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TRIANGULATED NATION. Staged by George Coates. George Coates Performance Works, San Francisco. 7 April 1999

LIZARD MONITORS. By Cathy Weis. Dixon Place, New York. 16 April 1999.

Within the parameters of "techno-theatre," George Coates and Cathy Weis might be considered opposite ends of the spectrum. Coates's 3-D work is arguably the highest form of digital technology on stage, while Weis creates sophisticated images from "dinosaur" equipment. However, I hesitate to categorize either artist's work as simply multi-media or techno-theatre. Due to theatrical and metaphoric couplings between the live body and technology, I prefer to describe the work as "cyborg theatre." The term refers to an integrative form highlighting fusions and often blurring lines of distinction between the body and various forms of technology. Coates and Weis question the body's relationship to a variety of technologies. In their most recent projects, the tools to explore these fusions might be considered "low-tech." For Coates, this approach signifies a hiatus from his last few pieces, and for Weis it is a continued exploration of technology financially accessible to her.

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At the other side of the techno-theatre spectrum is Cathy Weis, who creates sophisticated conceptual work out of the simplest technological equipment. Her "dance" with technology is literally cyborgian in that the technology extends her body, projecting what it cannot. Her limitations are caused by multiple sclerosis, but are transcended by her collaboration with media. I had no idea her body was physically limited until I read her press material—a testament to her level of sophisticated thinking, humor, expertise, and sheer technical prowess. Weis, a former ballerina with the Louisville Ballet, has been creating technological performance for the past ten years. Her experiments have earned her a BESSIE Award in choreography and creation and a research fellowship at Bennington College where her work included a simultaneous performance/internet event between Bennington and Prague in the Czech Republic. Her work is largely video-based, and always concerned with aspects of the body in space.

In *Lizard Monitors*, Weis directly addressed issues of the absent body and its mediated replacement in the first of three pieces, called "Dummy." Weis boldly defied a passive approach to media, and instead choose to explore video's limitations. As the lights came up on dancer Scott Heron, Weis's whispering voice was heard, "excuse me, I can't see very well, please pick me up." The audience was meant to find and pass around a video monitor, which happened to contain Weis's live projected head inside. They finally complied, as-

sisting the bodiless face within the TV. As the monitor was passed forward, Weis commented, "careful now, don't drop me," or, about Heron, "he's beautiful!" However, tension rose between Heron and Weis, culminating with the monitor spinning through the space by its cord and Heron storming off stage leaving the face looking at the crowd, center stage. The head then happily told a tale about its body, "once, I was a dancer. I could run and jump and kick my legs high like the best of them." It/she explained the disjuncture between head and body through a story about ballerina Weis dropping mescaline before a performance, until a friend from the audience asked, "but why in the midst of all that activity, did you stand perfectly still, like a stone?" The question sparked an inquiry into the body/mind connections that drove the head-that-is-Weis from then on.

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Weis has explored the head-in-a-box idea in recent performances, and although it was her head in the monitor, she otherwise remained in a choreographer's relationship to other performers. In "Dummy," Weis emerged from the box to perform with her mediated self, as a pre-recorded version of her face replaced the live feed (done in such a way that the audience was unaware of the change except for the strangely out of synch mouth in the TV). The evolution of technique perhaps parallels an evolution of her own body's empowered relationship to the technology she uses. As Weis conversed with her televised head a strange sense of joyful uneasiness crept over me—perhaps because of my emotional acceptance of her double as an extension of herself. As the live Weis created a non-live version of herself by attaching a similarly dressed, two-foot-tall foam body to the televised head, her use of humor and movement transformed the Frankenstein tale into a cyborg to live with. The newly formed creature benignly expressed that "some people have a problem with sentient media," while confirming it was "only a matter of time before we started interacting back." In the context of bodily limitations and media's overwhelming obsession with youthful bodies, Weis's interaction with the Weis-cyborg-self was a refreshing and witty alternative to the proliferation of Terminator creations.

Other pieces also played with ideas of the absent and present body. The final piece, "Fly Me to the Moon," was an evocative technological foray aided by a narrative of love, loss and the human body. Weis manipulated the camera to create a confusion of time and space. As she entered the stage her image was projected endlessly in a mirror-image behind her, the flat wall seeming to expand as her image reached backward as far as the eye could

see. Grainy video images, haunting sounds, and sparse, compelling text aided the melancholy mood of the piece. Heron entered and spoke through a standing microphone, "Helen has left me and gone back to 1930." Weis's profile was projected in extreme close-up behind him as he alternately spoke and broke into a twisted, contorted dance, resonating a sense of pain and nostalgia. Notions of time and place were blurred as Weis and Heron appeared both on and offstage, sometimes simultaneously, in a dazzling array of breathtaking and amusing images. One such image saw Weis dancing live, and on camera, with a large cartoon cut-out of her new lover as Heron looked on, representing the present and perhaps doubling as Heron's imaginative past.

Experiments with projected image grew more innovative when, in the latter part of the piece, Heron entered, face pressed against a three-foot-wide translucent latex circle with Weis following not far behind. She pushed her video cart around the stage as she aimed her camera at the circle. Here again Weis broke the typical passive viewing frame and resituated the audience's gaze on the screen and the camera itself as an extension of the body.

Weis's compromised physicality is strengthened by the technology she uses. Incorporating video into live work creates a space that would otherwise be unoccupied by artists like Weis. Pushing the limits of technology on stage, Weis opens doors for a necessary examination of technology's potential to extend the live body. In so doing, Weis's thought-provoking images beg a stronger financial structure so the technology of her work may grow more complex.

JENNIFER PARKER STARBUCK
CUNY Graduate Center