
Performativity and the event: enacting a philosophy of difference

John-David Dewsbury

School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol BS8 1SS, England;
e-mail: jd.dewsbury@bristol.ac.uk

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Abstract. What is performativity? In this paper I set out to encounter this question by intimating the directions we are forced to consider when thinking through the performative. In centring my arguments within the corpus of Deleuze's philosophy of difference I advocate academic production as creative of thought. This is to suggest a performative thinking and doing that unfolds our way of looking at our social, corporeal, human dramas and the technologies by which we feel able to analyse something, and in so doing, enact its constitution. Coursing underneath this issue of performativity is the problematisation of the term of the subject—what if the event was more important? What do we understand of the event if not through a sense of subjectivity? Insinuated within the confrontation with performativity are fundamental implications associated with the timing of something as it happens, the centrality of the material and visceral body to this, and the settings through which events take place. Arguing through this triality I extract three symptomatic themes of performativity: that it speaks of irretrievability, indeterminacy, and excess. Ethically, and in conclusion, emphasis is placed on the empiricism of life in its *doing*—the present moment of immediate uncertain happening as we are continually enacted out of 'knowing' how to go on within concrete, material circumstances.

“The theatre of repetition is opposed to the theatre of representation, just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept. In the theatre of repetition, we experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space which act without intermediary upon the spirit, and link it directly with nature and history, with a language which speaks before words, with gestures which develop before organised bodies, with masks before faces, with spectres and phantoms before characters.”

Deleuze (1994a, page 10)

Introduction: “The theatre of repetition”

Heisenberg Why did I come? And once again I go through that evening in 1941. I crunch over the familiar gravel, and tug at the familiar bell-pull. What's in my head? Fear, certainly, and the absurd and horrible importance of someone bearing bad news. But... yes... something else as well. I can almost see its face. Something good. Something bright and eager and hopeful.

Bohr I open the door...

Heisenberg And there he is. I see his eyes light up at the sight of me.

Bohr He's smiling his wary schoolboy smile.

Heisenberg Suddenly I'm free of all the dark tangled currents in the water.

Margrethe Look at them. Father and son still. Just for a moment. Even now we are all dead.

Bohr For a moment, yes, it's the twenties again.

Heisenberg And we shall speak to each other and understand each other in the way we did before.

Margrethe And from these two heads the future will emerge. Which cities will be destroyed, and which survive. Who will die, and who will live. Which world will go down to obliteration, and which will triumph.

Bohr Come in, come in...

In the above scene from Michael Frayn's play *Copenhagen* (1998) we are at the moment in the theatrical experience just before the interval: a reiteration of the question "Why is Weiner Heisenberg visiting his old mentor, Niels Bohr, in the Copenhagen of 1941?" As Frayn says himself "A lot of one's actions one can't give a coherent account of. Not afterwards, and not at the time either, because one is too busy doing the particular thing one is doing" (1999). So as a minimal starting point, all we can say with certitude is that something is happening here, that something is always happening in itself. Apparent within the transitory and decaying corporeality of such moments one can also suggest that while these happenings may not possess immediate meaning they are nevertheless intelligibly felt. Take the flow of action in the scene above, and feel the pull towards the scenic clarity of the tug of the bellpull. One foot after the other and towards the next. Stop. A threshold is encountered, whereupon there is a moment of hesitation perhaps with its own duration and affect—a sense of fear, the tingling 'being-there' that feels like trepidation. Until somehow, after however long, and through some force of attraction the bellpull proffers motion and channels the action beyond this period of arrival. Next, there is some sense of expectation, a knowing of the face that is imminent, a knowing that is not photographic, however, nor Cartesian and certain, but felt: bright, eager, and hopeful. The door opens, and what is next spreads out. More moments unfold, proliferating and swarming forth, each with a residue pertaining to a weight of its own, a weight that distributes the actualisation to come by increasing the potential for some encounters whilst decreasing that of others. Extracting the performative qualities from this event and exposing the performative in its immanence within any topography of action is the focus of this paper. So, after a prologue—a necessary act that guides customary modes of thinking towards a performative bent—we begin the extraction as follows:

"Philosophy is like a novel: you have to ask 'What's going to happen?' 'What's happened?' Except the characters are concepts, and the settings, the scenes, are space–times" (Deleuze, 1995, page 140).

So taking *Copenhagen*: here is a moment of happening, the timing of which subdivides ad infinitum outwards into past and future, delivering us unto the central performance of the two bodies of Heisenberg and Bohr, and carrying us forth into the unfolding constitution of an event as it emerges. A transposable appraisal of the performative is thus proposed through the apprehension of associations that structure the paper into three scenes of argument: first, the *time*, or *timing*, of something as it takes place (both in the sense of it being actual, and in the way this etches out space, taking and possessing place); second, the centrality of the *force of our material, visceral, and sensual embodiment*; and third, the constitutions folded out of and through the *architecture and situation of eventhood*.

Additionally, each scene is organised around three themes that act repetitiously as refrains. These make suggestive assertions over what the concept of performativity is and is useful for, and are as follows: first, performativity is nontextual and nondiscursive in that it is, in Bataille's terms, *irretrievable*, or it is not at all (see Hollier, 1992). It is of the sketching out of the present moment. It speaks of happening as an act of immediacy, of looking towards spontaneity and 'never-before-occurring' situations encompassing aspects of risk and chance. The performative thus utters the vitality that is intimate to our 'death-subjected' bodies (Lingis, 1991). Second, performativity itself is *indeterminate*, in that it does not rest on there being intentionality behind it (see Rostas, 1998 on Humphrey and Laidlaw, 1994). In this sense the performative uptake is antihumanist and antisubject-orientated. Schieffelin illustrates this quality by arguing that "our expressivity is not entirely under our control, but rather that it [also] belongs to the situation" (1998, page 197). Finally, performativity is *excessive*, in that it

expends unaccountable energies and is affective rather than purely effective. It speaks of a multitude of possible outcomes within an event: everything that actually happens could also have always happened otherwise and simultaneously other happenings occur irrespective of the focus of one subjective orientation. Thus, at this moment either take in the advisory bias of the “prologue”, or proceed straight to “scene one”.

Prologue: introducing performativity

Performativity is a slippery term indubitably linked to the idea of a performance, but, regardless of the multiple instances by which a performance might come to be defined (see Schechner, 1994), the performative slips across, beyond, and through such actual renditions. In this sense, whilst constituting a discrete act—the performance—the performative is not itself a concept signifying such an act. The performative is the gap, the rupture, the spacing that unfolds the next moment allowing change to happen. Alongside this easy conflation of performativity with performance, there is the additional concern that the boundary between performance and everyday life is increasingly becoming obscured such that everything becomes a performance. Currently within social sciences there is a prevalent assertion that a performance comes about through there being an audience (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). Thus, in everyday circumstances people become performers because they *underline* their behaviour under the auspices that they are being scrutinised by others (including, in narcissistic terms, themselves). It is the closeness of the word ‘perform’ (to make or do something) to the word ‘act’ (to dissimulate, feign action) that causes this discursive doubling up (Schechner, 1994). The distinction I wish to make in this paper is that narcissistic performance chimes with the latter, whereas it is the former general performance, practice let us say, that is constituted by the performative.

A key concern remains: is the concept of performativity one for all occasions? Yes, in that the performative has a univocal sense: it is the cusp of an emergent structure. And no: whilst univocally speaking of the incessant alterity within the spaces of our encounters, the potential the performative etches out for refusal, fracture, and torsion is set within *specific* sites. In this it is necessarily aberrant and parasitic upon conventional, citational, and socially stratified context (whether that be upon the theatrical structures and rules of a specific performance art or sited event, or whether upon Goffmanesque performances set to everyday life). As Perloff (1996) notes, our structures of meaning have to be repeated to work, and as this always entails a shift in context as well as in use, everything becomes open to chance. Hence, whilst the performative, as a theoretical tool or concept, can be used in any given circumstance, its usefulness and what it uncovers and creates are fundamentally specific to the context in which it is sited.

