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# Stroboscopic Stutter

on the not-yet-captured ontological condition of limit-attractions

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## Opening

Affect as critical point

suggests that parasite affects and lateral barely perceptible moves might be welcomed to undo any will to reach a too-managed critical judgement and remove any remaining mastery wishes from the process of critically exploring.

A desire only:

might (also) writing and (also) reading cease to be practices of mediation to become inter-fused modulations?

## Inter-Fusion Pre-Story

*The interconnection of the senses was graphically illustrated by an experiment that ingeniously combined anesthetized skin and high-altitude flight. A scientist who was also an experienced pilot and had been trained to orient expertly during high-altitude manoeuvres anesthetized his own ass. Amazing but true: he could no longer see where he was. He could no longer orient. He had scientifically proven that we see with the seat of our pants. The interconnection of the senses is so complete that the removal of a strategic patch of tactile/proprioceptive feed makes the whole process dysfunctional.*

—Brian Massumi (2002:157)

## Inter-Logues (*jeux de piste*)

*Partitioning* senses or the politics of daily sensory experience.

*Some-thing* is fusty on the shelf of a much reiterated *view* on dance and its performance as vanishing present bodies. That *view*—one anchored and inscribed in dance and performance’s supposed ontological specificity—seems hard to re-move. Specifically, it still equates with a (pre-)view of both presence and movement as formal disappearances, displayed on the very grounding grounds of a measurable Euclidean space and with-*in* a perception of time as a flowing linear line. An assumption difficult to re-move not only from the sort of diffuse perception we have of our day-to-day moving bodies, at every step in our daily rounds, but also from more elaborate perceptions still moving through certain circles of dance and performance researchers,<sup>1</sup> as well as through a good portion of dance and performance practices.

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1. André Lepecki (2004:124–39) traces the genealogy and metamorphosis of this trope: from dance as “ephemerality,” a dance that should be accurately documented or else fall into complete forgetfulness (as it was diagnosed from about the late 18th century on—with and after Jean-Georges Noverre’s “mournful lament” about “dance’s flawed materiality”), until the current version of dance as “disappearance,” a dance that dismisses any documenting effort not only as unnecessary, but also as undesirable (dance’s presence is still understood as perpetual self-erasure, but this time symmetric to a writing equally subject to the movement of perpetual *différance*—with and *after* Jacques Derrida’s trace). May this essay move toward a re-opening of the remaining ontological condition—*after*-Derrida—of dance and performance as “disappearance” (in its latest versions appearing as historically, culturally, and politically embodied “disappearance”).

The persistence of the assumption that dance and performance are best defined by the formal disappearance of present moving bodies, calls for a reframing of ongoing temporal and spatial perceptions, along with a reframing of subsequent perceptions of perception itself.

Before we move on though, let us take some time to convey how intrinsically aesthetic and intrinsically political these matters are, and how intrinsically they collaborate. The common-sense notion that situates aesthetic perception in a flowing linear time and in a measurable Euclidean space is not contained in the realm of artistic practice alone, but concerns both aesthetic and so-called nonaesthetic experience. More exactly, it concerns what aesthetic and nonaesthetic experiences might have in common or lend to one another. This is the interface that inevitably acquires a political dimension, the point where we should ask to what extent that common-sense notion of perception limits both our conception of sensory experience and our modes of sensing, perceiving, moving, and thinking. Furthermore, we should ask how far a notion that perpetuates a consensual order of the senses, assigning specific parts and positions to identified bodies, locating them within precise sociocultural frames according to their abilities or nonabilities, is or is not a political matter worth discussing.

At this point, I am following Jacques Rancière's most recent politico-aesthetic works (1998; 2000), particularly the concept of "partition of the sensible" (2000) on the basis of which he argues that there is an intrinsic knot between aesthetic practices (including literature) and politics.<sup>2</sup>

According to Rancière, a "partition of the sensible" can be understood as a first sense of aesthetics, which is to say, not as a set of artistic practices, not as a general theory that concerns these practices, and not as a theory of sensory experience in general; rather, aesthetics (as "partition of the sensible") is "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to experience" (2000:13). As such, it can be understood in a Kantian sense (if revised by Michel Foucault's genealogy<sup>3</sup>) Hence, Rancière defines it as:

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2. *Le partage du sensible* in the original, alternately translated as "distribution of the sensible." All quotations from Rancière's works are my translation of the French editions.

Provided, as Rancière notes, we do not consider the aesthetic and literary core of politics "as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art" (2000:13), nor the political core of artistic creation as an intention of the artist to pursue a political program. In fact, when he comes to rethink the relation between aesthetics and politics, Rancière dismisses the pertinence of distinctions between autonomy and submission, and radically questions what he calls the "imaginary histories of artistic 'modernity,'" lost in "vain debates" that put "art's autonomy" on one side, and its "political submission" on the other (2000:25). Taking us far back to Plato's *city*, Rancière claims there is an intrinsic *politicity* of the sensorial and an intrinsic *aestheticity* of politics specific to each particular time, and to each particular place (not only during the "mass age," where Walter Benjamin diagnosed an "aesthetization of politics") (2000:24). Without restricting politics and aesthetics to their mutual annulations, Rancière considers that figures of community are internal both to the possibilities of artistic creativity and to the possibilities of political stance. These figures are able to circulate as affects in non-art, in non-politics, and in every possible field of knowledge and practice. As a consequence, aesthetics and politics are, in Rancière's sense, always the place of conflict, of confrontation, or productive dissent. This is what Rancière calls a real condition for democracy: a non-authoritarian, non-"authorshipped" circulation of the senses, positions, and parts played within a community.

3. At this point, we may recall Michel Foucault's genealogy of the human sciences conceived both as practices and as institutions (see *Les Mots et les Choses* 1966, where the author calls his genealogy an "archaeology" of knowledge, a concept he developed later in *L'Archéologie du Savoir* 1969). What is important to keep in mind in order to understand Rancière's reference to a possible analogy between his idea of aesthetics as partition of the sensible and Foucault's genealogical method (Rancière 2000:13), is the fact that Foucault's project was neither to determine the transcendental *a priori* conditions of knowledge in a strictly Kantian sense, nor to describe the evolution of the human sciences toward a growing objectivity supposedly achieved by modern sciences. Rather, his goal was to study the human sciences' very conditions of possibility, understood as specific spatiotemporal configurations (we could as well call them "partitions") in which specific conceptions of language, of representational modes, of beings, and of things, combine in hierarchies that give way to specific conceptions and practices of knowledge. Such conditions are not determined for all times and places, but in a permanent process of configuration, deconfiguration, and reconfiguration.

the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A partition of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and has exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what ways various individuals have a part in this partition. (2000:12)

Thus, the “partition of the sensible” must appear as the dimension of experience that “reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (2000:13).

This is to say, “aesthetics” understood as a partition of the sensible falls into the dimension of sensory experience where appropriate parts and appropriate places and times are attributed to appropriate bodies, according to their presupposed abilities of thought, locution, and action. Social positions are fixed according to these delimitations, and the partitioning of the sensible upon which the community is founded, and upon which politics becomes a possibility, ultimately determines which bodies, forms of sensing, making, and speaking are recognizable as a part of a shared cartography, and which are excluded from its part-taking and part-giving.

