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Seminar: Deleuze, Guattari, Performativity

‘Continuous Project-Altered Daily’¹

In this paper, I examine the ways in which theory and dance making and viewing are inseparable from each other, perpetually informing one another. In essence, production alters how we perceive and re-enact images. New and re-combined images require transformed theoretical frameworks; ones that can radically shift preconceived notions of good sense (requiring order, and predicting future) and common sense (bringing diversity together through unifying principles)². Gilles Deleuze not only offers frameworks applicable to the discipline of dance, he presents tools for seeing events of perception as creative, compositional acts in which the viewer does not have to rely on the traditional separation between subject and object.

Gillez Deleuze perceived philosophy as ‘a discipline that ...consists in creating or inventing concepts’ (Deleuze 2006: 313). He and his long-term collaborator psychiatrist Felix Guattari were supporters of the active principle and produced models of thinking which favored heterogeneity and invention. They were finding correspondences between seemingly disparate entities and formations, and thus avoiding traps of dogmatic thought

¹ This was a name of Yvonne Rainer’s project from which the performance collective of nine choreographers, known as Grand Union evolved (Fales Library/Special Collection).

² ‘The Logic of Sense: Twelfth Series of the Paradox (Deleuze 1990: 76-80). The nature of good sense and the nature of common sense are defined in relationship to the paradox.

by multiplying concepts. They bridged disciplinary boundaries, and introduced the concept of ‘image-thought’ thus confusing binaries between idea and representation, and breaking rigid conceptual frames that separate art, philosophy, theory and science. They proposed non-arborescent application of language³. Deleuze gave preference to models for creative endeavors that favored multiplicity, change, and acknowledgment of difference. Deleuze is one of the creators of positive ontology, the ontology of life and becoming. I am re-reading Deleuze through the process of viewing and experiencing the material residues of the performative acts that occurred in New York in early 1970s. These traces are pointers towards possibility of re-inventing theory and art in the process of mutual becoming.

The improvisations are inscribed in the video recordings from Yvonne Rainer’s collection. They took place in the Soho loft, on 59 Wooster Street, from 1970 till 1976⁴. I am not attempting to give an axiomatic reading or a chronological account of the entire series of events. I am relying on the memories of viewing, visceral impressions, and associations evoked. I am interested in the strategies introduced by the performers, and the spaces in-between established binaries. The discovery of the space appearing on the edges of categorical thinking does not imply negation of social codes and conventions belonging to large apparatuses dominating the world outside the intimacy of the dance studio. Rather, codes and conventions reappear in the performance events. The de-codified and the animalistic bodily movements are explored to the point of self-

³ They proposed rhizomatic model against traditional tree like model (

⁴ The group evolved out of work by Yvonne Rainer, specifically Continuous Project- Altered Daily

consciousness. Awareness of representational signification turns the kinetic being into a performing personality.

Dance is an ephemeral art⁵, as it explores elusiveness of movement; the perception of the motion against illusion of stillness. Movement occurs in the relationship to the imaginary stillness of the body, which was traditionally at the center of theatrical representation. Movement disrupts, distracts, and disappears. The perceived, recorded stillness stands for the imaginary ideal of the unchangeable material presence. The rigidified apparatus of documentation, and requirements for objectivity of descriptions of the seen world, provide basis for the essentialist doctrines evolving around metaphysical understanding of presence. The real at the center of the essentialist ontology is documented, copied, and authorized. ‘...[M]etaphysics can only offer dance theory the endless description of what “happened on stage”; this secures the presence of dance, keeps it fixed within certain visibility’ (Lepecki: 133). The artists from the Grand Union emphasized the process over product. They did not dance for camera; or rather they interrupted classical spatial organization, and illusion of the objective gaze. In Renaissance organization of space - all that belongs within the given frame, is seen from a single point of view⁶. The space outside the frame is infinite. Thus, theatrically speaking, the central event needs to be determined. Once this is realized, the other events taking place are seen as relative to this central event. In the modernist art, arbitrary

⁵ ‘Mostly, movement disappears, it marks the passing time. Movement is both sign and symptom that all presence is haunted by disappearance and absence’ (Lepecki 2004: 128). Later, in the same essay there is a quote from the dance critic Marcia Siegel. Here, she denounces the triviality attached to dance based on its ephemerality.