To etch out this difficult terrain of performativity I appropriate elements of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference (1990; 1994a), one that speaks difference in itself as independent of objective grounding, irrespective Hegelian dialectics, and unattached to transcendental presuppositions. In companion with Guattari in this concept of difference Deleuze issues an esoteric rendition of desire: a philosophy of desire as spontaneous, chaotic, and irreducible emergence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; 1988). Here desire performs the real, actualising specific moments of enunciation and utterance that emerge out of the differentiation of several layers of difference—difference shaping and associating ideas; difference expressing forces and feelings; and difference implicating and implicated in an entity’s emergence and reproduction of itself (Goodchild, 1996, page 12).⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ This series of differences parallels the triality of timing, the body, and the event that structures this paper, respectively.

Difference, in other words, as a stuttering that “no longer affects pre-existing words, but, rather, itself ushers in the words that it affects” (Deleuze, 1994b, page 23). The performative is the ushering in of the worlds that it affects: it is “an actualization, a series of practices... [that] does not provide blueprints, models, ideals, or goals. Rather, it experiments; it makes; it is fundamentally aleatory; it is bricolage” (Grosz, 1994a, pages 195 – 196).

So, in lieu of the fact that everyone has habits of thinking (Deleuze, 1995, page 160), I want to unpack the need to police the performative by setting out five aspects that the performative shares in kinship with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics: opposed to the verb ‘to be’ “the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and... and... and’” (1988, page 25). First (a possible beginning), performativity is about *connection*.⁽²⁾ One asks what something does, and how in its doing, or being thus, it connects with other things, digresses boundaries instigating new ones, whilst rejecting, separating, and recomposing others. This ‘striking across’ incorporates and brings about the embodied performances that make us “deal with ourselves and things in our everyday coping” (Dreyfus et al, 1997, page 17). This has “nothing to do with signification” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pages 4 – 5) for via the performative the ruptures, folds, fissures, and ephemeral alliances sanctioned by discourses of identification are exposed (see Grossberg, 1996). Furthermore, “there are no longer any true or false ideas, there are just ideas” (Goodchild, 1996, page 2) emerging out of thinking in lines instead of points — it is not “beginnings and ends that count, but middles” (Deleuze, 1995, page 160). This ‘eventual’ space courses out of collective and connective assemblages, speaking, and being spoken through, a language which is “an essentially heterogeneous reality” (Weinrich, 1968; quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 7).

Heterogeneity, a second characteristic, opposes the arborescent manifestation of the nostalgia for an ordinary past (roots) and its One anticipated, ultimate future (of outstretched yet connected branches).⁽³⁾ Opposite to reflection, referentiality, the imitation of the Same and comprisement within the One, think experientially of inauguration, “a sense of origin as occasion”, as a beginning arising only in the performative moment (Gibson, 1996, page 88). Through immanent relations of proliferating couplings variant domains, capacities, objectives, and outcomes are assembled, offering up, opening, and unfolding alternative, more situated, spaces that contest the discourses of our present and possible futures, vitally giving back to our studies of life the multiplicity of the present and the alterity of the future. In other words, history is not seen “as a linear advance up the ladder of progress but as the crossing of non-linear critical thresholds (bifurcations)” (De Landa, 1998, page 15), the very action of which pits the confluence and flow of life into actualised, and several, states, or possible worlds, that coexist and interact simultaneously. Rather than talking of panaceas, of whole intended topographies traced out of a homogeneous community, think of the ‘unintended collective consequences’ of human – nonhuman interaction bringing about ‘emergent properties’ (De Landa, 1998, page 15) within a “whole micropolitics of the social field” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 7).

Instead of foundations, and operating without a unifying force, one senses in the performative *multiplicity*: “an every-changing, non-totalisable collectivity, an assemblage defined, not by its abiding identity or principle of sameness over time, but through

⁽²⁾ These characteristics are prised from the introductory chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

⁽³⁾ The placement of the notion of history in our conceptual machinery is clearly prevalent, having considerable significance; for example “both classical thermodynamics and Darwinism admitted only one possible historical outcome, the reaching of thermal equilibrium or of the fittest design” (De Landa, 1998, page 13).

its capacity to undergo permutations and transformations, that is, its dimensionality” (Grosz, 1994a, page 192). Away from a dialectically anxious constitution—“either there is an absolute ground or foundation, or everything falls apart” (Rosch et al, 1991, page 140; see also Bernstein, 1983)—the argument is for something that is more actual to our being caught in the midst of working on, making anew, amalgamating, acting and reacting with others and with things. Thinking the performative in *this* way is in seeing the enactment of a path between, and through, the theoretical questions of objectivism and subjectivism (which constitute the polarised versions of the absolutism that spars with relativism).

The performative adopts an open-ended stance toward human experience, becoming *a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure*. Now one maps as “an experimentation in contact with the real”, performing the mapping, having “multiple entryways”, and exists, being “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 12). Our enacting then, both through our speech acts, and our bodily performances that carry them forth, propose and create connections which configure the ‘object’ allowed to materialise in discourse (see Haraway, 1991; 1997). In other words, both our thought (ideas) and action (practices) assemble the relations of human and nonhuman and announce the discourses through which we exchange and, through description, make our experiences meaningful. Always this is an immediate task, one of “observing oneself, with a certain distance, in... the midst of the hurly-burly of everyday events, crises, deadlines, and myriad pressing demands” (Rabinow, 1997, page xviii). This “non-epistemic ontology—activity” (Holzman and Newman, 1997, page 11), or performative ontology,⁽⁴⁾ does not mean an escape from the material struggles of the world, for, through arguing that all thinking, knowledge creating, and experience referencing is a bodily process, it speaks of the variation of our embodiment within the lived world itself. Furthermore, instead of orientating arguments from the presupposition of self-autonomous, intentional agents of subjectivity, one therefore focuses on the “common human practices and skills into which we are socialised and that in turn produce people, selves, and worlds” (Dreyfus et al, 1997, page 16). Thus “our primary relation to our environment consists in practical competence” (Crossley, 1996) and is about “knowing how to negotiate our way through a world that is not fixed and pre-given but that is continually shaped by the types of actions in which we engage” (Rosch et al, 1991, page 144).

Finally, *asignifying ruptures*, breaks, discontinuities: an instigation of indifference to determinations. “My everyday has a certain routine, doubtless, but it is also touched by a deal of unexpectedness” (Taussig, 1992, page 141); something happens before one construes it as happening to oneself (Gibson, 1996, page 201). Let me give an example of this: “only when there is a disturbance of some sort do we appear to ourselves as agents, with beliefs and desires directed toward goals that require some particular action” (Dreyfus et al, 1997, page 18). The performative is announced out of the diffuseness of the ineffably unexpected, out of subtle suggestions emerging out of an encounter itself (Gibson, 1996, page 200). These are enactments not of “sense so much as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic knowledge that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational” (Taussig, 1992, page 141).

⁽⁴⁾ Think here of the way Deleuze and Guattari’s classificatory schemata and concepts are differential and as varied as their frameworks, and where consequently their insights and methodology change as their works progress from one to another, and from within. Thus in effect several concepts are rehearsed over again, especially the concept of the event.

Scene one: timing performativity—“*Moving is opposed to the concept and to representation*”

Slipping in, one begins here with the assumption that imbued within any conception of the performative there is a sense of time, or timing. Take the ever-changing dimensionality propelling encounter after encounter in the scene from *Copenhagen*. The simple act of footstep after footstep carries the situation (and Heisenberg) forth into the next moment. This is differentiation as “the explosive internal force that life carries within itself” (Deleuze, 2000, page 51). And yet, through this “positive, internal movement, being must become qualified and concrete in its singularity and specificity” (Hardt, 1993, page 14). Therefore, I want to suggest that by utilising Deleuze’s conceptualisations of time by juxtaposing the Stoic configurations of Aion and Chronos, it is possible to think of the same and the different, the concrete singular and the ongoing continua, together. The actuality of Chronos acts as a leverage for apprehending the qualified, necessary, and determinate sense of our being, whilst Aion provides a sense of the vital openness and indeterminacy of experience as it happens. All of which etches out the excess primacy of the “heterogeneous time of difference over the spatialised time of metrication with its quantitative segments and instants” (Boundas, 1996, page 92). As May (1996) notes, these concepts do not work to show us what time is; rather they are normative in relating understanding of the temporal towards certain uses. In other words, this is not about having a better understanding of the world; rather it works to encourage better ways of living in a world conceived in the ‘tactical resourcefulness’ (Conley, 1993) by which we make aspects of life apparent.