Only on the basis of the partition of the sensible taken as “primary aesthetics” (2000:14) can we understand that aesthetic practices and politics are not two separate and permanently fixed realities. Putting aesthetics at the very basis of politics and politics at the very basis of aesthetics, Rancière considers that the arts only lend *what they can* to the “enterprises of

domination or emancipation” (2000:25), which means the arts only lend to politics what they already have in common, what they inevitably share as partitions of the sensory dimension of experience. Consequently, what they share is nothing less and nothing more than “bodies’ positions and movements, speaking functions, [and] partitions between the visible and the invisible. And the autonomy they may benefit from, or the [political and aesthetic] subversion that can be attributed to them, have the same basis” (25).

Tautological as it might sound at first sight, such an assumption deserves further and closer consideration, as it neither compromises politics’ nor aesthetics’ autonomy.

Nor does it engage them in submitting to one

**Politics’ and aesthetics’ relation to one another only engages both and each of them in creating new bridges and gaps between different and even opposed levels of reality, in shifting the borders of what is considered artistic and of what is considered nonartistic, and also in shifting the borders of specific artistic or nonartistic genres and modes of being, speaking, and making.**

another—and this is not a negligible consideration. In fact, politics’ and aesthetics’ relation to one another only engages both and each of them in creating new bridges and gaps between different and even opposed levels of reality, in shifting the borders of what is considered artistic and of what is considered nonartistic, and also in shifting the borders of specific artistic or nonartistic genres and modes of being, speaking, and making. In short, for Rancière, both art and politics share the aim of modifying the “sensory perception of what is common to the community” (2000:63).

More radically, this equates with situating the relation between aesthetics and politics on a level that makes both politics and aesthetics one and the same with our most daily

sensory experience (where artistic activities as such give up their usual *aesthetic* exclusivity).<sup>4</sup> It is a relation that works on the basis of the implication of both politics and aesthetics in the deconstruction and in the critical reconstruction of partitions of daily and less ordinary perceptions; precisely those perceptions that come to be felt as personal, despite the fact that they are shared according to common *partitioning*(s). Simultaneously personal and commonly sensed, these perceptions involuntarily pertain to particular forms of installing and moving in times and spaces, more or less visibly, more or less critically and creatively.

In this context, it becomes evident that both politics and aesthetics only become effectively political and effectively aesthetic when they are capable of interrupting a given order of the forms of sensing and of the forms of making sense; when they are capable of giving way to the eruption of singular sense combinations that don't necessarily fit in the consensually established ones. Their task is then not only to reconfigure the limits of each of our senses and their relations to one another, but also to constantly push those limits to tensional thresholds of *dis-sensus*, to produce a crisis in *consensus*. More precisely, their task is to force singular heterogeneous reorganizations of the sensible into everyday experience, namely suspending appropriate places, de-positioning bodies out of their appropriate positions, and listening to the polyrhythmic humming of erupting senses without formal recognition. For, as Rancière states, arts' and politics' aim is not to produce appropriately placed collective bodies: "Instead, they introduce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies," thus calling into "question any distribution of roles, territories and languages" (2000:63, 64).

In a word, both politics and artistic practices should constantly and variably try to unfold the question: How can the imperceptible become perceptible within a given partition of the sensible that apparently has no place for it?

## Sewing Seams

"Concrete is as concrete doesn't."

—Brian Massumi (2002:6)

Now taking into account that time and space, although they are indeed distinct dimensions of experience, aren't formally discernable as such, let us put it this way: what is missed by our most current perceptions of bodily presence and movement, occurring with-in a linear timeline and in a Euclidean space, is that the most embodied of our bodily experience always occurs in a relational spatiotemporal smudge whose end differentially loops back to its beginning.<sup>5</sup> It seems we keep "*looking forward to our own past and looking past into the future*, in a seeing so intense that it falls out of sight" (194). It seems, we are all *Angelus Novus*.<sup>6</sup> It seems

4. Rancière puts it as follows: "No matter the specificity of the economic circuits along which they are displayed, artistic activities are not 'an exception' over the other activities. They represent and reconfigure the partitioning displayed by other activities" (2000:73).

5. This is, according to Massumi, a recursive complex duration that is lost to our conscious awareness, but nevertheless constantly and recursively in-forms (and is constantly and recursively in-formed by) any elementary unit of thought. This has been experimentally confirmed:

In famous studies in the 1970s, Benjamin Libet demonstrated that there is a half-second delay between the onset of brain activity and conscious awareness of the event. Cognitive scientists and theorists of consciousness have worried over this because, in brain terms, a half second is a very long time. [...] All kinds of things might be going on in autopilot as perception and reflection are taking off from chemical and electrical movements of matter. Thought lags behind itself. [...] All awareness emerges from a nonconscious thought-o-genic indistinguishable from movements of matter. (2002:195, 196)

This is where micro-perceptions emerge, which make thought think more than it thinks it does, I guess.

6. Massumi's (2002:194) formulation reminds me of how Walter Benjamin referred to *his Angelus Novus*—Paul Klee's painting (1920), which became Benjamin's Angel of History.

that the very daily empirical experience of an historically, culturally, and sociopolitically embodied body half-involuntarily calls for the emergence of an abstract-virtual spatiotemporal surface of perception—radically *synesthetic* and *kinaesthetic*, more than aesthetic and kinetic—that can only be conceived topologically in a nonlinear temporality.<sup>7</sup> If the way we live is always entirely embodied, then “you” can never be “just about you,” precisely situated in place (“where”?) and time (“when”?), “‘you,’ just as you are” (entirely personal affair...), as we love to define ourselves. It means both that you are never isolated, and that there is more to it: “you” is always connected to other situations and dimensions, embedded in something brighter than “you” in your places, times, and timings.

It’s not that we don’t live in a measurable space and in a linear time as well, as we *in-deed* do. They are not just optical illusions. Bodies don’t just explode the laws of physics. Unavoidable then, it is also true that we live in Euclidean spaces and in linear times: we build, we eat, and we sit in Euclidean space and linear time. Fair enough. It’s just that all this, as reassuring as it may sound, wouldn’t make it to the surface where distinct materialities cross-reference concreteness and abstractness, where supposedly already-perceived forms may re-emerge as just emerging perceptions, and potentially re-color our modes of thinking and perceiving. Without that inter-crossing dimension of dimensions, “you” wouldn’t be reading this, and “I” wouldn’t be writing it. In fact, we have to have Euclidean and topological geometries (many more? We don’t really know how many, do we?) collaborating and co-attracting, their differentiation and mutual integration operating together within our perception.<sup>8</sup> Consequence: in-between, in interference and overlapping, is where we always have to be, to really constantly re-become kinaesthetically inter-fusing thinking bodies.<sup>9</sup> Even when we are visibly positioned somewhere here, sitting and writing at home, in Paris, in France, in Europe, on Earth, on a St. Valentine’s Tuesday—or else visibly moving from somewhere visibly here, to somewhere visibly there. “A ‘surface’ then,” Rancière very appropriately notes, “is not simply a geometric composition of lines” (2000:19). Rather, it is always intrinsically a (political) form of sharing/*partitioning* the sensory dimension of experience.

Get closer. Step aside. Intermingle: In-between is where we may intensively read, move, sing, think, walk, love, fall, or write, and varyingly re-main. In-affection. Still. Still varying.

## Chopping List

I therefore suggest that new insights on time, space, and perception might be found by introducing relationality<sup>10</sup> into the present essay. This can be tried both by rethinking

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7. Peter Sloterdijk refers to the human being as a “topological enigma,” a “creature” that should ask us to constantly renew the question: “Where is it in reality? On which latent scene does it operate as it does what it does?” ([2001] 2003:168).