⁶ ‘Perspective mathematizes...visual space; it is an ordering, but an ordering of the visual phenomena’. (Panofsky 1997: 71). In ‘Perspective as Symbolic Form’, the art-historian Erwin Panofsky looks into the development of perspective. The organization of space and the development of perspective are related to the philosophical and spiritual understanding of subject and its formation. The Renaissance organization of space in arts reflects the change from medieval deism to human centered naturalism.

elements, the indifference towards objective measurements, and the lack of a teleological plan provoke an uncomfortable sense of the psychological ambiguity in the viewers. In the space created by the modern artist, often the preliminary work is revealed, and the finished product appears unfinished. The image does not tell the viewer what to do⁷.

Dancers from the Grand Union do not avoid the discomfort caused by the lack of directionality. This apparent lack reflects multiple potentialities for movement, as well as resistances to proposed actions. Sometimes the resistance is physicalized through oppositional forces produced by movers in the space. ‘Alice is the one who always goes in two directions at once: Wonderland exists in always subdivided double direction’ (Deleuze: 78)⁸. Dancers inhabit the unstable space. Here the loss of a unified directorial voice speaking from above becomes disconcertingly apparent. There are orders, ideas, steps, but none of them have the authority of a monotheistic credo. The emergence of gesture and character is not avoided. Representational conventions concerning figuration in visual arts, and the building of the meaning by staging archetypal theatrical situations are sketched in space, evoking associations without stratifying meanings. However, timings are distorted, informed by the demands of the space of the loft, and by the needs of dancers’ bodies moving without predetermined choreography. The endless invention, and collage-like nature of improvisational activity, reveal multiple planes of everyday

⁷ Panofsky argues that ‘the arbitrariness of direction and distance within modern pictorial space[Bildraum] bespeaks and confirms the indifference to direction and distance of modern intellectual space’. (Panofsky: 70)

⁸ The paradox, what it represents, and how it determines Alice’s double adventure is the focal point of the ‘Twelfth Series of the Paradox’ in *Logic of Sense*. Language functions through allowing for paradoxical entities to come to being. Deleuze asserts that paradoxes ‘have the characteristic of going in both directions at once, and of rendering identification impossible’(p. 74).

reality commonly excluded through labyrinths of binary thinking. The micropolitics⁹ of accidental encounters aids re-invention of marginalized spaces, and the re-arrangement of temporal hierarchies¹⁰.

The documents preserved disclose the subjectivity of both the viewers and movers. This meeting takes place within a depersonalized moment of perception. The movement of both the camera and the body displace the spectator's desire to know the dance. The dance is never complete; it evades knowledge. When the situation or choreographic structure emerges, it is soon displaced, ridiculed, or deconstructed through interruption of the linear development, the climax before the complete resolution, and gestural and durational restrictions. The prolonged or interrupted timings take body for short flights outside prescriptions given by the signifying machine. The body experiences flow as it detaches itself from common signifiers. As signification re-emerges, the body is stopped, and the constructed nature of the unique performer as a socially independent subject is revealed. The Grand Union dancers do not wait for the natural dissipation of energy fields, they actively predict assigned meanings, and interrupt identifications through strategic re-composing of the space.

The Grand Union emerged in the aftermath of the Civil-rights and pacifist (anti-war) movements in United States. Dance historian Ramsay Burt writes that Yvonne Rainer

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between different political processes and different states of the same process. 'Every society, and every individual, are thus plied by both segmentaries simultaneously: one molar, the other molecular'. Molecular 'works in detail and operates in small groups'. Molar are associated with large sized groups and processes, and arborescent segmentation. Molar and molecular are both distinct, and inseparable. '[T]hey coexist and cross over each other'. (Deleuze : 213-15). Karen Houle defines micro-political processes as those that have tendency 'to introduce or preserve heterogeneous space, and organize resonance'. Macro-political processes tend to 'preserve homogeneous space, and 'inhibit resonance' (Houle: 92)

¹⁰ Dancers use several tactics to displace conventional relationships with the recording devices: varying the timings, allowing for syncopation, displacing the hierarchy of the traditional stage, and inviting and provoking intrusions once the specific event organizes itself into a known psychic and physical territory.