The *irretrievable* as Chronos—corporeal and actual

There is a sense that we do not experience the present as something wholly unique. We schedule our lives, making of them representations, measuring our encounters temporally with minute exactitude, becoming impatient with the present “whose duration restricts our access to a future event that we desperately need to make real” (Crocker, 1998, page 486). We wish to eliminate time’s interval whilst living so draconiously by it. This can be aptly phrased as proleptic living: living as if a future event was accomplished already—so, as Margrethe Bohr says in *Copenhagen*, “Even now we are all dead”. Irretrievable lives. It happens. Tick-tock. This is the time of Chronos. There are three aspects of this conception of time that are key to the representations that render the performative visible and that through habit communicate the event that unfolds around performative moments.

First, a proleptic echo of an event that will be recounted again shortly: first this happened—‘she raised her hand’, *tick*—then—‘he drew back’, *tock*. What is being done and what then has been done is understood and categorised via discrete manifolds. This is a turn taking that is discontinuous and actual, encasing us into a series of successive, relative presents providing us with the building blocks for the civilisation of time, “an organisation that humanises time by giving it form” (Kermode, 1966, page 45). Thus think of the clock’s tick-tock as two discrete manifolds, where “tick is a humble genesis, tock a feeble apocalypse”. Chronos thus incorporates; it measures “out the action of bodies and causes” (Deleuze, 1990, page 162) seeing difference as only that which exists between self-identical entities and which consequently only speaks of difference in degree (Deleuze, 1991a).

Second, the eventhood rendered in Chronos is that of a vaster present: from the moment of her rising hand, extending through to the withdrawal of his face. Thus only the present exists so that the future and the past are branded *relative modalities* of the one present (see Deleuze, 1990, page 162; 1991a, page 74).

Third, the movement represented by Chronos delineates time as the shift from the possible to the real, and thus involves loss—an irretrievability rendered because the other possibilities are now impossible. For example: Chronos as Copenhagen, September 1941—do you go and see Niels Bohr, or do you wait, do you put it off such that you will not see him again until the year 1943? Perhaps then you might never see him again such that things were going the way they were...? It happens, it has to happen, time passes, and in practice you are judged by what you do. Meanwhile possible futures are being shut down whilst equally new possibilities open up. This is illustrated in the smallest details—consider, for example, in this incident from Milan Kundera’s novel *Slowness*, the position of Berck as he is made to vie for political popularity with Duberques:

“Berck had lunch in a famous Paris restaurant with a group of people with AIDS, ... not to miss an opportunity for setting a good example, Deputy Duberques had invited the cameras to come in at dessert time. The moment they appeared on the threshold, he rose, approached one of the sick men, raised him up from his chair, and kissed him on the mouth... Berck was caught short. He understood immediately that, once it was photographed and filmed, Duberque’s great kiss would become immortal; he stood up and thought hard whether he should go kiss an AIDS person... those few seconds of hesitation cost him dearly, because the camera was there and, on the nightly news, the whole of France read on his face the three phases of his uncertainty, and sniggered” (1995, pages 14–15).

Every minutia of action clearly holds an unbearable weight of responsibility actualising what is, up until that moment, seemingly virtual. In the split moment, or the performative rupture, of Duberque’s kiss lies the commutation between virtuality and actualisation. The clarity of the actual kiss signifies the complete change of the situation as it is represented through the sociocultural politics netting the eventhood. Through this Berck is incorporated into the material reality and the specific netting of its signification via this moment of embodied connectivity. Putting aside for the moment the fact that there are multiple nettings of signification adequate for the communication of this moment, the movement that potentially makes such an action is hidden behind the representation of time as a succession of instants. This is the paradox of Zeno’s arrow: “movement cannot be reconstituted on the basis of instants any more than being can be constituted on the basis of presents” (Boundas, 1996, page 83). Rather than an atomistic conception of experience—an empty linear sequence of nows—time is actually created in experience by the way in which moments are associated (Goodchild, 1996, page 17). This virtuality is apprehended in the time of Aion, so, like paradigms but simultaneously, we shift plane and realise that it is happening whatever...

The *indeterminate* as Aion—incorporeal and virtual

It is happening: this is difference as the movement of a virtuality that is actualising itself (Deleuze, 1991a, page 93–97). This is the time of Aion. Contrasting Chronos by not judging time purely in relation to the death of its contents as corporeal and actual, Aion conceives time purely in terms of “the explosive internal force that life carries within itself” (Deleuze, 2000, page 51). In other words, it is that which delivers us to the instant in “an internal multiplicity of succession... *virtual and continuous*” (Deleuze, 1991a, page 38).

“There is only one time (monism), although there is an infinity of actual fluxes that necessarily participate in the same virtual whole” (Deleuze, 1991a, page 82).

Relative to Chronos, instead of speaking of the one present Aion conceives “a future and past [that] divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum

into past and future, in both directions at once” (Deleuze, 1990, page 164). In other words, Aion is conceived of this monistic, virtual time, whereas the actual fluxes are made apparent through the more precise narrative contouring of Chronos. So, one’s implied territory expected in the time of Chronos is disrupted by this continuous flow of Aion. The point is that we cannot be fixed points *in* the world for we become *with* the world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, page 169). Thus, this interplay, between Aion and Chronos, allows a communication of a minimal subjectivity whilst never denying the fact that any subjectivity cannot be anything other than a process of becoming (see Smith, 1998, page xxxvi). It is not identity that is rejected; rather there is a rejection of identity being subsumed under a transcendental principle (see May, 1994, page 46), and as such the significance of performativity as the frontier teetering in between the necessary and the unexpected comes to the fore.

Finally, Aion is virtual in that it cannot be grasped; it is indeterminate in existing as the *pure empty form* of time that traces the frontier between things (Deleuze, 1990). Something does not exist without the future mode and a past genesis, but these dimensions do not exist with it, they are virtual. So, thinking in terms of Aion is to think time itself, to think of the immanence of another world of incorporeal, or surface (nonindividual), effects that are about ‘pure operation’ not incorporation (Deleuze, 1990). Immanence to the virtual presents the next happening as that which is in liaison with all that has ever been, whilst equally presenting the fact that the virtual whole changes as it endures such that novelty arises. Without the force of the future upon the present, action is unimaginable. Yet, despite expectations of what is to come this sense of future is likewise unforeseeable. In summary: Aion gives credence to a non-representational way of sensing the world, apprehending in the spacing between two enactments, a virtuality of forking time and of infinitely saturated space (Borges, 1964). And it is this gap which allows us finally to intimate a virtual space that hovers immanently around all that is done, shadowing everything realised with what might have been (see Deleuze, 1990, page 100). It is not that we should ever fully know these things, rather the point is that first *it* happens before we represent the event via the question of ‘*what* happened?’

The excessive as virtuality

Virtuality is a key concept in the work of Deleuze. Unlike possibility, the virtual is always real; being inaccessible but necessary, not proceeding but contemporaneous to the present (see Massumi, 1992, pages 167–170; also Deleuze, 1991a, page 96). This is virtuality as “real potential that is imperceptible in itself” (Goodchild, 1996, page 4).⁽⁵⁾ The unity of a moment of actualisation—that minimal subjectivity in a doing—is in fact “a contingent operation holding together a potential divergence” such that the virtual opens up uncharted directions (Rajchman, 1997, page 18). It is important to note with all the talk of virtual geographies that the virtual in this sense has nothing to do with a representational system that configures an unreal space of interaction. Here, the performative frontier proceeds not by elimination (possibilities not realised), nor by limitation (thwarted possibilities) but only by creation (the actualisation of potential) (see Deleuze, 1991a, page 96). Every move you make is an untimely moment redistributing what has gone before while opening up what may yet come (Deleuze, 1991a, page 96; see Hayden, 1995, pages 295–296).

⁽⁵⁾ “Take a lump of sugar: It has a spatial configuration. But if we approach it from an angle, all we will ever grasp are differences in degree between that sugar and any other thing. But it also has a duration, a rhythm of duration, a way of being in time that is at least partially revealed in the process of its dissolving, and that shows how this sugar differs in kind not only from other things, but first and foremost from itself” (Deleuze, 1991a, pages 31–32).

