

## A 360 DEGREE STRETCH : Dialogue, Desire, and Divine Beauty

*Sue Spaid*

As a picture, Patrizia Giambi's performance "360 Degrees" suggests myriad ideas about language. On its most basic level, it suggests the way discourse is a tug-of-war of sorts, as two people engaged in dialogue must inevitably expand language in order to communicate. The rubber band's elasticity bridges two individual's desires, making intercommunication possible. Communication in 360 degrees necessitates speaking and listening, language and adjustment, give and take, unlike a 180 degree, which commands an about face.

More important, two men physically stretch BEAUTY, Dave Hickey's self-proclaimed "issue of the nineties," in all directions. By continuously reconfiguring beauty, they denote its infinite possibilities, which metaphorically subverts the concept of Beauty, the most classic of universals.

As the men move around, they employ varying stances, sketching the range of stretches, literally visualizing language's elasticity (Barthes's *dupes*). A stretchy language can accommodate myriad dialogues to construct different pictures of reality. Though engaged in a tug-of-war, winning is impossible, as the rubber band is hyper-flexible, unlike a rope or a stick. In this way, their tug-of-war alludes to Hegelian Dialectic; whereby, thesis is transformed into an antithesis, which is preserved as its synthesis.

Giambi's muscle-bound men remind us that communication is an activity of pleasure, with plenty of room to play, to pose, to stretch, to flex, but mostly to experience whatever one desires. By stretching, they're engaged in a laborious process of working it out, the give and take. If each participant's language usage is as individual as his panty preference, then the speaker must consider his delivery in order to facilitate the listener's understanding. This is the *third stretch* that language must endure for communication to be possible. However, this is the step that the dominant culture refuses to engage, which has made language the scapegoat.

It's significant that Giambi has eroticized this tug-of-war, because it evokes the role desire plays akin to both Barthes's *pleasure of the text* and Diotima's first stage in the love of wisdom, the genuine *search* for beauty of the outward form.

Diotima (embodied for *talking back* to Socrates in Plato's Symposium 2400 years ago) describes Love as being *in want* - neither fair nor good; but a philosopher, a lover of wisdom. Diotima shares with Isaiah Berlin a vision of love that's an intermediary, a communication facilitator, existing as the mean between ignorance and wisdom, engendering immortality, as knowledge does. "Love is of the everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire immortality together with good: Wherefore love is of immortality ( Plato, p. 73 )."

Diotima's love that is *in want* connotes our *desire*, as it facilitates generation, "which always leaves a new existence in the place of the old ( Plato, p. 73 )", but is not exclusive to pregnant bodies begetting children.

But souls which are pregnant - for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies - conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions? - wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor ( Plato, p. 74 ).

Just as Diotima drives a hard bargain (her criteria for immortality is only that which is "deserving of the name inventor)," Giambi drives a hard bargain. Although Giambi prepared specific instructions, she did not choreograph the performance. Rather, she encouraged them to pull with all of their might, to test the limits of each new stretch, never to repeat a pose, so as to locate the beauty in everything. As they began stretching under her tutelage, they felt awkward and unconfident. But in time, her challenge inspired them to explore new images of reality, not just images of beauty, which fulfills Diotima's concept of divine beauty and Rorty's request for new visual practices.

Giambi's laboring men anticipate their discovering a *wondrous beauty* (Diotima describes this as "a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, ... but beauty absolute, separate, simple, everlasting ( Plato, p. 76 )"), whose activity is rooted in a desire initially stimulated by the eyes, as Diotima wants and art must. That the final pose seems so *heroic* affirms both the pleasure in fulfilling one's own desires and a confidence that they achieved DIVINE ( not pure/not real ) beauty.