and her fellow artists worked outside pre-existing institutions, purposefully staying on the margins of the mainstream. Although Rainer has, on occasion, claimed she was an apolitical choreographer, she was highly aware of social and political problems of her era¹¹, and stayed aligned with ‘the social and political radicalism of the counterculture’ (Burt: 118). Carrie Lambert-Beatty claims that Rainer’s work should be viewed in relation to the political events and contingencies of US politics outside confines of the avant-garde artistic scene.¹² The young generation was rebelling against dogmatic political structures, and the media directed spectacle of the American imperial power. The young generation of choreographers, emerging from Robert and Judith Dunn’s composition class, questioned the essentialist inclinations of the early dance modernists. The dynamics within the new collective were loose and unpredictable, based on shared knowledge from Dunn’s classes (Foster: 191). Thus, they disrupted hierarchies on stage, challenged separation between the observers and the participants, blurred boundaries within different artistic disciplines, between everyday life and performance, and art-making and art-theory. Many of Judson pioneers entered the field of conceptual work that was instigated by the conceptual visual artists of the era. The medium itself, the

¹¹ In 1968 Yvonne Rainer expressed her concern about staying distant from ‘a world in crisis’. She writes: ‘In the shadow of real recent converging, passing, pressing, milling, swarming pulsing, changing in this country formalized choreographic gestures seem trivial’ (from the ‘Statement of May 11th, 1970 in *Information* ed. McShine, p.116). She organized two events that reflected concerns about dance formalism at times of War. Her work, even when not overtly political, reflects the tensions between media dominated culture and the experience of the physical body. After the protest at the Kent State University she organized a street event which was later named Street Action. Her next piece WAR was in her words about ‘battlefields strewn with bodies, or masses of people’ (from the telephone interview with Richard Pilkinton-audience member).

¹² In the introduction to ‘Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s’ Lambert-Beatty looks into the relationship between 1960s avant-garde artists and the existing culture of spectatorship. She writes about Rainer: ‘The presentation of the body in Rainer’s work must be understood in its tensions *and its correlations* with spectatorial situations outside the realm of art; in dialectical engagement with the effects on the sense of time, distance, and bodily reality of the culture of information and spectatorship that had developed in the postwar United States, particularly escalation of television culture.’ (2008:11)

body, became important in itself, not as representational device, but as an experiential reality. The body co-existed with inanimate objects in the gallery, and was articulated, through its interaction with the environment, as an expressive force initiating movement on the dance floor, and in the audience. The acknowledgment of multiple modes of becoming in the theatrical, or gallery space, challenged representational conventions, and inverted established differentiations. At this time, the tasks and endurance practices performed by dancers and performance artists, demonstrated involvement with the quotidian experience of the everyday. These performances of the ordinary appeared in the dynamic relationship to the glamour of the Broadway stage and beauty standards of the Hollywood film industry. However, the performers did not avoid the representational reality of bodies perceived as commodities. The fetishization of the body, and especially of culturally charged body parts, the fashion dicta appearing within secular, urban environments, and the media produced and re-produced stereotypes, were not excluded from the Grand Union performances. They did not want to recreate binaries inherent in the non-dialectic relationship between high, elitist art, and popular entertainment. During the brief period of Grand Union existence as a collaborative collective, improvisational practitioners shunned from full absorption into the esoteric disciplines they often practiced. Thus, their work was highly political, related to the events in the external environment. The Grand Union performers challenged the requirements for virtuosity and theatricality associated with the traditional stage. They consciously interrupted habits of passive spectatorship. Susan Leigh Foster asserts that the seeming informality of these events was grounded in the shared understanding of precedence of choreographic process over the finished product¹³.

¹³ She writes; ‘The members often chose music, collected costumes and props, and arranged the

The clichés, those intentionally evoked by choreographers and those reproduced by the viewers, contested the notion that *tabula rasa* is a prerequisite for art making. The dancers do not start from the empty canvas. The space which they inhabit is charged by the historical and cultural shadows, and thoughts evoked through meeting and resonating with the other.

‘We are besieged by photographs that are illustrations, by newspapers that are narrations, by cinema images, by television images. There are psychic clichés just as there are physical clichés – ready-made perceptions, memories phantasms’ (Deleuze: 71). The attempt to work in the complete vacuum leads to the rebirth of a belief in reality of the figurative presence. It blocks the invention of new possibilities of expression. In improvisation activities, clichés are emptied of signification. This emptying leads towards evanescent expressions of unstoppable physicality. Impulses from ordinary human lives are transformed into movements on the edge of abstraction. However, the ideal of pure abstraction, is intentionally avoided. Dancers ridicule, distort, and render cinematic the kinetic choices they make. Through strategic play, and subtle maneuvering, they interrupt the culturally produced inclination towards passive spectatorship. As the viewer is de-centered, he/she is faced with his/her inability to see the seemingly new without a reference to the past knowledge. The different has to share a particular trait with its previous incarnations if it is to be recognized. The traditional separation of form and content becomes inadequate for understanding movements of dancers in space. The outward movement is not other than the inner impulse, outer and