The crucial point is that to understand any moment is to grasp its field of latent potential such that whatever significance is given to an event it is dependent on what *could* have happened. Events take place *in* time, that is to say that it is often a delusive practice trying to predetermine events in advance of their occurrence; after all there is always a surplus constituting ‘the choice’ that makes those moment-by-moment decisions real. Take, for example, the event mentioned above—‘she raised her hand’, ‘he drew back’:

“I fancied they both stood still for an instant, and looked, as it were, strangely at one another, *but I may not have seen rightly in the crowd*. It is asserted, *on the contrary*, ... that Liza, glancing at Nikolai Vsevolodovich, quickly raised her hand to the level of his face, and would certainly have struck him *if* he had not drawn back in time ... I must admit I saw nothing myself, but all the others declared they had, *though they certainly could not all have seen it* in such a crush” (Dostoevsky *The Possessed*; quoted in Morson, 1994, page 122, my emphasis).

Morson makes clear that we are given here not one but many potential events, such that Dostoevsky’s purpose is “to suggest that reality includes what might have happened” (1994, page 123). It is not that there are several perspectives on the same world, rather that each viewpoint opens up another world that is at the same time ‘of this world’. So, if what makes an action significant is that this happened rather than that, that there is a choice and a potential difference, did Nikolai move, or is Lisa someone who is ultimately unable to inflict such action? The event in itself speaks of all these worlds, of all these potential eventualities by being indifferent “to the individual and the collective ... because it is actualised in diverse manners at once, and because each participant may grasp it at a different level of actualisation within its variable present” (Deleuze, 1990, page 100). Thus, the event in itself is neutral to its actualisations being “always yet to come and already passed”, being excessive in that it is in itself impenetrable. Deleuze here introduces the concept of singularity to do its detective work on the impersonal and pre-individual transcendence of the event that does not correspond purely with the empirical actuality of individual people, perspectives, or things. These singularities exist as a ‘fourth person singular’ distributing potential which admits “neither Self nor I, but which produces them by actualising or realising itself” (Deleuze, 1990, page 103). In other words, people, perspectives, or things only come about, become actual, through events, through being performed. They “are no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being, nor inside the sendentary boundaries of the finite subject” (Deleuze, 1990, page 107). Decisively, this can only be so if one understands the present moment as saturated with a virtual field of what might happen next (the chance combination of a whole plethora of forces). The forces at play here, having no fixed points of reference, are now merely related to other forces, such that singularities are not moments of synthesis, more mathematical points expressing the immediate convergence of several forces. Of course, amongst these forces there are predominant players, that, because of their slowness of composition (materially one might think of architectural spaces), or because of their more stratified nature (discourses that are reiterated more than most because of the security that their abundant performance provides), seem to suggest a certainty fixity. Performativity thus comes out of convergences, that are either connective (if... then), conjunctive (and... and), or disjunctive (either... or) (see Smith, 1998, pages xxvi – xxvii). This convergence, the movement of footstep after footstep, requires a sense of immediate knowledge that is sited out of our material, corporeal, and sensual placing.

Scene two: bodies—“*Experience pure forces, dynamic lines in space*”

Vital to the ways we experientially ‘go on’ as embodied entities are the affective, figural, and sensorial foundations through which we configure our places in and of society, yet these, the body, have too often, been a neuralgic point in the metaphysics of Western thought. Placed in the shadows and conceptually figured (see Grosz, 1994b; McNay, 1996; Pheng, 1996), the body features only as a denial of the fact that “reason, desire and knowledge are embodied and dependent, at least in the first instance, on the quality and complexity of the corporeal affects” (Gatens, 1996a, page 110). Here the body is rendered as the *object* of knowledge whereby conceptions of our embodiment write on the body (as passive, as object) and write off the body (as an unnecessary ‘active’, or mere container). Consequently the body can only be portrayed ‘Ideally’ as a whole organism comprised and structured out of an intact, logically proportioned set of organs that bind its matter and energy flows neatly within un-leaking ends. Significantly, not only is the body, our tears, our feelings, our pains and pleasures, territorialised into a nexus⁽⁶⁾ of the singular, self-identical, and rigidly determined, but so to is the scope of our knowledge. So even though there are intimations towards understanding the multiplied unity of the body (as singular subjects), the multiple sensate instantiations prior to any notion of identity, singular or otherwise, are ignored (Brusseau, 1998; Grosz, 1994b, page 164). This is not to argue that singular, body-centred identity should be overthrown, but that our bodies cannot always be reduced to any “single, general universal or ideal organisation as they result from the complex interaction of disparate systems” (Lynn, 1993, page 61). Not seeking the partial for its own sake it is important to ask what is forfeited, or advanced, in conceiving our bodies as that which emerges “through local intricate connections, alliances, aggregations and affiliations of base matter” (Lynn, 1993, page 61)? Seeking out the interstices between experience and expression, in other words, the realms intimate to the elusive, fragile, and temporary becomings of our lived bodies as “a continuum of interacting embodied subjectivities” (Braidotti, 1991, page 120), a performative account of the body takes the body as the *subject* of knowledge.

The *irretrievable* as the ephemeral corporeality of the ‘pure event’

Descriptions of the body can only be ‘anexact’ (see Lynn, 1993) in that its presence is only apparent when actualised as a part in an assemblage, or as a linkage of flows, as energies, agitations, and intensities. In effect our bodies “are always made, not found” (Grosz, 1994b, page 168). This transitory nature of embodiment speaks our decaying corporeality, siting the body as actively affective, as the irretrievable experiential quality of life. If the academic task is to capture and apprehend such ephemerality then, I believe, it needs to begin with a modest assumption of writing. Rather than presupposing that writing operates because it re-presents exactly a self-present pre-formed reality one understands that the grapheme of writing is not the container of meaning but its incarnation (see Grosz, 1995; Kirby, 1998). Writing thus implicates both thought and substance, finding its foundation in our materiality such that there is a ‘writing in a general sense’, an *arche-écriture* (Derrida, 1976; see Norris, 1987, chapter 4). In this vein Deleuze’s account/creation of the *pure event* can connect us with this corporeal evanescence (1990, pages 58–65). To illustrate, imagine the action of a cutting instrument cutting, like:

⁽⁶⁾ Nexus refers here to “Discursive practices [which] are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them” (Foucault, 1977, page 200).

“When the scalpel cuts through the flesh, the first body produces on the second not a new property but a new attribute, that of being cut. The attribute does not designate any real quality... it is, to the contrary, always expressed by the verb, which means that it is not a being but a way of being” (Brehier, 1928; quoted by Deleuze, 1990, page 5).

What is suggested here is that one understanding of the *pure event* is as the verb in its infinitive; for example, the cutting, and by implication our becoming, our performing, our writing, talking, walking, breathing (all corporeal), etc. These are forms of *arche-écriture*, all of which speak the vital correspondence linking our linguistic pronouncements with that of experience. Thus the concept of the *pure event*, things, states of affairs are attuned accordingly with verbs, nouns, and propositions (see Brusseau, 1998, pages 63–64; Deleuze, 1990). Crucially, the verb, like the irretrievable present moment of the body as action, is not seen because *in effect* it eludes our scopic orientated domestication. Thus, if we do see the cutting itself, then we see it at the very edge of things and within the shortest burst of time: we see the skin splitting. The body thus can be conceived as an affect, as *pure event*, as an elusive transient happening: something composed through differentiation occasioned, or actualised, out of an affirmative understanding of our fleshy, fluid life force (contra difference written out of an economy structured from the value of signification).