8. See how Massumi describes interference and superposition between empirical and virtual dimensions: “Without its passage into the empirical, the virtual world would be nothing lurking. Without the passing of the virtual into it, the empirical would functionally die. It would coincide so even-temperedly with its own unity and constancy that it would have no ontological room to manoeuvre: *entropic death by excess of success*” (2002:159, emphasis added).

9. Drawing from Massumi again, on interference or resonation:

It’s not really discrete bodies and paths interacting. It is fields. Gravity is a field—a field of potential attraction, collision, orbit, of potential centripetal and centrifugal movements. All these potentials form such complex interference patterns when three fields overlap that a measure of indeterminacy creeps in. It’s not that we just don’t have a detailed enough knowledge to predict. Accurate prediction is impossible because *the indeterminacy is objective*. (2003; emphasis added)

10. On “relationality” as “already in the world” and registering materially in our bodies, even before we become consciously aware of it, see William James (1996 [1912]:25, 42, 71–72).

AFFECT—affects as “virtual synesthetic perspectives” (Massumi 2002:35)<sup>11</sup>—and by letting go of the formal opposition between the concrete and the abstract (as if abstraction had nothing to do with an excess due to very concrete moves of “perception’s passing”—perception as aesthetics, or a wonderfully pain-full force effect, posing for intensity).<sup>12</sup> Except that putting the above-mentioned opposition aside will force-fully affect the whole opposites’ family, namely co-relatives such as matter and mind, objective and subjective, quiescence and movement, visible and invisible, embodied presence and disembodied absence, present and past-future, space and time (as if we couldn’t *see time in space*, in continuous future-past interplay...).

Problem: to realize this list could extend almost infinitely to other well-known binary beings.

Example (*au pied de la lettre*):

01. Nature and culture.

Comment: as if culture wasn’t nature...

01. Real and symbolic.

No comment.

01. Event and representation.

Comment: as if representation wasn’t a dimension of event-reality, re-entering the relational continuum, always re-becoming eventful sensorial perception...

01. Raw perception and rehearsed perception.

Comment: as if every so-called “first-time” perception wasn’t already half way... a memory.

Comment: as if none of the so-called “higher” forms of perception had ways and means of re-plunging into direct con-tact with sensorial matter...

Comment: as if there wasn’t only a possible way of rethinking raw and rehearsed perceptions: each across and all along the other, inter-modulating. And no question of culturally

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11. What Massumi calls affect is the relationality inherent in every living thing, a

two-sidedness *as seen from the side of the actual thing*, as couched in its perceptions and cognitions. Affect is *the virtual as point of view*, provided the visual metaphor is used guardedly. For affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another. (2002:35)

It should be underlined that Massumi’s understanding of affect as intensity or potential connectedness owes quite a lot, as the author himself states (2003; 2002:32), to the works of Henri Bergson—especially *Matter and Memory* ([1896] 1988), Baruch Spinoza—*The Ethics* ([1677] 1985), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* ([1980] 1987), and to William James—*Essays in Radical Empiricism* ([1912] 1996). Moreover, it also is indebted to their having been read together with recent theories of complexity and chaos.

12. If we keep following Massumi, we might accept that “objects” could very well be just “anaesthetic specifications of the growth pain of perception’s passing into and out of itself. The anaesthetic is the *perceived*, as distinguished from the perceiving: objects passing into empirical existence, sensation passing out of itself into that objectivity. [...] If the empirical is the anaesthetic, then the pain accompanying perception’s passing forcefully into itself and continuing superempirically in flight from its objective quelling—what can this be but the *aesthetic*?” (2002:161).

“higher” cognition mediating naturally “rawer” perception, which is the usual way “to begin with”...<sup>13</sup>

01. Real experience and pure imagination.

Comment: as if experience itself wasn't a very imaginative multidimensional reality...

01. Anaesthetic and aesthetic.

No comment.

01. Mono-sense and cross-sense perception (synesthesia).<sup>14</sup>

No comment. Think about it.

Remember to add tri-oppositions like:

01. Forgotten, misremembered, and remembered.

01. Cognition, perception, and hallucination.

Comment: as if thought didn't hallucinate that it coincides with itself...<sup>15</sup>

Enough.

Press “Pause.”

## Move it! (Don't STOP)

*Hesitate. For one time, oppose.*

Still-ness: for some reason I would like to try to understand, the trope of dance and its performance as vanishing present bodies still has currency and is still pursuing the same old routes and routines along collective and individual imaginaries. Almost everywhere I go (and read), I can still hear its echo. That's why I feel like saying it still resonates more or less subliminally in human practices where you wouldn't expect it to. You will find it still

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13. A somewhat too-long quotation may be helpful at this point, regarding the above-mentioned loop between “primitive” and “higher” forms of perception and cognition, so that we won't miss its far-reaching consequences for a reformulation of ongoing concepts of perception (that frequently draw a line/divide between natural and culturally mediated perceptions):

The loop between “primitive” perception and “higher cognition” has been observed in [...] brain function. One of the most startling findings has been that a single neuron is capable of recognizing a face. / The feedback of “higher” functions undermines the deconstructionist mistrust of “naïve” or “natural” perception. In deconstructivist architectural theory, this mistrust has often translated into an aversion to any talk of direct perception, shunned in favour of mediated readings. But, if social operations like recognizing a face or cultural operations of literate interpretation can dissolve back into direct perceptions, there is nothing to worry about. If there is never any possibility of raw experience to begin with, there is nothing to bracket or deconstruct. The most material of experience, the firing of a single neuron, is always already positively socio-cultural. Conversely, and perhaps more provocatively, *reading ceases to be a practice of mediation*. We are capable of operating socially and culturally directly on a level with matter. / It all becomes a question of modulation. (Massumi 2002:199)

14. About the inter-fusion of senses, see also philosopher and dance theorist Michel Bernard (2001:101–21) who considers that our corporeality is mostly determined by the intersensorial modes in which our perception works. More precisely, the author posits a “fictionary theory of sensation,” exploring the idea that any sensorial experience, in its dynamics of subtle imbrications between sensation, expression, and enunciation, is intrinsically fictionary.

15. As Massumi refers to it, the “Libet Lag” (see note 5) determined that all “awareness is ‘backdated.’” And though

each thought experiences itself to have been at the precise moment the stimulus was applied, [...] the simplest perception of the simplest stimulus is already a fairly elaborate hoax, from the point of view of a theory of cognitive authenticity that sees truth in plain and present reflection. [...] The cognitive model would have to recognize that it, too, has been a matterful hallucination, on the half second installment plan. (2002:195)



enchants a whole lot of literature, philosophy, visual arts, media and cultural studies, cinema, and publicity. And you will find it still at work in many dance and performance practices, as well as throughout dance and performance studies.

The problem is that no matter how elaborate its new versions, this trope always leaves a residue of its old fellow traveler, the most enduring opposition colonized by Western thought: writing (and discourse in general) as a means to capture movement and sensation, and dance as a flowing vanishing art<sup>16</sup> (meanwhile turned into the art of vanishing? Remind me to get back to this...).

