

Spaces of Movement: Performance, Technology, Transformation

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1. Orientation

Working my way through Mady Schutzman's "Joker Runs Wild" and Heather Raikes' "Fluid Architectures and Sampled Spaces: Reflections on a Media/Architecture Performance," I am initially struck by how different these electronic performance installations are. Part of this is due to different coding formats that frame the experience: Schutzman's HTML system of texts and links versus Raikes' Shockwave multimedia synaesthetic slideshows. Part of the differential gulf is due to the explicit goals of the pieces. The goal of "Joker" is to motivate a change in transformative theatre practices by reinserting a forgotten Boalian technique into contemporary workshops. The goal of "Fluid Architectures" is to stage a transformation in the documentation of performance: this piece is a performance in its own right, but a performance of a documentation of another performance, "cosine." "Fluid Architectures" is a fluid document, an open and moving archive.

Yet another part of my initial disorientation brought on by an expectation of similarity is due to articulations of authorship and performative enactments. "Fluid Architectures," though attributed to Raikes, is produced by multiple authors. Its composition emerges from disparate aesthetic histories. This performing document is collectively thematized, yet singularly enacted. On the other hand, "Joker" is singularly authored from the perspective of a personal aesthetic history (although secondary authorship is attributed to the

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web designer). In a fashion that seems directly reverse from Raikes' piece, Schutzman's work is singularly thematized, though collectively enacted in a workshop-style performance. On my initial trip through these installations, I come up against a curious and unanticipated finding: what holds these pieces together is mathematics. Surely there is more to performance and technology than a common interest in math. Surely, there is. As always with installations, I need to move through them several times, at different speeds and in different orders.

As I work my way through these performance installations further, themes of motion and spatiality—spaces of movement—gain prominence in my readings. The themes linking space and movement to performance and technology are articulated in liberatory and multiplicitous terms. Both of these performances articulate space as a multiplicity. These two performance installations give a sense of how performance—in and as medium, message, and metaphor—can be creative.

Creating a space for creativity is a way that performance can orient thought and action to movement, fluidity, and change. This is an ambulatory and wandering notion of space itself. Here we have (no small) ontological shift. Privilege is given to *movement* over and against static points of rest (i.e., beginnings and endings). Static points are the sedimented structures of thought and action that describe most modernist orientations to knowledge, truth, and reality. A shift in orientation to movement has serious implications for theorists engaging power, politics, arts, virtuality, and the real. In the “vague spaces” evoked and invoked in these performance installations, movement and transformation are given constitutive, aesthetic, and even ethical priority. They let process have its due.

2. Vague

Spaces of movement require a reorientation to spatial phenomena. Boundaries, for example, cannot be conceived as rigid and impermeable (keeping some things inside while keeping everything else outside). Rather, boundaries are constituted in a way that is

flexible and porous. When subordinated to movement, spatiality is given vaguely. In a vague space, something is always moving. Movements between and across vague spaces are abundant in both performance pieces. Schutzman's Joker is a locus of paradox and transformation—both of which serve to unhinge ontological commitments and insert vagueness into space. The Joker is a character of vague spaces, a vagabond providing an element of surprise and an encounter with an event. In Raikes' description of the "cosine" performance, a vagabond orientation to space is central to understanding that piece: a primacy of motion is attributed to the spatial explication of the performance itself, which is, just like the documentary website, presented synaesthetically as a space of sights, sounds, and tactile experience that moves around audiences while audiences simultaneously move through the performance. Here, the notion of boundary is further expressed in terms of movement. The space itself is literally in motion.

In a space of movement, a boundary is never more than a suggestion, something tentative. A space of movement is more like a fog or a mist than something stable and inert. Such a space is alive, yet fleeting. To inhabit a space of movement—to try it on and wear it—is to occupy a place both familiar and alien. You can't get too comfortable unless you get comfortable with change. It's an art of encounter, an aesthetic of orientation. Its occupation is the embodiment of the force of process.

A vague space is characterized by approximation. This is not because some pure essence is being glanced upon and assessed in a tentative way, but because the tentative and the approximate is the essence of a space of movement. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explain this by positing two forms of cultural processes to explain relationships of power, knowledge, and transformation in various discourses. On the one hand there are "royal" or "state" forms. These are the more static forms that articulate structures of political and social power. These are the received views, standard methodologies, official histories, and accepted logics of arts, sciences, philosophy, and literature. On the other hand, there are the "vague," "vagabond," or "nomad" forms of cultural processes that constantly flee, challenge, displace, and usurp state forms. Each form constitutes

a different orientation to its object (static vs. fluid, for example). Interactions between these forms (state and nomad) occur in a vague space—a field of relations. Deleuze and Guattari write that a royal form “continually appropriates the contents of vague or nomad [forms] while nomad [forms] continually cut the contents of royal [forms] loose” (367). In other words, the function of vague process and spaces is to bring about multiple operations of change: supplying creative ideas to structures of power while devolving these power structures into transgressive fragments for rearticulation within a temporary vague space. By contrast, a royal space is a striated space that reproduces idealized objects and constructs a rhetoric of progress. A vague space is a smooth space that produces fleeting events and constructs a rhetoric of encounter. This is just the sort of space—a space of movement—that Schutzman and Raikes promise can be supplied by performance. In this type of space, performances have nomadic effects. Everything is active yet tentative, forceful yet fleeting—contingent, contiguous, continuous. How effective! How affective!