If we are to take up this affirmative understanding of the body as the subject of knowledge, a sense of discretion is required. For instance, the irreducible number, speed, and status of our ongoing sensation, of our body as *pure event*, ostensibly denies us our embodied sense of individuality, as something tangibly on the move (see Radley, 1995, page 4). Additionally, the purity of such sensorial moments overemphasises the body as brute experience, a tendency that prioritises the physical and biological level of our experience, reifying the body into an unproblematic, unscribed arbiter to an essential source of ‘truth’ (Grosz, 1994b, page 94). The discretion required can be found in the performative gap, at a micropolitical level, within the empirical and social aspect of our bodily encounters. Such encounters, in their very nature, recognise that “human freedom amounts to the power that one possesses to assert and extend oneself in the face of other (human and non-human) bodies that strive to do likewise’ (Gatens, 1996a, page 111). In other words, whilst the active role of the body acts as a basis to our sociality, our embodiment functions, and becomes apparent, within “the praxical–symbolic constituents of social formation” (Crossley, 1996, page 46).⁽⁷⁾ Thus it is possible to pursue a corporeal understanding of our lived/decaying physiology alongside the social, whereby both aspects emerge as mutually related, avoiding the inclination “to dissociate and externalise the body and the social world, reifying both, and, thereby, constituting a dualism and reductionism approach” (Crossley, 1996, page 46). So, whilst irretrievably present, our sensuous experience is a vital way through which the body differentiates and is differentiated by its encounters. The play between the transitory mark of our materiality and the relative stability of meaning found in the stratifications of the social inevitably results in an indeterminate and performative quality to our embodied presence and it is to this that I turn next.

The indeterminate as the fugitive and elusive body

The nature of our substance is “to be elusory” (Radley, 1995), exhibiting a playfulness and ambiguity that carries with the desire for certainty, for the contemporary will-to-know. Yet, the bodily aspects of smell, taste, touch, (beyond the obvious of sight and sound)

⁽⁷⁾ These notions suggest interesting links to the work of Bourdieu, especially to his concept of the *habitus*, and the notion of ‘appropriate action’ (for commentary in relation to performativity, see Butler, 1997).

enfold our bodies and the others encountered (organic or nonorganic, individual or in milieu) in such a way as to etch out our orientations. These ephemeral encounters are appropriated in Millet's (1993) writing on the 'fugitive body' where, through Lyotard's notion of the 'figural', he presents the fragmented processes of our body (parts) as that which intimates a "level breathing just beneath the discursive padding", exciting an intoxication that "does not discourse" (pages 43 and 41). This, as illustrated in Francis Bacon's paintings, renders a pharmacy that speaks a nonorganistic, nonchemical language, releasing, in Deleuzian terms, an "unformed, unorganised, non-stratified, or destratified body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 43). Untethered from the determinate mappings of discourse, the elusory body articulates an embodied knowledge that is immediate in not necessarily allowing us a comprehensive understanding of what is going on, but a capacity that sanctions our negotiation through what is happening, literally enabling us to 'go on'.

The 'certain excitations' that resonate anechoic and indeterminately from the event of the fugitive body animate collectives and individuals in a "boundless refuse of activity... that can only be described as *non-logical difference* that represents in relation to the *economy* of the universe what *crime* represents in relation to the law" (Bataille, 1997, page 180). This supports an understanding of the body as elusory, as "active in making as sketch, a continuity of engagement that allows us to know how things are because of what we did to bring them about" (Radley, 1995, page 5). Arguing for an acceptance of the indeterminate nature of the body points up its most constitutive quality, an observation that resonates with Merleau-Ponty's 'being-to-the-world' (1962) which emphasises the fact that one is unable "to stand back from the body and its experiences to reflect on them" (Grosz, 1994b, page 86). To illustrate this further, think/feel a sensual becoming as an active aiming at nothing above its own abundance. For example:

"A finger turns in light circles across your toes and the pads of your feet. Is this irritating? ticklish? erotic? relaxing? According to difference, the delineation does not usher from an exterior source, like the masseur telling you to relax or a social norm insisting that when your wife does this it is sexual and when your doctor does this it is not. Instead, let the physical action define the borders and meaning... What the event is and what it feels like arise on the scene" (Brusseau, 1998, page 10).

Thus, one can advocate that the sensation (the body, the *pure event*, the verb) comes *first*, whilst acknowledging, as we did in the last section, that this is secondly grounded in the social, in our nouns and the subsequent state of affairs. This dismembered physicality of sensation is an exhibition of the excess of flows of substance and energy which, in indeterminate confluence, couple new possibilities and new body-groupings that "produce quite specific 'ways of being'... [that] are thoroughly 'grounded' in the particular needs, desires, struggles, histories and institutions of particular communities" (Gatens, 1996a, page 102). Such possibilities, if understood in more expansive, societal terms, etch out a *surface-productive* of the social, that extends, elaborates, and transforms the communities of our relationalities (Lingis, 1994; see Gatens, 1996a, chapter 7). Thus, the right of every individual extends as far as the individual's power and its engagement with others as genuine others within a nexus of an ever-excessive affective economy, a medley of proximate things (organic and nonorganic), and a discursive grid, forever eluding its signifying origins yet coagulating specifically in its performative acts. The plethora of possible 'immediate circumstances' and the multitude of reverberations each may possess suggests that the body is an excessive performative field—always more than the capture of rational discourse and also elsewhere to our immediate focus.

The *excessive* as the affective economies of the body in-itself

The resolve to maintain certainty, to designate everything neatly as retrievable and determinate units, slights our Dionysian diversions, despite the erotics of our body, the sensuality of our embodied performances, and the raptures of ecstasy pertaining in potentia within our transivity as fundamentally constituent to our corporeal existence. We are not made up of the black and white signifying symbols of the written page—malleable and easily defined—but of biological flows of energy, matter, and stimulating chemical fluids (adrenaline, pheromones, endorphins) which are in excess of such definitions, irradiating, condensing, intersecting, building, and rippling our senses of *being-in-the-world* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These “excitations are the contact phenomena and reveal the other as the convex reveals the concave face of a surface” (Lingis, 1994, page 290), and are more than just the givens of meaning and orientation. The body being radically open, being a part of more impulses than can be perceived, is in excess of the actually performed actions through which we know we exist in the world. A possible illumination of the site of this surfeit can be found in Massumi’s story about the brain:

“The subjects were asked to flex a finger at a moment of their choosing, and to note the time of their decision on a clock. The flexes came 0.2 seconds after they clocked the decision. But the EEG machine registered significant brain activity 0.3 seconds *before* the decision... a half second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression” (1996, pages 222–223).

In that half second there is a proliferation of incipient “mutually exclusive pathways of action and expression”, all of which are prohibited from actualisation bar the one actualised, bar the flex of the finger. This “crowd of pretenders to actualisation” are in potentia: the present that could speak for them is in that missing half second, “passing too quickly to be perceived, too quickly, actually to have happened” (Massumi, 1996, page 224). Yet such bodily activity speaks without speaking as the dimension of pressing potential ‘behind’ every performance; an ‘exemplar sensible’ of a field of the potential actions the body ‘knows’ how to perform (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, page 139). ‘Thinkable by itself’ our bodily performances are more akin to a dance than a text, as something that is not aiming “at describing events (that is, it is not representational), but at evoking a semblance of a world” (Radley, 1995, page 12).

However, thrown out of the courts of reason as a dangerous irritation (venture-some, uncertain, and chancy), the body is excessive not only in itself, but also in relation to our predominant understandings of it. Massumi cautions us to move beyond this attitude which homogenises heterogeneous excess, arguing that:

“The problem is that there is no cultural–theoretical vocabulary specific to affect.

Our entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure across irreconcilable differences (1996, page 221).

Writings of our embodied knowledges must allow space to think (and write) these affective intensities which push the apparatus of identity beyond the same, encompassing the virtuality of all those unactualised possibilities. One concept gaining an audience and offering a presentation of the fold of thought and substance in writing announces itself under the name of *becoming*: “the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation” (Braidotti, 1994, pages 111–123). In respect to the body, becoming is the presentation of our living embodiment as the productive aspect of difference. Thus, utilising the notion of becoming one circumvents the sterile dialectic of nature and artifice, apprehending the quality that “nature is doing, it is the tangible me I feel because I act. It is the me ushering into the world on the heels of performance” (Brusseau, 1998, page 32). In other words, the dynamic

flow of energies and particles enfolding us all establishes “the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness, that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 272). So although we might lose ourselves to the process we equally discover that the process is in ourselves (O’Toole, 1997).