Moreover, this approximately two-century-old opposition has it (even if only residually, very *au fond de soi-même*) that dance would have the unique privilege of accessing the body as pure movement and pure sensation—supposedly, the closest to the body a body can be, the (most on the) threshold to the body’s most truly truth. A wonder. Or only just what reverberates in neoliberal official discourse on sensation and movement. Assuming: fluidity inspires and fascinates our next best (me included, I suspect). And there it goes, echoing and far reaching: “Move it!”; “Be flexible!”; “Overcome yourself!”; “Overcome your second best!”; “Project yourself (be a projectile!)!”; “Get a brand new ‘you’!”; “Re-new!”; “Do ‘it’ yourself!”; (Whatever “you” *does*): “Don’t stop ‘it’!”; “Don’t stop!”; “Move ‘it’”!

From here we will always risk returning (even if only very *au fond*) to a dance mystified as a pre-something, a pre-language, a pre-everything you can imagine, with no effective (affective) potential beyond its local appearing, only existing (desisting?) in a fascinating vanishing, unique body *here* and *now*, never again. And again: gone forever. Repeat it after me. Echo “it.” After “I” *has* disappeared into the realms of pastness. Document “it,” for “I” wouldn’t mind. By the way, “who” said documenting was less (a-)live than live-arts? (Remind me to get back to this.)

## Cauliflower Effects

### *Affect as Critical Point*

Recapitulate: My point by now is that what has to “vanish” from theoretical discussions on dance and performance is not only the very notion of specific ontological conditions proper to specific artistic practices, but also general notions of separately operating levels of reality, relating to each other almost exclusively under the mode of mutual exclusion. Separately operating levels of reality would then never intersect but only meet under the mode of distancing formal equivalence, and thus officially allowed, substitution of one another—describing or prescribing, documenting or regulating each other. Inevitably, such distinctions limit the field of operating possibilities, when it comes to dance and performance theory. They only help perpetuate the same old set of action-reaction circuits, instead of helping to explore the interference and superposition circuits at work between distinct materialities, which in fact are mutually included in the same continuum of self-differentiating reality. That is why I argue that some key notions here could be “resonating levels” of emergence, “bifurcation” paths, or simply affect as “critical point” (Massumi 2002:33). These notions refer to affect’s relational operative modes, and as such intermingle at the core of what we may call the turning points of any sensory experience (32). They intervene as openings for a more-to-come. It becomes clear that this is exactly the point where resonance levels are most active, giving way to the sensing of contradictory levels of reality belonging to multiple logics and spatiotemporal organizations. They present, as recapitulations of many versions of one and the same physical system, a continual doubling of the actual by its dimension of intensity

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16. Lepecki notes that “such an ontology [the one attributed to dance] has a historical grounding” and that “it exists only within the horizons of the mournful lament generated by the splitting of dancing and writing, a splitting propelled by the perception of movement and presence as markedly sentenced to disappearance” (2004:137).

(intensity equating with potential). Such a turning point in perception equals its becoming critical. It can only take place when affect appears as the point of emergence of all resonating levels remaining in many ways present (though not necessarily actual).

Now many present resonating levels cannot avoid bifurcating at many points, opening up a supplementary level of complexity in the inter-secting of sensing, thinking, saying, or making. Bifurcation paths are ways of simultaneously covering and uncovering rifts in the field of thought and sensory perception, making apparently distinct terms relate without making them coincide (for example: politics and aesthetics, or matter and mind).

As operative modes of affect, resonance and bifurcation are the conditions for the becoming critical of perception at large. This means affect brings about a multitude of openings for more senses, more thought, more action, more whatever, that leads perception to its becoming critical of what is right now, of what was or has just been, or of what will possibly be. In a register closer to Rancière, this also means it is through these operations that affect can render perceptible new networks of sensing. Affect functions as a “critical point” insofar as it can dismantle legitimate orders of discourse as well as definite relations between words, bodies, minds, actions, and objects. This is the way affect goes against modes of communication that legitimate the “appropriate,” those in which every body, every sense, and every thing is attributed a place or a non-place. Blurring positions and functions, affect appears as a tool for opening up constant redistributions of the places attributed to every body and to every thing.

Is it just me, or is affect now resonating with Rancière’s idea of democracy? It seems like there is at least one level of affect that could bifurcate the political dimension of aesthetics and the aesthetic dimension of politics: the level that inevitably reveals a certain kind of indetermination, if not disincorporation, that survives even in the best identified identities. Let us read what Rancière writes about what the operative mode of arts shares with politics: “artistic phenomena are [...] inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself: a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, *logos* identical with pathos, the intentional of the unintentional, etc.” (2000:31). Let us also read what Massumi writes about affect: “an invitation to recapitulate, to repeat and complexify, at ground level, the real conditions of emergence, not of the categorical, but of the unclassifiable, the unassimilable, the never-yet felt, the felt for less than half a second, again for the first time—the new” (2002:33). And then return to Rancière again to underline that the paths for political and aesthetic subjectivation are surely not those of identification but those of artistic (also literary) disincorporation (2000:64).

In the meanwhile, note that affect cannot be reduced to subjectively captured and qualified emotion. Nor should it somehow be romanticized as only personal depth of each one’s subjective experience. On the contrary, there is undoubtedly much to think over about the relations between affect—mobilized affect—and the new nonideological decentralized forms of power operating within late capitalism.<sup>17</sup> But first of all, before being captured...affect captures (and again: it captures even after it has been captured). It is given to the world as an impersonal gift: affect is merely “the virtual co-presence of potentials” (Massumi 2003). And it is much more about (felt) transitional intensity than just about personal emotions or feelings, although it is surely also what allows personal feelings to intensify and enlarge their

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17. Massumi underlines that “affect is now much more important for understanding power, even state power narrowly defined, than concepts like ideology. Direct affect modulation takes the place of old-style ideology. [...] This post-ideological media power has been around at least since television matured as a medium [...]” (2003). Massumi further asserts that marketing itself, where words like “connectability” make careers nowadays, functions along affective lines. This is “relational marketing,” working on the grounds of affective contagion rather than by rational convincing: “The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory” (2002:45).

potential of actualizing differently. Affect then, is “not just subjective, which is not to say there is nothing subjective in it” (2003). The same doesn’t go for emotion:

[A]n emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progression, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. (Massumi 2002:28)

That is the reason why an emotion is always just a very partial expression of affect. Affect on the contrary is “all about the openness of situations and how we can live that openness. [...] With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life—a heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places” (2003).

Call affect the reason why a body moves through life as a swarm of swirling potentials. Call it also the reason why the complex dynamics of the body’s in-mixing of spatiotemporalities is neither conceivable nor conceptualizable if we don’t take to exploring non-Euclidean ontologies and nonlinear causalities. And finally, call affect the inhabitant of a cauliflower complex, the best way to suggest fractal modes of sensing.

Consequently, if we want to analyze the complexity of our perception, we will need to take all fractal, non-Euclidean, and nonlinear dimensions into account, as Massumi refers: “The organization of multiple levels that have different logics and temporal organizations, but are locked in resonance with each other and recapitulate the same event in divergent ways, recalls the *fractal ontology* and *nonlinear causality* underlying theories of complexity” (2002:33, emphasis added).

One thing is almost certain: affects are *in-deed* analyzable, namely as effects.<sup>18</sup> So why not try to diversify our methods of approach? Getting closer (from a varying distance)? (Question.)

Answer: “The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect” (30).

## On the not yet captured ontological status of becoming “something other than”... *disappearance*

*Get back. Invert senses.*

Talk about processes of disappearing...ask where *it all* goes. Afterwards. Ask also if the place where a performance finds itself after public (re)presentation—should it be memory—is really exclusively invisible and distinguishable from the performance itself, differing both in *nature* (in matter) and in (choreo-*graphic*) *genre*.