performance space for each concert at the last minute. Underlying these impromptu decisions, however, was a commitment to cultivating the liminal ground between art and life and to collaborating on dance not as a beautifully fashioned product but as a choreographic process (Foster: 191)

inner co-exist with each other; they even cohabitate the same space. Thus, the thinking, stopping, communicating, looking for balance, inventing steps, imitating others' action – all these ways of being in space are rendered obvious. The illusory techniques of the old world theatre are deconstructed and re-invented in new configurations. Multiple planes come into existence as dancers shift their awareness. The performance space itself becomes a transforming, evolving event in time. It comes into existence as a different form of awareness, awareness related, but not identical with the social awareness individual performing subjects already possess. In this continuously re-created meeting zone, multiple memories join and clash with each other, distorting, redefining, rarifying, collapsing and confusing established boundaries, individual structures, and common systems of support. The new lines of flight emerge, when the known restrictions and organizational habits are played out. Previously imperceptible ruptures are opened, and potentials for motion are indicated, as performers enter the process of becoming through re-mapping of territories. The body moves by reinventing its relationship to the objects, architectural structures, and the psychological and physical impasses. The stillness appears as a form of movement; movement in which the subtle workings of the body and intellect can surface.

‘The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present’ (Phelan: 146). Peggy Phelan writes that performance becomes through disappearance. The very moment of performative gesture: step, breath, sound, is not repeatable. The uniqueness of a particular moment comes into being through the complex play of contingencies. Even if the movement performed is happening under conditions that simulate the previously performed movement, the

shifting nature of perception and the fragility of the moving body continuously interrupt the tendency towards standardization. It is only through exclusion and technological doubling that the moments of visual sameness are achieved. The memory preserves the personal essence of the performative encounter, but the memory itself is subject to change and transformation. Peggy Phelan critically assesses pressures of the reproductive economy to create faithful reproductions of the original. The original is seen as an ideal, and is displaced through multiplication. The singular traits of copies are errors in relationship to the unique value of the original. Later, even the original itself appears as a mistake compared to the repeatable marketable product based on it. The product is reduced to sameness – something we seem to share. It contains hidden promises that apparently produce predictable reactions. This product is structured around the concept of positive experience necessary devoid of ambiguities and complexities still unfamiliar to the main-stream culture. Thus, if the body of the dancer is seen as a commodity, the commodity should meet expectations related to the standardization of taste. The search for a new kind of dancer, who dances original, exotic choreography, is paradoxical. It is followed by the imperative to purify the newly found expression and by inventing ways of re-producing the interesting aspects and minimizing the unneeded singularities of the copies. Thus, what remains important in the reproductive economy of dance is the step; not the very thinking, feeling, intuiting, remembering or criticizing that allowed for the ‘new’ step to come into being. The question is how to awaken residual impressions which carry on forms of rebellion inherent in the invention of new artistic, or aesthetic forms.

The recordings of improvisational work, filmed by the subjective camera are precious opportunities for analyzing the shifting dynamics between the viewing subject and perceived object of the gaze. They re-live the past in the present, and stimulate births of spontaneous bodies that are not bound to the imitation of the seen images and descriptive texts. This shared dual being, in the process of becoming, is invited to watch, feel and think through the body. The new born presence does not imply permanent metaphysical presence; rather it is open for multiplicity of perceptions and perceptual reinventions.

These moments of emergence initiate inquiry into the modes of perceptual and interpretative activity through which fragmented recordings from the past become on their own clear aesthetic statements. They acquire new creative and theoretical force when in interaction with palpable conceptual formations of Gilles Deleuze. The diverse textual and movement events clash into each other, and are re-invented in the process of mutual becoming. The body can be read differently when the memories detached from their normative versions are transformed through evocation of their intimate residues. Gilles Deleuze saw in the art a potential for generating new modes of thinking, and for experiencing intensities, and heterogeneities otherwise expelled from the life governed by rhythms of modernity. In the contemporary society, often as a result of the overflow of information, there is a conforming tendency to re-affirm the arborescent hierarchies and molar binaries.