A crucial point: becomings involve a mediating third term (between a current becoming and the next deterritorialisation), a relation to something else through which the subject enters into connections (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 274). Becomings are therefore not a matter of choice, they involve both a fundamental reconfiguration of the subject, risking social integration and requiring certain other connections to be possible (Grosz, 1994b, page 174). Equally, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves warn, “don’t blow apart the strata without taking precautions” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 160) for there is “no invention without a commensurate dose of instability” (Massumi, 1992, page 85; see also Kaplan, 1993). Our bodily enunciations, more poetic and sacrificial, more intuitive utterance than factual information, induce an anguish that both reveals “a yawning gap in which subject and object are dissolved” (Botting and Wilson, 1997, pages 10–11) and a “commonness in which both subject and object participate, [as] a single ‘thing’ folded back on itself” (Grosz, 1994b, page 95). And with this in sight we now confront new subject–object relations. This is a space between, and beyond, the dialectic of the organic and nonorganic, such that the body, and our understanding as embodied beings, is seen as an a posteriori product of the newly connected capacities emerging out of situated and ethological performances (Taussig, 1993, page 24).

Scene three: encounters within foldings as settings—“*Gestures which develop before organised bodies, with masks before faces*”

“Living creatures and their inorganic counterparts share crucial dependence on intense flows of energy and materials.”

De Landa (1998, page 104)

This is the realm of an actual performance: lives sketched out of a dynamic capacity for affecting and being affected by other bodies; a prompting “to act differently according to the objects encountered” (Deleuze, 1988a, page 21). Here circulation is all: a channelling that activates certain relations “inseparable from the capacity to be affected” (Deleuze, 1990, page 218)⁽⁸⁾ such that the visceral, physiognomic aspects of the percept uniting viewer with the viewed emphasise ethology (action and affect) over aetiology (cause and effect) (Taussig, 1993, page 24). We are moving now into the Heideggerian realm of ‘disclosive spaces’, in which, through constitution of itself, singular totalities of interrelated *tools*, each potentially prevalent to a specific task, implement undertakings that achieve certain *purposes*, which in turn enable those in the relation of performing to have *identities* (Dreyfus et al, 1997, page 17).

⁽⁸⁾ See Merleau-Ponty’s perception (as ‘in-the-world’) based philosophy of embodiment which defines the perceiver and the perceived as relational beings within one order of things (1962; see Crossley, 1996, and specifically Grosz, 1994b, page 96). It seems clear that our senses are thus bound to the object as much as they are to the organs of reception: thus Nietzsche’s aphorism “Seeing becomes seeing something.” Additionally, this speaks of the prevalence of our conjunctive ontology and how technologies refigure potential compositions between things: “a ‘proximity’ grouping between independent and heterogeneous terms (topographical proximity is itself independent of distance or contiguity) ... of man-tool-animal-thing. It is primary in relation to them since it is the abstract line that crosses them and makes them work together” [Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, page 104; see also Benjamin’s well-trod essay “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” (1992)].

It is easy to forget that “we live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakeably” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Similar to Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology, the ordinary constitution of the human (action) should be disrupted to make perspicuous their shakeable practical organisation (1984; see also Lynch, 1997). Living in the midst of things means everything is mutually emergent, that there is “an intense taste for life that grows and pullulates” (Conley, 1993, page x). Accordingly, the settings for our actions are not already there just waiting to be walked into; the question is rather “how do you ‘get into something’” (Deleuze, 1995)? The problem is the ‘event in itself’:

“An event is an astonishing, multiplying, emissive occurrence, an intense awareness or perception of something that turns into a becoming-other, a becoming-animal, that somehow takes place in a swarm of sensations, in a nexus of ‘prehensions of prehensions’” (Deleuze, 1993, page 106).

Many perspectives can orientate and cloud the event, yet the event exists in and of itself, with several centres or nodal points all resonating on different levels with different affective intensities. Therefore, subject and object, organic or nonorganic, mutually perform the space of ontological composition, coordinating significant nodal points in the subjectivational field, affirming both a materiality and its affective density, mapping out a fluctuating geography of experience wherein the nexus (and the certainty) of the subject dissolves in an aura of affective energy coloured by different degrees of force intensity. Thus “everywhere the subject swirls in the midst of forces they exert stress that defines the individual body...The subject lives and re-enacts its own embryonic development as a play of folds (endo-, meso-, and ectoderm)” (Conley, 1993, page xvii).

The irretrievable as kinetic astonishment

“A body is defined by relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed between particles. That is, it is not defined by a form or by function. Global form, specific form and organic functions depend on relations of speed and slowness.”

Deleuze (1988a, page 123)

It is all a question of speeds and slowness, of relations of movement and rest: forms, elements, or molecules “borne away by fluxes” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, page 92). This is Deleuze’s Spinoza: one substance for all attributes such that there is one nature, itself individual, varying in unlimited ways—“What is involved is no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds and all individuals are situated” (Deleuze, 1988a, page 122). Take, for example, the building you walk through/within—what is the speed of flux that is keeping it assembled? It seems permanent, less ephemeral than you, but it is ephemeral nonetheless: whilst you are there it is falling down, it is just happening very slowly (hopefully). In such a world, that is incessantly bifurcating and resonating amongst the different movements of its many compositions, our subjectification is always occurring (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 133; also Deleuze, 1990, page 178); our monadology becomes nomadology (Deleuze, 1995, pages 77–78; also Conley, 1993; Smith, 1998, page xxviii). “The self is not defined by its identity but by a process of ‘becoming’”, such that “in a becoming, one term does not become the other; rather, each term encounters the other, and the becoming is something between the two, outside the two” (Smith, 1998, pages xxix–xxx). Encounters are rife and the identities that possess us need maintaining; yet our sense of self does not suffer absolute dissolution, nor does this avocation of becoming patronage

intemperate destruction.⁽⁹⁾ However, often it is our surroundings that appropriate what it is we do (although, individually, we are going to be more or less capable performers) such that we are continually forced into ‘never-before-occurring’ situations that ‘become us’ (Shotter, 1993; 1997). Thus, there is the anxiety as to whether or not we are going to perform the same, or as well, again. There is “the sense that what death is closing in on is not me, but rather my identity, this form I took on and which was required by tasks and situations” (Lingis, 1991, page 121). Yet, we are secure in an acculturated sense of appropriation, such that “one avoids going to places utterly unlike any other, and which would leave one wholly astonished, with an astonishment that could never recur again” (page 121). Representation, in working through the logic of the Same, fails to give countenance to this potential astonishment.

“Representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing. Movement for its part, implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation” (Deleuze, 1994a, page 56).

What is needed are ways of looking at this “coexistence of moments”, the seeing of “space and time as expressing some relation between the entities themselves” (Latour, 1997, page 174; on this Leibnizian geography see Doel, 1996; Thrift, 1994). This in-between of acting is the space of the performative, a space where the unfounded and unmediated status of becoming is valorised such that society (the objective) and the individual (subjective) are simultaneously enacting a conjunct substantiality. [A cautionary point: infinite representations are not adequate for they are indissociable from the domain of representation that renders them possible. Rather the aim is for a “superposition of perspectives” that do not look to the identifying logic of subject/object, but to difference differing in a “veritable theatre of metamorphoses and permutations” (Deleuze, 1994a, page 56)]. It is the surface-speed in the middle of everything that matters, where “the middle is by no means an average” roundly describing what is happening, but “where things pick up speed” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 25).

The *indeterminate* is *intermezzo*—the place where life is

“What if we ‘reconfigure both the world and our theoretical-practices from *the middle*?’”

Doel (1996, page 421)

Everything is *in-between* where actuality happens. Massumi describes this treacherous theoretical map when he asks ‘Are there atomistic individuals forging relations of commonality on the “basis of a normative recognition of shared needs”, or is there such a thing as society which defines individuals through their topographical ‘positioning’ in an always-already intersubjective frame’ (1997, page 175)? Arguing from the middle sublimates both these polarised options, arguing instead for an indeterminate and “constitutive positionality” (page 176). This is about accepting the ‘scrumpled geography’ of “a world of continuous variation, becoming, and chance, rather than one of constancy, being and predictability” (Doel, 1996).