Some years ago, performance theorist Peggy Phelan wrote: “Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, in the realm of invisibility where it eludes regulation and control” (1993:148).

Today still, when I read this, questions run over each other through my mind. (Far from disappearing as fast as performances. If.) As a historically situated strategic move intended to challenge the politics of visibility and visibility as politically partitioned, this theoretical assertion may sound effective for a while. Only: can we really escape the trap of visibility (as politically partitioned) from its outside, especially when its “outside” is here taken strictly

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18. Concerning the possibility of analyzing the effects of emerging affects, Massumi argues that “affect is indeed unformed and unstructured, but that it is nevertheless highly organized and effectively analyzable (it is not entirely containable in knowledge but is analyzable in effect, as effect)” (2002:206).

as invisible “inside”—namely, memory as the realm of invisibility—elusively protected from all visibility? Memory as capable of eluding “regulation and control”? I wonder if Phelan’s statements are not evoking a sort of freedom performed by personal memory unattainable by extrinsic constraints, and thus unattainable by politically partitioned visibilities?

Try to leave it open so far. Asking.

Isn’t the only way to resist visibility, to fight from within visibility? And by the way: is memory really the realm of invisibility? Is memory a strictly interior “affair,” and is interiority strictly invisible? The most intimate and personal memory, doesn’t it *force*-fully have something to do with visibilities (though at different levels)? Does any memory, as intimate and personal as it may feel, really escape constraints, visible or invisible? Is memory really a boxed-in “affair”? Never (also) collectively cued?

Change paths: “Consider that there is no ‘raw’ perception. That all perception is rehearsed. Even, especially, our most intense, most abject and inspiring, self-perceptions” (Massumi 2002:66). Consider then, that memory is just a re-activating perception. Not some utopian escape from outwardly performed visibilities. Not that we are not following ourselves within our memories and other most intimate realms of experience. We really are (also), but following ourselves is already (also) following paths that politically partitioned perception has put in us: from the inside, from within our very openness to the outside, not from a separate, imposed-upon outside. So we never really do free ourselves from extrinsic constraints, we only sometimes find the leaks in them and more or less creatively convert them. This doesn’t necessarily shrink our degree of freedom to some merely repetitive re-conversion of something exterior to us. There is nothing to fear at this point: “Wherever you are, there is still

**Memory is not only a realm that is in no way exclusively interior and invisible; it is also a realm that is crossed by and interferes with so-called exteriorly performed visibilities.**

potential, there are openings, and the openings are in the grey areas, in the blur where you are susceptible to affective contagion, or capable of spreading it. [Only:] It’s never totally within your personal power to decide” (Massumi 2003).

From here we may suppose that memory is not a realm immune to visibility. Moreover, *there have to be visibilities* within memory, many

of them working together, for memory is as synesthetic as perception itself, and “synesthetic perception is always an event or performance” (Massumi 2002:190) merging outward and inward dimensions along a one-sided surface. *See?* Memory is not only a realm that is in no way exclusively interior and invisible; it is also a realm that is crossed by and interferes with so-called exteriorly performed visibilities.

How can resistance against entropy then be performed not only “against” entropy but from “with-in” its utmost outside (visible and invisible)? Seemingly, misunderstandings persist, about where and how resistance can be performed: when we believe resistance must be performed from the outside (disappearing from visibility), we paradoxically replace it with an invisible inside (memory as invisible); when we believe resistance is only displayable from within, we just go straight back to the same spot (are we resisting resistance?), and afresh we tend to take this “with-in” for an invisible interiority, opposing, escaping, and finally getting rid of outside constraints.

## Loop the Loop

Re-ask where *it all* goes. Ask also where *it all* comes from. Ask also where *it all* just becomes. Better, ask also if what comes *before* (as production-creation), what comes *during* (as public presentation), and what comes *after* (as documentation of) a performance is really completely distinguishable and different in *nature* (in matter), and in (choreographic) *genre*. Perhaps all

these levels do differ from one another, but only *other-wise*. That is, not as ontologically different, and not as methodologically separate levels of emergence. Rather, they may and generally do resonate intertextually and interchoreographically in one another. For: “The virtual self-standing of [any] vision actually takes place in a crowded bubble” (Massumi 2002:157).

Phelan defined performance ontologically as an experience that only becomes itself through disappearance. The refrain is by now well known: “Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive” (1993:148). And well re-enacted: “Presence and theatre are instances of enactments predicated on their own disappearance” (1997:2).

In a legitimate theoretical move (though almost falling into moralizing, as I read it) pronouncing against documentation as “photology,”<sup>19</sup> Phelan strongly advises us to resist any desire to preserve, further represent, document, or in any way illustrate performances as such: “The desire to preserve the performance is a desire we should resist. For what one otherwise preserves is an illustrated corpse, a pop-up anatomical drawing that stands in for the thing that one most wants to save, the embodied performance” (1997:3). “Always failing to keep the real in view, representation papers it over and reproduces other representations” (1993:19). Sounds fair. Our archives are full of corpses and we should better acknowledge that what we have experienced once in a lifetime is not anymore and will never again be exactly the same way. That, in a way, is life, and performance performing life. Only, it is not that simple. Corpses or any other stiff bodies are seldom that dead. Nonetheless, the refrain comes back, and insists: “Performance’s life is only in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance” (146).

If I get it right, a degree of complexity is missing, a whole set of interference patterns between fields (has it just disappeared along with performance’s current status as “disappearance”?). Hereby, Phelan automatically strikes a note familiar to “on-the-spot” notions of witnessing that insinuate the pressure to be right there at the right moment, to not miss it. Note how both the urge to document and its opposite, the need to “resist” the “desire to preserve” the performance, strangely join in a similar urge toward direct witnessing. For Phelan only mentions documentation as a direct consequence of direct witnessing, as something leading to infinite circuits of representations of representations, from which the “real” live-performance is, on the grounds of its very ontological status, absolutely absent as such. No relation, no interference. I would now like to ask how close is on-the-spot witnessing (be it in order to document or in order to *not* document) to the process itself. It looks like we have long ago left behind the age where we used to speak of “the thing itself,” but we still abide with the pressure to witness processes in “real time,” as the only valid circumstance allowing us to feel close to it.

Is there really an essential value difference between primary and secondary sources?<sup>20</sup>

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19. “Photology” is a term used here in reference to the project of documenting dance, as it emerged within early dance theory and within the frame of Western metaphysical tradition, namely in a sense analyzed in detail by Lepecki: underlined is the fact that dance theory has largely developed out of a documenting effort where documentation turned into “optical-descriptive obsession,” echoing a “mournful lament” (that same one that goes far back to the late 18th century) in the face of dance’s ungraspable presence (2004:124–39).

20. In a side note to a letter entitled “*Les Affects*,” included in a lecture text on collaboration, dance and performance theorist Myriam van Imshoot (2003:342) imparts her desire to work on a conference project with Jill Johnston (author and critic from New York who created a short series of performances, was deeply engaged in the arts and dance world of the ’60s, and was very close to the Judson “family”). For the project, van Imshoot would take Johnston’s place, wearing the same jeans and imitating her silhouette as she appears on the cover of her anthology *Marmalade Me* (1971), and they would cross their visions on the dance of the 1960s. The project has yet to be realized, but van Imshoot maintains that she is very enthusiastic about the idea of cowriting a text that would transcend the double rhetoric of the “I’ve been to it, there you are, here’s my experience” that can only take place with the “Oh, if only I had been to it, and that’s exactly what I regret.”