John Rajchman looks into the potentials for breakthroughs instigated by the awakening of aesthetic sense:

Art works are composed of sensations, pre-linguistic and pre-subjective, brought together in an expressive material through a construct with an organized plan, with which we have peculiar relations. They are not there to save us or to perfect us (or to damn us or corrupt us), but rather to complicate things, to create more complex nervous systems no longer subservient to the debilitating effects of clichés, to show and release the possibilities of a life

(Rajchman: 138)

In the meeting with the seemingly disorganized (or maybe even anti-organizational) activities of the artist, there are potentials for chaotic resurgence of sensations and painful memories. Experience preserved in the bodily memories of the viewer relates to the performing body of the exposed performer. Paradoxically, these meetings involve artifice, and evocation of clichés both sides might be critical of.

In 'Proust and Signs', Deleuze asserted that "there is no inter-subjectivity except an artistic one." The kind of subjectivity that forces the individual outside the boundaries of social expectation awakens singularities that do not belong to anyone. The 'real' encountered in the space is improvisational in nature. It involves dislocations, creation of distances, digressions, and interactions not bound to normative frames. However, the normative frames are there, the de-territorialized areas are soon re-mapped into new territories that will be claimed by the capitalist machine. It is in the crevices, and cracks that the felt experience is most accessible. The details of everyday existence, evoking multiple surfaces of experience, have a freeing potential.

The creative, unrestrictive concepts read in the near simultaneity with the dance documents participate in the re-composition of texts. The past is re-inscribed, and present becomes intertwined with bodily memories previously repressed. With these

openings it is possible to initiate new readings, readings in which language of the body and language of the theory are mixed. These two planes of becoming – the written language and the space of the body, do not explain each other but interfere with any fixed interpretation. They deform one another, and enter the potentially chaotic field of inter-related signs.

According to Deleuze, the body without organs lies ‘[b]eyond the organism, but also at the limit of the lived body’ (Deleuze: 39). The rhythmic unity of the senses appears at the threshold, where the darkness and the chaos threaten the organization of the living body. Fear makes its appearance in the improvisational work of the collective. It is intentionally exposed by the performers, challenging assumptions about technical and social skills, and about the interpretative methodologies of the viewers. Fear can be read as a symptom of emerging chaos. The disorganization of the body leads towards failed choreography. The failed choreography is a new choreography. The lack of coherency causes the unexpected rearrangements of the matter. It is accompanied by the appearance of molecular becomings: subtlety of a hand resting on a shoulder; particularity of a deep exhale; unresolved potentiality of an unpronounced word never to become a heard syllable, or exchange of glances on the edge of imperceptibility. The bodies relate to each other in multiple ways, transmuting each other’s shadows, losing their anatomical particularities in the contact with the other, detaching temporarily from their humanity and from the trained forms of behavior and organization. Writing about the art of Francis Bacon, Deleuze explains animal becoming as the artistic transformation of the human subject: ‘The shadow escapes from the body like an animal we had been sheltering’ (Deleuze: 20). The organization of the body, highly valued in the dance training, is

disturbed through various separations. These separations accentuate singularities, and allow for the appearance of heterogeneity where homogeneity was an initial requirement.

The creating of a performance situation, the organization of an event, the finding of space, the invitations, beginning, endings, warm-ups, and the collaborative creations of entertainment strategies are unifying events, asking for the recognition of sameness. Once we become aware of the strategic planning involved, dancers start repetitively breaking out from the norms and structures previously established, producing, and falling into, zones of indiscernibility. These zones of indiscernibility appear at the level of meaning – comprehension, and at the level of visual codification. The emotional expectations are often disappointed. The bodies alone or in contact, become almost unreadable – animalistic and confusingly reminiscent of various forms, without ever fully taking on those forms. The fullness is suggested, but not fully realized.

In relationship to Bacon's paintings, Deleuze invents the diagram-accident which can scramble the figurative form. The diagram acts by 'imposing a zone of objective indiscernibility or in-determinability between two forms' (Deleuze: 126). Diagram-accident blurs the formal arrangements in the space. In the dance space, once the initial structure is deformed, there appear new correspondences and resemblances not based on rational planning. The learned ideas about what is seen with potentials for axiomatic readings of spaces and bodies are disturbed. There are no immediate correspondences. The initial structure is still apparent, and the singular refrains stubbornly reappear at moments when there was a perceptible potential for stilling the space. A movement on the one end of the room is reflected in the movement on the other end of the room. The movement motif introduced by one dancer is reintroduced later, seemingly out of

nowhere. The body parts become interchangeable in the play of signification. The foot moves like a hand, the arm supports the body weight, the bodies act as architectural structures creating new systems of support, even humorously transforming into new forms of mannerist ornamentation. The animalistic behaviors challenge and interfere with beginnings of dramatic narratives. The dancers reinvest dramatic potentials with flights of desire that do not necessarily find resolutions in romantic relations or lyrical duets. They indulge briefly in the kinetic escapes from their humanity. The usual hierarchies are reversed or forgotten, and the body moves unrestricted by the norms of the society.