3. Wandering

Schutzman evokes the notion of “ambulant knowledge” to describe the inherent power of approximation—a vagabond encounter—in jokes. Raikes evokes the “flowing language” of the rheomode to describe dislodging movements of bodies—a nomadic encounter—in the dance component of her performance. Jokes, dances, or any other texts whose enactment reverses the ontological priority between movement and rest, trajectory and destination, can have the effect—and affect—of little explosions: bombs of sense and sensation. Jokers and performers become vagabond characters: the vague embodied; movement in the flesh. Their constitutive labor results in the creation of spaces of movement. Movement is the essence of the structure of these performance spaces. Any kind of space—no matter how fleeting or rigid—has the potential to be both effective and affective. Writing of architecture in performative terms, John Rajchman explains,

We might distinguish between two kinds of spatial disposition, effective and affective. In the first, one tries to insert movements, figures, stories, activities into some larger organization that predates and survives them; the second, by contrast, seeks to release figures or movements from any such organization, allowing them to go off on unexpected paths or relate to one another in undetermined ways. (92)

Such a distinction, of course, is formal, as both tendencies will reside in any space and any construction of sense. The key is that movement is inherent to each kind of spatial disposition—spaces are living processes and material forces. The question then becomes one of evocation and use. Can we call forth movement, the vague, a sense of wandering? Can we entice it to action? How will we use these little bombs of sensation as they scatter meaning and possibility throughout our vague spaces?

Construct performances (mundane or formal) in ways that engage movement. Explode sense and sensation to create a space for change. Wander among ideas and affects, drawing unforeseen connections. Maintain openness to potentiality and encounter. Think of performance as an encounter . . . with a vague space. Think of performance as a mode of habitation, as a liminal life, as dwelling in spaces of movement. Think of performance as the constitution of “nomadic thought.” This is how Schutzman sees Boal’s joker technique being put to use: turning theatre and social structures into nomads, unhinged by paradox, exploded by affect. This is how Raikes sees performance being put to use: turning art and perception to a wandering orientation, unhinged by motion, exploding the distance between performer and audience until it vanishes.

4. Encounter

Elizabeth Grosz writes, “Thought confronts us necessarily from the outside, from outside the concepts we already have, from outside the subjectivities we already are, from outside the material reality we already know” (61). Confrontation from the outside is an encounter. I express the concept of encounter agonistically more because of our resistance to it than by its imposition on us. What Raikes’ fluid

performances and Schutzman's fluidizing Joker do are to force an encounter, to confront us with different modes of perception and different possibilities for subjectivity. They are necessarily confrontational since we tend not to welcome difference, transformation, and change into the habitation of our habits. But what if we try, rather, to inhabit our encounters and sustain their intensities?

An encounter is rapt with joy and wonder; it is an opening of and an openness to potentiality and the virtual. Performance, in this sense, is pragmatically and inherently virtual. It is through encounters with its own virtuality that performance gets its power as doing, as creative force, as burning fire of liminality. This notion of virtuality is ontological, and refers to something much different than new media (though, an encounter with new media can often be teeming with the virtual). As I am employing it here, the virtual is a figure of creativity, an openness to the future. It is the condition of the possibility of change and movement, the form of fluidity. As Grosz puts it, "The relationship between the virtual and the actual is one of surprise, for the virtual promises something different to the actual that it produces, and always contains in it the potential from something other than the actual" (12). The goal of performance is to force an encounter with the virtual: to surprise. To bring it on. To open it up. To orient us to the future precisely by dis-orienting us from our habits and complacencies. As we inhabit our habits, we close ourselves off to encounters by constructing impermeable spaces: psychic and material bunkers to protect us from the imperturbable rush of movement, change, transformation . . . life.

5. Between

To be outside is to be between. The outside is inside in the sense that it is always in-between points of stasis, points of rest, points of arrest—between the institutions, subjectivities, categories, and other cultural structures that arrest movement, sense, potentiality, the wild.

What we must take great care in expressing is that the in-between is not subordinate to the terms that it is purportedly between. The between is not subordinate to points. Rather, to be between is to be

moving and to be virtual. It is potential, change, and openness to the future. Between—the middle—is becoming, process. The middle is the only place to start for performance, because the constituents of performance—bodies, sensations, affects, arts, encounters—are always in spaces of movement, residing nomadically as inhabitants of vague, liminal spaces. Both performances are performances from a between: joking mines the space between decorum and liberation; Raikes' performance mines spaces between performers and audiences, wholeness and flux, and containment and dwelling.

A between is not some void separating two objects. It is not a position, a point, or a location. As Brian Massumi puts it, “the in-between, as such, is not a middling being but rather a being *of* the middle—the being of a relation” (70). Relations are external to their terms. They are in excess of points. A relation is a vague space—a virtual opening—that is ontologically distinct from whatever points are being related. Massumi explains that such an ontological distinction “is in fact an indispensable step toward conceptualizing change as anything more or other than negation, deviation, rupture, or subversion” (70). Operations like negation and subversion may dislodge the relative ordering of terms in signification, but they don't provide a new set of terms.

An ontology of the middle is thus an ontology of change and movement. It is the constant introduction of something more, new, unexpected. An ontology of the middle—the between—for performance is the transformative potential of performance, the surprise of the event. To return to Deleuze and Guattari, “*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (25). No matter the duration or breadth of a performance, look for the moments of movement. Look for the moments when things get quick. Be open to the surprise; it just may carry you away. Be careful, though, or you might miss it.

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