Another consequence of Phelan's last-quoted assertion is that a neat line between performance and other genres is drawn. If I get it right, there is a certain genre stratification resonating here, between what I would call *choreographic* and *nonchoreographic* practice, with no regard for what I would call affective/critical *contagion*. Could we for a while stop pulling the curtain around the "unique present moment" displayed by performance, and around performance as a unique genre? Could we stop talking of "disappearance" as "becoming something other than performance," and start talking about "changing" and "becoming something other" within performance as well? For isn't "becoming something other" something that works on performances from within? Aren't all the "others" already performing within performance, exploding genre barriers all around? Are dance, performance, and any sort of documentation, really separate moves and genres?

I am thinking of choreographer and performer Olga de Soto, who created the performance *histoire(s)* (2004)<sup>21</sup> out of a documenting process. The choreographer not only transformed a documentation process into a performance, she also transformed the very act of performing into one of documentation, displacing both notions of documentation and of dance performance.

Following an invitation from Culturgest (Lisbon, 2002) to pay tribute to the ballet *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort* (1946),<sup>22</sup> de Soto began with the question "What does it mean to pay tribute?" (2004) and arrived at the conclusion that in the absence of direct witnessing, the best thing to do was to approach the memories of the individuals who had been to the premiere. This is to say, to get in touch with their mental, affective, and physical spaces, and with their modes of telling and relating to their memories. So, instead of analyzing the ballet itself or trying



Figure 1: Olga de Soto, *histoire(s)*, Centre National de la Danse, Paris, 2004. (Image by Gregoire Romefort)

to reconstruct it in some way, de Soto followed the trace of the witnesses' perception of their own memories. Interestingly, the result doesn't help us identify the ballet in question; what we get is a choreographic recomposition of heterogeneous times, spaces, memories, and perceptions, constructed around the projection of a *documentary* film. Projected on four screens of different dimensions, the film shows the witnesses de Soto contacted (this was not easy and the research took her quite a long time) quietly installed at their homes, in their intimate spaces, talking about their memories of the ballet. They were all filmed from the same distance; only the screens are placed and displaced by the dancers onstage, so visible physical distances constantly change, as they visibly constantly change in the mental and affective space of each pair of eyes we see on the screens.

21. Conception, direction, and choreography by Olga de Soto, performance by Olga de Soto and Vincent Druguet. Coproduction: ABAROA/Coto de Caza asbl, KunstenFESTIVAL des Arts, Centre National de la danse-Pantin. Commissioned by Culturgest, Lisbon 2002. Premiered at the *Centre National de la Danse* of Paris, on 6 December 2004.

22. Ballet *en deux tableaux*, choreographed by Roland Petit after Jean Cocteau's libretto, premiered at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées just after WWII, on 25 June 1946. Dancers: Nathalie Philippart and Jean Babilée.

Eventually, what we *see* in the performance of *histoire(s)* is an image of a deliberately biased archaeology of memory and perception that emphasizes the affective dimension of perception, of remembering, and of any project of documentation. We only see the performers onstage in their intervening role, actively but discretely catalyzing (manipulating, reorganizing) the diverse dimensions of experience at play in a choreographic pattern. And at the end we get the impression that the words and voices of the witnesses, their hesitations charged with affective force suddenly appearing as movement, as well as the questions they lead us to, could have been functioning as a choreographic score all the way through the performance.

Another effective realization of the precarious boundary between documentation and performance is *mnemonic nonstop: Ein Kartographisches Duett* (2005), a choreographic performance by Martin Nachbar and Jochen Roller<sup>23</sup> that also disrupts the apportionment of genres, spaces, and times of aesthetic experience. In this performance, choreography, documentation, and cartography patterns inevitably blur and inevitably change. Applying a method close to the technique of the *dérive* developed by the French Situationists,<sup>24</sup> Nachbar and Roller choreographed a performance out of the exploration of the affective anatomy of five European cities (Tel Aviv, Brussels, Berlin, Zagreb, and Graz), collecting and noting impressions, photographing details, and drawing unconventional cartographies of those cities. Their method consisted of intermingling, for example, street events with mental detours, places observed with past encounters, present encounters with past impressions or emerging desires, or the other way around. In a way, this is nothing other than making heterogeneous levels of perception and memory intersect with heterogeneous physical spaces, by opening up the leaking holes between them and official mappings. About this practice, Nachbar states:

When embarking on a walk through one of the cities, our attempt is to find holes and cracks in the official maps, so that we can crawl through them and map the city in a different way than the one we might find in our tour guides. We don't literally trespass onto forbidden territory, but we leave the commonly agreed upon passageways of a city. The result of our practice is a heightened perception and an ability to play with the situations we encounter. With this, we create passages that enable us to leave known territories (of land, but more so of perception); we de-territorialize and ideally, our passages become lines of flight. The space gets perforated, so that our passions can leak into the city and vice versa. (2005)

Looking for modes of generating choreographic scores out of research on the ways we walk (live) through urban space, Nachbar and Roller produced a cartographic/choreographic mode of documenting the paths of our daily lives that questions and extends the borders of the three implicated methods: the choreographic, the documentary, and the cartographic.

Onstage, the score for *mnemonic nonstop* is the projection of transparencies either containing the mappings that are the result of the artists' singular documentation process, or official ones; these mappings are progressively superposed, and each time, the last one added proposes a new approach to the former. As Roller writes:

When one copies the map of the city one is in onto a transparent foil, this foil can be put onto another map and hidden structures appear on them just like secret ink appears when exposed to its developer agent. When, for example, laying a transparent map of Brussels on to the map of Congolese capital Kinshasa, the superposed cities seem to plainly deconstruct the Belgian colonial past. (2005)

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23. Choreographed and performed by Martin Nachbar and Jochen Roller; coproduction of Steirischer Herbst Graz, Klapstuk #12 Leuven. Premiered at Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria, on 15 October 2005.

24. Developed in the 1950s, the technique of the *dérive* was conceived as a way of proposing an alternative mode of moving through a city, namely remapping urban spaces according to their psychogeographic relevance. It should be noted that the use Nachbar and Roller make of this technique largely transforms it into something other, far away from its well-known limits.



Indeed, by traversing these altered cartographic and documentary proceedings, choreography itself can be approached otherwise. As Roller states: “the patterns that evolve by superposing foils in a ‘mnemonic nonstop’ simulate urban experiences: the choreography reorganizes space and becomes itself a map that describes this very re-writing” (2005).

Inevitably, “proper” and officially mapped places are displaced; they become unrecognizable or recognizable otherwise. Besides, this de-territorializing (and re-territorializing) cartographing choreography can also work as a vivid document of a particular gesture: an invitation to rethink our modes of conceiving and delimitating physical and mental spaces, sense and sensorial terms, choreographic, documentary, and cartographic modes of moving.

Look through: performances are often treacherous grounds from the point of view of attempting to stratify genres. Look around: contemporary and actual performances are frequently the most heterogeneous composites, effectively made out of the most diverse supports and out of the most diversely interconnected spatiotemporal dimensions—performance as an inter-modal *kinaesthetic* practice among others, as just one of many other intertextual and interchoreographic genres. This is where documentation’s materiality as a (why not inter-choreo-graphic?) practice, and despite its being more or less illustrative, more or less affectionate toward representation, would start to move, enlarging its current

Figures 2–4: Martin Nachbar and Jochen Roller, mnemonic non-stop: Ein Kartographisches Duet, *Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria, 2005*. Fig. 2, from left: Marek Lamprecht, Martin Nachbar, Jochen Roller. Figs. 3 and 4: Martin Nachbar (left) and Jochen Roller. (Photos by Katrin Schoof)



ontological status of nondisappearing, unchanged and unchanging illustrative, representation mode. This is where documentation modes can also become treacherous grounds from the point of view of attempting to stratify genres. Reason enough to argue that performances' remains (documentation or others) do not necessarily just remain as postmortems wandering along the representational corpses they give way to. Nor do they necessarily remain in boxed-in personal memories.