The individual speech becomes a refrain. The Grand Union performers stubbornly verbalize and communicate. The language returns, recreates the experiences and interrupts a tendency towards potential romantization of silence. The role of the refrain is to establish territory. Thus, Deleuze names it a territorial assemblage (Deleuze: 314). The speech that dancers engage in is confrontational. It confronts the expectation of silence from dancers. It is a mode of confronting each other; re-negotiating dynamics of sameness and difference, and also, inviting the shadows of the unspeakable into the space. The recognizable refrains awaken latent forces in the space. Deleuze connects the role of the artist to the act of territorialization: ‘The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark’ (Deleuze: 316). The dancer does not leave a visual mark of her movement pathway, but re-configures space, re-arranges bodies, and facilitates emergence of spatial designs.

In the late 60s and early 70s, experimental dancers defined their art form through the context in which it was presented. Thus, the internal content became secondary to the

politics of the performative situation. ‘Political themes of participation, democracy, cooperation, and ecology, although often implicit in the early sixties, were now made explicit.’ (Banes: xix). According to Banes, the *Continuous Project-Altered daily* ‘examined not only the stages and modes of performance, but also issues of leadership and control’. As the individual participants became equal co-creators, the project evolved into a collaborative improvisational collective: The Grand Union.

On the tapes from the Fales Downtown Collection there are seven dancing participants. We can recognize: Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Nancy Lewis Green, Stephen Paxton and Yvonne Rainer. The music heard was chosen by the members of the collective, and changed from day to day.¹⁴ The footage was taken on May 28th 1978 at the Joe LoGiudice Gallery. The gallery space was owned by the art dealer Joe LoGiudice only for a short period of time, from 1971 to 1973. The Gallery no longer exists. The owner relocated and opened a resort/restaurant in New Mexico.

The space where the events took place was never a permanent dance institution. The space was born at the historical crossroads, during the time when the avant-garde artists were looking for alternative venues. It reflects the minimal expenditures of the downtown dance scene. The space is the location for the event, but it also becomes a source for multiplicity of events. (There are columns, movable chairs which are often transported during the performance, and a ladder used for climbing and resting). Through mapping and re-mapping of spatial markers the moving bodies of the dancers

¹⁴ All the information about the Grand Union tapes is from Fales Library. It was given to me by Breat Phillips, the library Media Archivist

are rendered readable. No reading is every finalized, as the movement itself denies fixity of any stable interpretation. The conventional views of the body are challenged by the bodily intimacy the dancers display. The transitional nature of the project is reflected in the way dancers interact, seamlessly enter and exit, and are willing to give up their territories in order to accommodate changes that are out of their immediate control. Dancers act as trained street performers, pedestrians opened to the working of chance procedures, and as the embodied cultural critics; taking in account both subtle shifts in their environment, and the large political changes.

In the essay on *Grand Union*, Steve Paxton gives the account of the objectives of the collective. ‘The weighty theatrical tradition of subjecting one’s self to another person’s aesthetic of time-space-effort manipulation is ignored in favor of the attempt to be emancipated without confining or restricting others’ (Paxton: 130-1). Theatre hierarchies rely on the tradition of subjection of the body. It is through the mapping of the very apparatus that confined the individual subject to its representational double that the dancer can repossess the body and begin the ‘survey of unexplored lands’. The re-mapping takes place on the level of visibility and on the level of utterance¹⁵. Deleuze denounces subjects and objects, and talks about regimes that define social movements. The literal movement of dancer’s body initiates new lines, lines that move in between prescribed paths, and predictable organizations. The graceful movement of the body does not anymore signify silent submission to the authority from the above, nor the unquestioned respect for institutions, their conventions, and appropriate expression. The movement of the body, can during this utopian project extend into enunciations, is