The debate over Deleuze’s ‘transcendental empiricism’ has theoretical currency here (1990; see Buchanan, 1997). Empiricism speaks of knowledge derived directly from experience: it is not knowledge per se that is important, but knowledge as a

⁽⁹⁾Note the cautionary tone in the following: “Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into a demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever. This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, ... experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 161).

means for practical activity, for ‘getting by’, that matters. Furthermore, this is an empiricism as a “concern for ‘the concrete richness of the sensible’, for contingency, difference and incommensurability, and a resistance to universalising abstractions through emphasis on the particularity of situated, historical practices” (Baugh, 1993, page 15). In implication there is a sense of the transcendental in Deleuzian empiricism; however, this is not something that founders ultimate meaning (a priori conditions of experience), rather it intimates a sense of ‘necessary condition’ pertaining to actual experience (a posteriori actualisation). Again, this is not to advocate experience as a first principle, that “the intelligible ‘comes’ from the sensible” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, page 54). Rather Deleuze’s empiricism intimates relations as external to their terms (Deleuze, 1991b, page 66), thus according them an affirmation of diversity such that difference modes of existence are created in the immanent power to be affected. Whilst still existing between terms, relations come about practically and not essentially, nor as a teleological causation of an internally related closed system: responsibility is therefore put back into our actions for no longer do our relations “inherently tend toward the consolidation of absolute identity” (Hayden, 1995, page 286). Accordingly:

“The concept determines the possibility of repeatable experiences that are identical in respect of their organizational forms, whereas the sensible is the actuality of any given experience, and as such is the non-repeatable basis for the difference *between* actualizations” (Baugh, 1993, page 15).

For example, take any performance of *Hamlet*: what is performed (the concept, in this case the form and content of the text) is identical, but the actual performances differ—a repetition and a difference. This is a world completed and yet unlimited. Experiences have to cohere sufficiently for understanding to come about such that the empiricism of the moment is not about isolated actualities identical to nothing.⁽¹⁰⁾ Whilst we grasp empirical actuality experientially through ‘nonconceptual’ intuition rather than through referential recognition of the already known, the moment is not just an immediate empirical sensation: “the empirically actual is not a bare particular, a ‘this’ like any other ‘this’, but a singularity that has a determinate content in virtue of its actual genesis, the history of its coming into being” (Baugh, 1993, page 24).

The moment is an encounter with the not-yet-known aided by our *intuition* that endows empirical actuality with its genealogy such that it can be different (Baugh, 1993, page 25; see Deleuze, 1983, page 4; 1991a, chapter 1). If we are thinking about relations *between* things such that mutual subject-objectivity emerges, Deleuze’s empiricism removes us from the ontological position that “a term and its relations form an organic unity” such that “all things are related in an inextricable and necessary fashion” (Hayden, 1995, page 285). Thus:

“Our world is composed of open wholes produced by social practices, practices which constitute and alter the relations of these wholes... Although relations are external to their terms they are nonetheless immanent within and open to the dynamic continuum of the world” (Hayden, 1995, page 287).

So, whilst “one gives one’s experience form by identifying things with the names with which everyone calls them, by seeing the paths and the obstacles others see, by envisioning the goals others are turned” (Lingis, 1991, page 119), experience itself is actual, not

⁽¹⁰⁾ Significantly, Deleuze argues that the continual differentiation process, cannot be purely accidental. First, if accidental then variation would by nature be indifferent to other variations, and thus external to everything else past, present, and future. Subsequently, if external then there can be no association or relationship between variations. Finally, then, this indifference means there is no reason that small variations might add up in the same direction. Consequently, Deleuze argues that there is a vital difference, by which he intimates an internal difference, wherein there is unity in there being only relations of dissociation, and thus a virtuality that is actualised according to lines of divergence.

possible, contingent, not necessary, and particular rather than universal (Baugh, 1993). Consequently, the subject “does not stand outside that which it organises or makes coherent”, yet at the same time, as a matter of appropriation, it is “as much the product of self-invention as it is the consequence of conforming to an existing structure” (Buchanan, 1997, pages 486–487). For example, taking a pared-down and extremely isolated case of form(ul)ation: Wittgenstein’s famous ‘language game’ involving a pupil writing down a series of cardinal numbers to the compositional rule of ‘ $n + 2$ ’ in the context of the experience of a test series involving numbers less than 1000. It is entirely possible, and consistent with the contextual experience, that going beyond the threshold of 1000, the pupil, as Wittgenstein illustrates, might start adding up ‘ $n + 4$ ’, presumably to go on to add ‘ $n + 6$ ’ beyond 2000 (see Wittgenstein, 1953, §143–§185; Lynch, 1997, pages 166–168). The paradox apparent here, to quote Lynch:

“Is based on the assumption that our grasp of the rule is based on an ‘interpretation’; a private judgement about the rule’s meaning separate from any regular practices in a community” (1997, page 167).

Subsequently, the ‘nexus of common behaviour’ compels our extension of a rule’s application beyond our context dependent experience of it. While we have a compunction towards certain ‘forms of life’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, §241), in certain circumstances, the rule of such formations is not external to the actions performed in accord with it (§189). To reiterate, our very performance, our movement onwards, is impregnated with the potentiality of difference. Empirically there is no enactment of rules, rather there are novel conjugations of forces producing something unforeseeable, producing, what Deleuze has announced as, the *event* of actuality: “a mixture of the dependent and the aleatory” (1988b, page 86). In summary:

“Coming into existence is not a transition from the possible (the concept) to the real (its instantiation), but the production of something new by already existing forces entering into new relations through chance encounters, where these encounters are nevertheless the extrinsically determined effects of previous encounters” (Baugh, 1993, page 23).

There is therefore “an ontological circuit around an opening” which announces performance as ‘collective individuation’ consisting of mutual subject–object emergence (Massumi, 1997, page 180; see also Guattari, 1995, page 9). Massumi paints a tangible instance of the in-between of subject and object through the idea of a catalysing point with specific reference to the event of a football match. The catalytic point (the football), of which there may be several amongst a series of event-dimensions layered on top of one another in a given situation (thrown coins, chants of the crowd, the heat, video screen images, the ‘blind’ referee, etc), arrays other actants into a relationality of possible subject and object positions irrespective of their organic nature.⁽¹¹⁾ Thus:

“The players are in perpetual motion, [since] their relation to each other, the ball, the goals, is also in constant flux, too complex to measure, only registerable as heightenings and releases of eddies of intensity in the midst of which appear openings for the potential movement of the ball.... The player must pare himself down to a channelling of the play.... Belonging is unmediated and under way, never already constituted” (1997, pages 178–179).

This direct channelling illustrates performativity as an *ontological vector*: an ingathering of the “heterogeneity of substantial elements, along with the already constituted abstractions of language (meaning)” (Massumi, 1997, page 179). Hereby, the scenes of our action are etched out in our continual deliverance to change, so that at the instance of enactment something is delivered to historicity, to “an effect of prior and future invocations that

⁽¹¹⁾ This heralds a relational middling as an ontology in itself, effectively countering theories of hybridity which still advocate ‘the being already-constituted’ via filiation to both the poles it hybridises.

constitute and escape the instance” (Butler, 1997, page 3). There is thus an excess to any totalising account of action, an excess both in a spatial and in a temporal sense; it is to the former that I now turn.

The excessive as latent monstrosity—swarms of potential

Placed as we inevitably are in an inexorably occurring nexus of ‘prehensions of prehensions’ where there are no centres, no “findable, touchable” powers (Crawford and Latour, 1993), there are always other worlds simultaneously occurring, being an equal part of the event—pure, ephemeral, irretrievable, and happening. Parallel to the world we focus upon are swarms of other worlds, worlds so immanent that we might potentially slip into them (such immanence gives a sense of the munificence of the event). Within such compossible realms objects naturally resonate with situational aura, possessing caustic properties in lieu of either their meaning in terms of language or in terms of the sensorium they might induce (one can think here of Proust’s *Madelaine* pastry).

“Objects and settings (*milieu*) take on an autonomous, material reality which gives them an importance in themselves.... It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it” (Deleuze, 1989, page 4).