In short: potential for change is potentially everywhere. Just not always, and not always the same, in the same way.

## On “odd fruits of experience that [sometimes] go ‘raw’”

*There is an objective degree of freedom even in the most deterministic system. Something in the coming together of movements, even according to the strictest of laws, flips the constraints over into conditions of freedom. It's a relational effect, a complexity effect. Affect is like our relational field and what we call our freedom are its relational flips. Freedom is not about breaking or escaping constraints. It is about flipping them over into degrees of freedom.*

—Brian Massumi (2003)<sup>25</sup>

These considerations about “relational flips” that allow degrees of freedom into the most deterministic systems shall lead us directly to the relation between movement, perception, and language. This is to say, directly back to affect. Rancière posits that literature, as a mode of locution belonging to a specific partition of the sensible, “lives only by evading the incarnation that it incessantly puts into play” (1998:14). So literature lives only to escape the becoming-flesh of words, or their becoming recognizable as a specific body that dictates meaning by incorporating words. In other terms, the conflict that inhabits both literature and language is much like the one that inhabits both politics and aesthetics: they only live on the basis of partitions of the sensible, and they only live by disrupting those partitions and modes of communication that function to legitimate the “appropriate,” so that they can create new partitions and new modes of communication and thus give a part to those who have no part; give a part to the “inappropriate” or not necessarily “appropriate,” a surplus that can only be sensed and rendered effective through connectedness—through affect. So, again, it should be noted that Rancière’s “partition of the sensible” is a concept that has the advantage of highlighting the fact that the sensorial delimitations it refers to are neither merely physical nor merely discursive, but apply to the borders where conceptual sense meets the senses; exactly where affects best unfold and produce turning points.

The issue is that in spite of its being direct—or better said, directly in transition—and unmediated (though not quite in the sense of being more natural than other cultural deeds), affect does touch, re-include, and move highly elaborated functions like language. Still, we cannot deny that language is first of all (at least for most of us) the most coded or conventional expression of affect. But there is more to it—something to get back to...

In the meanwhile, we will admit that we use words to capture, seize, tune into, and express affects, usually as emotions. This is namely the more or less calculable part of affect, the one power recycles so well, provided we are not thinking of power as repression, but as it effectively circulates nowadays: as a highly subversive inclusion and conversion, of the most subversive charge of affect. The good news is that affect doesn't just abandon already

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25. Keep thinking about this when, for example, reading Rancière:

Think also about the long and contradictory history of rhetoric and the model of the “good speaker” along the monarchic age, where “excellence of word” was the imaginary attribute of supreme power, and nevertheless remained available to display a democratic function, lending its canonical forms and consecrated images to the subversive break through of non-authorized speakers onto the public scene. (2000:23)

formed forms (whichever their relation to power circuits of regularization) to the delirium of seemingly stiff bodies. Affect moves through and re-opens everything: “There’s an affect associated with every functioning of the body, from moving your foot to moving your lips to make words” (Massumi 2003).

So, affect doesn’t just disappear from effectively actualizing or already actualized discourses, even the most dominating, mimetic, or stereotypical ones. It just somehow remains off to the side, erratically, as a “perpetual bodily remainder,” as a not-yet-exhausted excess, a third and a fourth body, a more-to-come. In any case, more than just gone forever, sentenced to disappear by any of its past or present actualizations. For affect is not only an aspect of emerging unique events like live-performances. For one thing, pronounced or written words, or any more or less arrested forms, affect us, for better or for worse, or neither of the two.<sup>26</sup>

The thing is that language is always about playing between constraint and the remaining room to *manoeuvre*. And it is always difficult to pin down the constantly refreshing e-merging affects; and it becomes stale, when you think of it in the traditional way, namely as a tool for constraining or regulating, a means to describe or even command movement and affect, rather than just a boat to navigate through them, wherever this might lead. Just try using words not only to pin down but also to intercept and absorb irregular blobs of passing rhythms, to scratch your tongue, to stagger, or to do anything you can imagine. Just don’t let words coagulate in and out of your throat. Give them other uses. Burst out laughing, stutter. Use your imagination, and your own language as a foreign one.<sup>27</sup>

Language is definitely amphibian. Two-pronged (many-pronged? I wonder), as Massumi declares: “If you think of language in the traditional way, as a correspondence between a word with its established meaning on the one hand and a matching perception on the other, than it starts coagulating” and distancing itself from the excess of affect that the experiencing of every situation brings about. Though, he continues:

[T]here are uses of language that can bring inadequacies between language and experience to the fore, in a way that can convey the ‘too much’ of the situation—its charge—in a way that actually fosters new experiences. Humor is a prime example. So is poetic expression taken in its broadest sense. [...] Experiencing this potential for change, experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation, even the most conventional ones, that’s not necessarily about commanding movement, it’s about navigating movement. (2003)<sup>28</sup>

Now if we think of perception as a synesthetic experience and accept its “strange one-sided topology” (Massumi 2002:189) as “the general plane of cross-reference not only for signs, sounds, touches, tastes, smells, and proprioceptions, but also for numbers, letters, words, [and] even units of grammar,” then we have to acknowledge that “the learned forms that are usually thought of as restricted to a ‘higher’ cultural plane re-become perceptions” (2002:189). This means that no given forms of discursive pinning-down and documentation, however descriptive, conventional, and stereotyped they may be, ever go definitely stale.

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26. About the interaction between discourse, relational psycho-affective dynamics, and the biological functioning of the speakers, see Boris Cyrulnik ([1991] 1995).

27. Let me borrow some words from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari:

Proust used to say: “masterpieces are written in a sort of foreign language.” It is like stuttering, but stuttering in language itself and not only in speaking. To be a foreigner in one’s own language and not only as someone who speaks a foreign language. To be bilingual, but within one and the same language, in the absence of any dialect or patois. (1980:124, 125; translation by the author)

28. For an example of “navigating” movement along writing, see the works of Hélène Cixous. Deleuze (2002:320–22) refers to the writings of this author as “stroboscopic,” “*une écriture stroboscopique*” that merges fiction, theory, critique, and colors, in a way that produces unknown tones, using words to form variable figures and to make us follow vertiginous speeds of connection in the process of reading.

Keep in mind, knee, and nose that their staleness is just as provisory as eventful experience itself.<sup>29</sup> And if they usually look like just another set of stubbornly persistent forms of arresting movement and affect to be poured into our monumental archives, they also practice other not yet given forms of *remaining*: as “odd fruits of experience that [sometimes] go ‘raw’” (2002:198).

And by the way, do dance and performance always have to equate with fluidity? Keep in mind, body, and brain that real effects of affects are just not part of the “formal definition of the figure” (185).

Lasting problem: a nonsequential one to be dealt with accordingly, or nonaccordingly. (Just look how sequential forms of dealing with problems may also become effective in dealing with nonsequential ones.) Try.

Try 1: Perhaps stiff bodies are not only to be found in documentation, representation, and other textual or imaged supposedly arresting movements!