¹⁵ Deleuze writes about curves of visibility and curves of utterances starting with Foucault’s notion of apparatus (Deleuze 2009: 339)

informed by the image-thought awareness, and released into moments of de-codified presence in space. The historical awareness of the traditions of the confinement and regimentation of the body precedes the coming into being of the conscious subjects. Through subtle acts of subversion, the power of theatrical illusion is disturbed and the contours of the apparatus of control outside the intimacy of the dance studio are rendered visible, taking forms of shadows, ghosts, and kinetic fallacies. Thus, there comes into existence the utopian project of a thinking dancer, who moves with others with the intentional curiosity and the increased awareness of multiple forces acting upon the interacting bodies. Once there is no presentational deification of performers, the question of control is brought to surface. The group of performing subjects openly looks at the group of performing spectators. The expectations, desires, subversions and deformations enter performative space, as the question of authority posits itself. How are boundaries negotiated? Does a performer or a selected group, easily slip into a role of the leader?

Yvonne Rainer saw the dissipation of her initial project as an opening of potential for modes of inhabiting space that is different, or at least more inclusive, than the ones prescribed by the traditional theatrical hierarchies. She writes in the letter to Paxton and Dilley in 1969:

‘The words I keep thinking of to describe [the piece] come perilously close to current psychotherapeutic clichés: reality of encounter, responsible interaction, truthful response. I got a glimpse of human behavior that my dreams for a better life are based on- real, complex, constantly in flux, rich, concrete, funny, focused, immediate, specific, intense, serious at times to the point of religiosity, light, diaphanous, silly, and many leveled at any particular moment.’ (Rainer: 149)

What follows are isolated, fragmented memories from my notes. I watched the Grand Union Tapes multiple times. The events taking place have transformed in my mind and particularities of the specific instances of seeing were reactivated when I went over my notes. Many frames for viewing and receiving art overlap. I am seeing these dances as historical documents informed by other documents. They remind me of a collection of ripped pages from many diaries, belonging to many authors. They evoke a poetic landscape filled with unorthodox interpretations, and deformations of the conventional meaning systems. It is a space that does not invite the stratification of grand narratives and mythic realities. The projections and transferences become elusive, as the video material reflects the transitory nature of movement. This act is accompanied by the reawakening of potential for actively re-imagining the past. We are made aware of the subjectivity of the camera, of the intimacy of the space, and of our inability to permanently stratify the concept of objective vision and knowledge. Feelings, sensations, and memory clusters invade prescribed objectivity; objectivity that privileges sight and marginalizes other senses. I found myself reinventing dances, and becoming absorbed in details that would otherwise easily escape my attention.

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A woman is touching the leg of another dancer with her mouth. Is she eating, biting, or just pulling the pants with her teeth, inviting the friend to play? Is she exploring a new point of connection to the other's body? The tendency to create a consistent narrative is disrupted as she leaves the scene. Next, she begins a ritual like repetition of arm gestures. She stays bound to the earth. After completion of the task, she deliberately walks towards an open ladder and climbs up.

Same dancer, on a different tape, is warming up slowly. She flows through the formal dance vocabulary. The body is pulled off balance. Then, the recovery happens through the exploration of the bodyweight's relationship to gravity. What initially seems as a preparation for an attitude turn becomes a repeated reach towards appearing circular form. The unfinished circle is an elusive indication of invisible geometry on the plane parallel to the ground surface. A fall is inevitable when the force of the upper body exceeds the pressure of the foot into the ground. Dancer propelled towards movement, loses her balance. The lifted foot and the head almost touch. The dancer becomes a stretching amorphous animal-being. An endlessly extending body temporarily forgets the imperative to fulfill a prescribed step. Each weight transfer is a new experience. The fall is ambiguous as the easy recovery disturbs the memory of the fall. The dancer who is trained to balance fails, and yet this failure appears as an intentional change in the weight distribution. She repeatedly over extends, falling at the edge of formal expression. Her suspensions become longer. A body becomes a paradoxical entity: very human, and also abstracted, isolated from its background through the intensity it projects.

Through the eye of the camera, the inner-outer dichotomy is confirmed, and then denied. When the dancer is isolated, the turbulence of the external motion and the noise from the street appear as musical accompaniment to the self-absorption of the dancer healing an injury through practice of moving fluidly. (Her ankle is wrapped.)

When the camera is more inclusive, the rhythms of the body begin to reflect the external motions in the room. Waves of feelings and sensations ripple through the body. Other dancers join the solo mover. They introduce new singularities, each of the dancers moving mostly in one place. Movement vocabularies sometimes overlap. A leg kick

reflects a gesture of the arm, which extends into a leap, and reappears in the unexpected arc of the back. The fragments of the dancing body, de-signified and de-personalized create unexpected analogies across the space. It is the glances that bring back the personalities, and the conventional behaviors. The faces remind us that these dancers know how to entertain and use their pre-learned skills. They display originality, bravery, humor and knowledge of theatrical conventions.