Imagining the event as a volume of space–time, as a territory of surfaces which are dense, flowing, particular, sensate, and radically actual may allow for an understanding of objects as actants, as things attaining existence through their conventional positioning within a system of functionality, as organising possibilities of instrumental action. Moreover, their existence in themselves reverberates with a menacing excess allowing for potential monstrosities to be enacted. To illustrate, note the ambiguity of intent in the event-dimension of this scene in Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker* (1960) [a world created out of an “obsessive surface treatment of reality” (Dobrez, 1985)].

Davies A jig saw, mate?

Aston Yes. Could be useful.

Davies Yes. *Slight pause.* What’s that then, exactly, then?

Aston walks up to the window and looks out.

Aston A jig saw? Well, it comes from the same family as that fret saw. But it’s an appliance, you see. You have to fix it to a portable drill.

Davies Ah, that’s right. They’re very handy.

Aston They are, yes.

“Could be useful”, for what? The saw is clearly a nodal point in the situation around which the thoughts, fears, and desires of the characters, as bodies or elements of the field, are arrayed. Representational commentary on this scene will note that Aston’s familiarity with the jigsaw further alienates Davies (for example, see Esslin, 1992, pages 87–102); indeed the semiotic tracing within ‘common’ experience of the object allies a sense of ‘acculturated functionality’ to the jigsaw (Baudrillard, 1996), but my purpose in this paper is to argue that what it actually *does* heralds alternative cartographies of possibility in excess of what is expected. The recognised menace of Pinter’s plays stems in part from the economy between the already-constituted abstraction of acculturated familiarity and the “heterogeneity of action” pertaining to a change in the arrangement of objects (Dobrez, 1985, page 352).

Within Leibnizian geography the relativity between all the components ‘present’ for an event to exist is inclusive—everything has equal comport within the event itself. It is not that the jigsaw, as object, will always resonate with such menace (energy)—events are singularities not universals (see Deleuze, 1995)—but that it has the *potential* to do so. Furthermore, such objects are as important to the event as you are take them away and the event changes, you change, thus completely recasting the notion of the subject

(Deleuze, 1995, page 160). Therefore, objects have both a latent capacity to draw attention to themselves and a potential metonymic functionality, designating 'entire' worlds (through their specific points of actual materiality) whereby points of contact are made possible for the body to become situated (Garner, 1994). Again the excessive quality, for there are several situations corresponding to the different processes of the body—hand to keyboard, eyes through glasses, to screen, stomach and nose to my neighbour's orange. Thus, as Guattari argues there is "a true polyphony of subjective formations" (1997, page 142), a multiplicity of selves coexisting rather than exhibiting diachronic, progressive development. Thus our modalities of being are simultaneously emergent, core, and subjective, being continually mobilised in our everyday coping and becoming.

If acculturated functionality, or the domestication of action, was ignored and an absolute empirical objectivity was taken up, life would appear as a strange ballet whereupon "every act or speech is seen *in itself* as it were" (Dobrez, 1985, page 352). As such there is no cause and effect, no signifier and signified, for there is no human identity, rather just 'characters' or marks of immediate affect. There could only be mismetings, collisions, only objects as extraordinarily there (regardless of the intriguing and significant 'actor-networked' history that possess it to be what it is now, as something apparent inexplicable). Yet, the environments of our daily chores, our love affairs, our theatres, our bars, our walks, are indeed ours; this is a *human* geography—"a passage that is experienced and real. A *duration*" (Deleuze, 1988a, page 39). The important point is to build the strange ballet of uncertainty, of catastrophic (unfair) accident, of things in themselves, into our stories. So, this story of *Copenhagen* 'ends':

Heisenberg But in the meanwhile, in this most precious meanwhile, there it is ... Our children and our children's children. Preserved, just possibly, by that one moment in Copenhagen. By some event that will never quite be located or defined. By that final core of uncertainty at the heart of things.

Conclusion: *N* threads and *a* life ...

"There are dimensions here, times and places, glacial or torrid zones never moderated, the entire exotic geography which characterises a mode of thought as well as a style of life."

Deleuze (1990, page 128)

In utilising Deleuze by linking conceptualisations on performativity to a form of detective work in the concrete empirical field, the drive is in explicating what we do rather than what we are (see Goodchild, 1997; May, 1996). There are several threads that can be taken beyond this here and now, but three elements seem to illustrate the currency (good or bad) made available when performatively thinking the social.

Immanence

First, performativity is an 'anti-judicial' stance: why should our sociability need a transcendent power independent from our embodied, natural condition, such that what we do is prejudged by a context outside the event of its happening (Gatens, 1996a, pages 164–165)? The ethics here speaks our mutual immanence to *a* life (Deleuze, 1997), that there is something that exists between a subject and an object, something incorporeal, something inherent within everything, such that everything is a virtue of the same substance. The events that people this immanence are the effects of the interactions of bodies (organic or nonorganic), and as combinations of actions, passions, and circumstances they have no "origin in the consciousness of the knowing subject" (Hayden, 1995, page 292). Relative to how we might traditionally think this is antifoundationalist, and yet to critique a foundation is to affirm another one: a performative foundation, or ontology, that is immanent, material, and open (see Hardt, 1993, page xv). In announcing a vital, ethical

alternative adequate to contemporary social questions, Deleuze's works are clinical as well as critical in that they look to "a possibility of life, a way of existing" (1995, page 100; see also Deleuze, 1998; Smith, 1998). Certainly this vitalism is antihumanist, being the 'elan vital' (Deleuze, 1991a) existing in "opposition to the world represented and mediated through the framework of the subject and object" (Marks, 1998, pages 29–30). It speaks the infinitive verb, the expressing of "becomings or events that transcend mood and tense" (Deleuze, 1995, page 34), such that we now speak of an "empiricism for which difference is the generative force of the actual" (Hayden, 1995, page 283).

Practical and pragmatic

"One never has a *tabula rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms."

Deleuze (1988a, page 123)

Being delivered to the actual sees that our relations come "into existence by practical rather than essentialist or necessary means" (Hayden, 1995) such that the performative is very much a part of being in constant interchange with our environment (Gatens, 1996b, page 165). First, this means that, rather than seeking interpretation, asking what something means by joining the dots, creating a pattern already orientated through a tracing of a historically substantiated (power-riddled) grid of signification, one experiments by asking 'what can be done here?' The conjunction 'AND' rules (see Doel, 1996) such that there is always the possibility of divergence and the destruction of identity (Deleuze, 1995, page 45; see Smith, 1998, page xxiii). Subsequently, the world, and our identities, have to be made; they need constant maintenance or re-enactment (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, page 6). There is a danger here of advocating a 'primal scene of an originary, unmediated encounter' (Goodchild, 1996, page 43) when the point is rather to show a sense of everything existing in a 'zone of indiscernability' where we are defined by the limits and borders of the relations we slip into (see Marks, 1998, page 34). In this way the ethological perspective speaks of the micropolitics 'in-between' subjects, such that one is always asking: "How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other's own relations and world" (Deleuze, 1988a, page 126)? Accepting that an ability to affect is reciprocated by a capacity of being affected, part of the answer is performative, it is in getting through each individual moment, it is in knowing how to go on. Finally, in that it is difference, rather than identity, that persists through time, performances are always, to a greater or lesser extent, an encounter with the 'not-yet-known': they are risky, continually testing our insecurities. It is performative therefore to think/act on real existence in opposition to the possibility of existence being pronounced by a priori ideas: it is the 'earthiness' of our daily walks, the encounters for our tears and laughter, and our corporeal needs that etches out the conceptual, not the reverse (see Baugh, 1993).

Creative

The performative is the incessant need to think otherwise, to realise that we are always thinking on our feet (see also MacKenzie, 1997). Setting expectation aside, it is "not concerned with determining the essence and intrinsic relation of each thing, but with describing how new relations can be actively created between things in order to produce change in and between the wholes these relationships form" (Hayden, 1995, page 287). Understanding the persistence of difference in itself is to accept the inevitability of change. Performativity is the sense of experimentation that greets us everyday; it is our ongoing tentative endeavour to enact local utopias that seek to create situations for joyful encounters, to enact performances that work in such a way that they do not question the superiority of one body over another, but rather compose a rhythm that sustains and eases. Performances are venturesome couplings—a carpenter

and wood; the companionship of dog and human; the relationship between a crocodile and a bird—that are creative in that they negotiate the new, enabling ways to ‘go on’.

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