Try 2: Perhaps fluid bodies are not only to be found in dance and performance! (What if dance and performance’s materialities didn’t really always flow?)

Try 3: Stiff and fluid bodies can be just everywhere. (Interconnectedness of all material supports—including human bodies—at work no matter where, when, and how.)

Sound it:

The idea of “flowing bodies” in a “flowing flux” tinkles a tone familiar to that same linear line that goes from one point to another, from the very beginning and across the middle, right to the end. A-problematically.

We have not found the solution. We have just come back to the heart(s) of “a-problems.”

## Fluidity Rocked

There is a certain ongoing praise of movement, sensation, fluidity, and even any sort of fluency that comes along with the conviction they are necessarily going to lead us “further,” in whatever sense. This prevailing fascination (if not mystification) of movement (and all concerned so-called fluidities) as the privileged doorway both to one’s own most human creativity and to one’s most politically effective body and soul has come a long way. As Rancière reminds: “In the *cit * hostile to theatre and to written law, Plato recommended citizens to constantly rock their infants” (2000:24).<sup>30</sup> Reason enough not to forget “the very ancient link between citizen’s unanimism and the exaltation of the free movement of bodies” (24). Reason enough to make us think of the trouble there is in distinguishing “fair mobility” and “guardians of good movement” from “fake mobilization” and “actors of mobilization,” as Peter Sloterdijk formulates it, should this be the “good” way to formulate it ([1989] 2000:46, 67, 46, 67). For they are neither really formally separable, nor otherwise absolutely distinguishable, both ambiguously bifurcating, superposing and interfusing on the topological surface of our perception. In fact, to think of perception as synesthesia and synesthesia as a one-sided topological surface may help us grasp the highly subversive political (*partitioning*) charge occluded by our amphibiological condition. This is to say: for better, for worse, or none of them. This is why it is important, as Sloterdijk suggests, to pay attention to lateral mobility. Notice then how affective connectedness is not just, and not necessarily, “the good” part of *it all*. Rather,

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29. Massumi points out that “[w]ords, numbers, and grammars recursively–durationally smudge as messily as anything. They reenter the relational continuum. This means that no matter how conventional or even stereotyped they may be, they never really go stale” (2002:198).

30. By the way, in Plato’s partition of the citizens’ activities into verbal and bodily practice (see Rancière 2000:15, 16), the choreographic form comes as the “good” one, countering theatre (a movement space where bodies double in scene simulacra) and writing (a non-moving surface of mute signs like painting). Joining dance and singing in the rhythm of the chorus, the choreographic form corresponds, according to Plato, to the expression of authentic movement appropriate to communitarian bodies.

affect as connectedness is an uncaptured gift given to everyone and everything, but what is not given is how we are going to *live along*, if we don't just want to make something *out of it*. As anything else in this world, the most promising movements, perceptions, thoughts, or affects, can quickly turn into self-captures. Keep thinking: "Think about the contradictory destinies of the choreographic model. Recent works have reminded us of the misadventures of the movement notation elaborated by [Rudolf] Laban in a context of liberation of the body that has nevertheless become the model for the big Nazi demonstrations, before it could recover a new subversive virginity within the anti-establishment context of performance arts" (Rancière 2001:23, 24). Think also how any functionalized and nationalized affective capture "feeds directly into prison construction and neo-colonial adventure" (Massumi 2002:42).

Think also how much space and time (fluent) fluidity images are capturing and occupying all around and in us. Think also how *this all* is getting slippery. Which is not a reason to fasten seat belts—on the contrary. Let ambiguity play, and interplay (with) it.

### **STOP. Every-thing.**

Time to ask where all theoretical attempts to define something ontologically *essential* to dance and performance come from and where they get to. Do they really help in conceptualizing dance's and performance's specific modes of appearing, doing, and disappearing; or do they rather erase something essential to our understanding of the effective modes of moving (affecting) displayed by each singularly embodied performance? Is it fair to suppose that such attempts derive from a limited but much expanded view of what live arts (like bodies) are supposed to be? For what live arts are supposed to be is usually borrowed from reified assumptions of how a body is supposed to feel and move in space and time, where and when it is supposed to start and end.

In a sense, these assumptions are just logical consequences of a general ontology that prioritizes human over nonhuman, position over movement, and discrete terms over relationality.

Unfasten your seat belt. Try the upside-down version of this. See if you get to a non-hierarchical relationality continuum, where concrete-abstract human bodies and concrete-abstract nonhuman bodies and terms not only move from position to position, but also interchange their modes of changing. To-gether (but not too loud): *changing-movement* rather than Euclideanized position, *connectedness* rather than separate bodies and terms. And back to the middle, by the sides (erase priorities): suppose there is no specific kind of presence specific to dance and performance that wouldn't be shared by other embodied practice in any other of the officially separate domains of experience. Suppose what you find at stake in dance and performance is just what you will find at stake in any situation where the issue is connectedness, resonance, and change, in any possible and impossible directions and dimensions. Change changes: suppose any situation where the issue is connectedness, resonance, and change is an open "domain" where human bodily-beings are neither prior nor non-prior. Now if there isn't anything prior to anything, if there isn't anything like merely arrested presence (or Euclidean position), if there isn't anything like merely isolated bodies (or isolated "what-ers"), then there is nothing to discuss. There is nothing to be asserted about dance's and performance's particular ontological condition. Dance and performance melt into the topological surface of melting affects—a connecting movement that doesn't even belong to the embodied human body alone.<sup>31</sup> Dance and performance emerge out of the same experiential continuum of variation, and into those most mixed-up—human and nonhuman, bodily and bodiless—spatiotemporal dimensions that dance and performance studies, and me along with my writings, seem to have some trouble conceptualizing.

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31. Quoting Massumi one last time: "The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible alterity of the nonhuman in and through its active connection to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, in irreducible alterity and infinite connection" (2002:39).

Still-ness. Try again: convey all possible and impossible heterogeneous ontologies, logics, geometries, choreographies, kinetics, and aesthetics you can imagine; use them all to rethink human and nonhuman changing co-presences, interconnected sensations, and merging writings, even before you get to dance and performance. Was this methodology ever to be named, than it would be called “amphibiology,” the only inhabitable sphere for *matter*ing thought, open for all sorts of heterogeneous, not yet thought-through operative methodologies of exploring *matter*ing thought. Openness. Close to the “amphibian anthropology” Sloterdijk (2003 [2001]) once mentioned as “informal thinking,” and according to which we are constantly making something of a dimensional pass into another. Even when we move the least we can, to not frighten “becomings,” as Deleuze (2003 [1990]) once wrote.

Dance and performance melt into the topological surface of melting affects—a connecting movement that doesn’t even belong to the embodied human body alone.

### ***Les devenirs. De-place moving places.***

De-place moving places. Put co-attraction in the place of presence (as disappearing movement). Put changing change in the place of movement (as disappearing presence). This will lead you to Baruch Spinoza (most quoted these days, but still very much uncaptured) and his writings on the body only in the pragmatic terms of its capacity for affecting or being affected, its capacity to step over thresholds. Instead of vanishing present bodies you get bodies as limit-attractions, simultaneously co-attracting and co-attracted, co-absenting and co-presenting along its varying virtual potentials. Try co-incident: You get to affect. Keep writing: affected and affecting is an intensive body only co-incident (though not coinciding) with its charge of affect, provided affect is a never definitely fixed openness.

## **Opening**

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