Trisha Brown falls as if she was shot, and then, Barbara Dilley falls as if she was following, imitating, possibly commenting on Trisha's fall. Is this death or sudden rapture? We do not know yet. The composition is established. Bodies appear to follow a regular pattern, a refrain with slight variation. Then the power of the composition explodes into multiplicity of meanings and potential interpretations.

"I don't have anything to say." A voice interrupts, and translates the free flow of the movement into potential for paradoxical readings. The statement implies preference for silence, at least silence of meaning, and yet the words are pronounced. However, movement and language appear to flow independently. The territories established through events are now suspended within overlapping clichés. We are made aware of the muscles involved in falling and getting up, of the efforts to preserve and reestablish organized space, and of familiar images evoked: a person being a shot, going to bed and getting up and automaton day-after-day, choreographing a piece and initiating others in the exploration of specific actions. Potential for immanence, reappearing like a glimpse of another reality, is overpowered through insurgence of the blocks of conventional language. Are we witnessing a rehearsal situation, dancers who need to speak to their audience, or a conscious practice in communication? What does this situation say about

professional and its dynamics inside and on the outskirts of established institutions? Is there a potential for conversation in-between disciplinary boundaries?

Yvonne Rainer lets her slightly stiffened body be carried by the members of the audience. She is overtly disrupting conventions of spectatorship. How does the informality of the event inform the pre-existent, often romanticized myths about dancers and their lives? Occasionally, audiences are joined by the performers. In one of the videos Barbara Dilley and Yvonne Rainer sit in the audience sharing a soda, listening to a song by a French singer named Barbara. Next to them is a woman holding a child in her lap. Each discreet gesture, movement of the eyes, subtle shift on the chair, circling of child's feet, becomes an exquisite, unique, unrepeatable moment; a fragment of real life placed in the center of our attention through the eyes of the camera.

Barbara Dilley crawls following the path prescribed by the cloth on the ground. She runs into David Gordon and Trisha Brown, thus compositionally transforming a physically tense male-female duet into an absurdist trio. The space of the duet is irreversibly altered, movement qualities change, and sounds of the bodies bumping into each other are exchanged with the communicative noise and gestural vocabulary. What appeared as a new language with specific signification becomes an aural environment, a play of multiplicities of expression.

Steve Paxton and Nancy Greene stand across each other. She is half-naked, reminiscent of a neo-Raphaelite painting or a classical sculpture of a water nymph. As they begin a partnering dance, the references from history of representation are overpowered by the expectations of athleticism. She supports him. He is light and fluid,

momentarily suspended. No great virtuosic act follows. She arcs and from this difficult position tries to lift on to his back. There is a great beauty in the discrepancy between two bodies that do not move in sync. They do not restrict their options in order to fulfill an implicit formal requirement. The beauty of the impossible is evoked through the unusual partnering sequence. Afterwards, they rest silently seated on the floor, using each other as a support. The subtle motion of seemingly still bodies caught by the camera interrupts the expectations of a dramatic ending for a love duet. The motion continues beyond predictable narrative resolutions.

‘Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible’ (Deleuze : 280). Movement is continuously occurring even when it is eluding our perception. Contrasts between speeds and slowness create potentials for perceiving what previously escaped our attention. If the timings are altered rather than bound to the repetitive routines, the historical traces re-appear on surfaces, creating complex topologies and overlapping planes of visual signs, movement lines, and meaning potentialities. Writing about dance reinvents the seen and the felt experiences. The labor of translating dance into language renders obvious the impossibility of completely translating one language into other without tearing open the gaps within language. Here we encounter meaning slippages and misunderstandings. Potentials for new theories emerge from these gaps. Areas of ambiguity are not only esthetically interesting. These are also places for investigation, places where multiple forces and lines of knowing intersect.

The strategies used by the performers confuse and re-direct viewers. They disallow simple identifications with performers, and invite critical assessment of relationships

between the performers and viewers. This time, they are informed by the experiential understanding, and the increasing amount of overlapping, performative texts. Personal history, preserved in the body, presents a challenge to consumerist habits and expectations. The desire for the continual fulfillment of visual expectations can surface, as we become aware of the subtle activities taking place during acts of perception.

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