, it represents itself,



first of all.

The idea of the body representing something makes us to think about the concept of the body as a machine. (KATZ: 2006, 2). The body is not a machine, is not an object used to process the information of light that comes from the environment. In other words, the body is neither a screen used to paint, nor a white sheet where is possible to write down.

The body doesn't exist as something separated of the time. It evolves constantly, as well as the light also evolves without stopping. The time doesn't go back; it goes straight ahead. The relationship between body and light occurs at the same time and continuously.

Different of the programmed states in machines, the body may be seen as something that results of exchanges with the environment. This flow of exchanges results a state of very present time and a process that may be characterized as a transitive one.

The relations between body and light seem to be easy when we consider static situations like those of architecture and sculpture. However, the process becomes very complex when we think about the body in movement, as it occurs in theater and mainly in dance performances. Here the many situations of spatiality and evolution of time require a special attention to the flow of exchanges.

The dynamic scene shows a living and continuous process of organization between the circumstances of body and light, which results a non-controlled quantity of changes with an incessant rhythm. The body in movement is a construction of many forms and configurations. The light is sensible to these configurations. A body stopped on the stage and lit by a focus of light reveals a constant state of reflection, bright shadows, as if it were a sculpture. However, a little gesture of this body is enough to transform some dark points in clear and bright ones.

Shadows in the neck and around the eyes, never seen before, become clearly visible. The position of the arms -- directed to up, down, left and right -- changes the former configuration and produces new contrasts of light and shadow. As the body moves in space, some new contrasts take place, with folds and outlines that allow new areas of reflection and absorption of light.

The interactive process between body and light tends to

modify in the proportion of body movements; the result is a flow of shadows that comes and goes away, resulting in a dynamic process of visual situations without control. This experience allows a variety of positions, in a flow of diffused reflections, projected shadows and even self-shadows.

Through the movement, the body reflects the light in many ways, even if it is lit by a fixed spotlight with constant intensity. Unfortunately our eyes are not prepared to realize all the changes. What we generally can see are the changes of color, focus and intensity – in short, the constant features of light but never the living light and its relationship with the living actor, in his evolutionary complexity.

If light and body are inseparable, it is impossible to consider one process without the other. So, in theater, the comprehension of this problem is beyond the concept of light as a separated process of the production, as suggested by Pilbrow (2002:33).

The process of stage light is not restricted to a description of external viewpoint, as suggested by the historical heritage from the Italian Renaissance. On the contrary, it results from a perspective strictly related to the scene and determined by the circumstances and states of body when building specialities.

The only constancy of living body is its inconstancy, directly related to the conditions of environment, through the adaptive mechanisms. Moving lights and motorized resources of stage lighting may be suitable for movements strictly marked, but its competence is still weak, if compared to the wide range of free human possibilities of movement. They describe the apparent changes like the jumps of the performers, for example. But the extension of his muscles, the flexion of his knees and the necessary combination of his members for jumping continue without description for the eyes. On stage light, there are suitable equipments for describing the course of the body in the space, but they are still poor to catch the rate of information the body processes when makes a simple change.

When a spotlight lights an actor on the stage, what we see results from the reflection of the skin, of the clothes and other surfaces, in contrast with self-shadows in a variety of states that evolves with the movements. The result is a complex exchange of information that lives in a strange space without time, without duration. The only time that exists is the time of the perception.

These considerations make us to think about the relations between light and body in theater and the need to propose an experience of concomitance, in which the creation of lighting and the creation of scene take place at the same time.

The visual information that the spectator receives come not only from the mediatic role of light (as a simulative effect, as an expressive resource of intensification, cutting and reduction or as a structure device). There is an invisible exchange between the pre-existent information of light and body that have to be considered, independently of the communicative intention of light and body while elements of dramatic situation.

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