
The Rhythmic Dance of (Micro-)Contrasts

Gerko Egert

Freie Universität Berlin

I

White, blue, green, red, blue, red, blue, white, violet, green, blue, red, green, violet, white The whole stage flickers in different colors, darkness and light banging and changing rapidly. Stroboscopic rhythms produce an excess of colour and contrast. This is almost the end of Hiroaki Umeda's dance performance *Haptic*. Its beginning is slow: thin lines of blue light are pulsing on the ground, different colours filling the stage evoking a burning bright light. A light that is always excessive and always too much: too bright, too colourful, too fast and too intense. But not only the light, also the sound of the performance produces excessive rhythms: it is a collage of technical sounds, the buzzing of machines, steady high-pitched tunes. During the whole performance, they produce different levels of staccatic rhythms and repetitive patterns. Sound loops and sudden moments of silence cutting across and interfering with the different movements of light and colour. Again: these sounds are too loud, too long, too shrill. And the silence is too silent. A third rhythm: the moving body of Hiroaki Umeda. Like the sounds, the movements evoke the association of machines: Many movements gear into each other, set each other off and produce a whole system of movements. The body: a production and product of a movement machine. In *Haptic* it is not the body, its anatomy and shape that connects the movements of the different parts; it is the interplay of all these different rhythms that produce an ongoing interference pattern of movements. Even though the body freezes several times during the performance, the vibratory force of movement goes on, always pushing its own limits. The rhythmic movements are fast and somehow too fast for the body.

The rhythmic patterns in *Haptic* do not build a structure or narration, they rather produce states – pulsing levels of movement, color, and sound. There is no climax, no turning point only repetition and duration. *Haptic* produces a mode of sensation, which effects the audience in duration and which can be linked to Okamura Keiko's concept of "Cold Burn" (*Teion Yakedo*). While being normally burned immediately, Okamura describes the sensation of cold burn as a slow change from a pleasant sensation of warmth to an eventually painful result. [1] In dance cold burn can be described as a way to produce *too much* sensation, "hyper-sensation". Katherine Mezur writes: the performance "produces in the viewer/experiencer and performer a kind of 'hyper' sensation that results in a low-intensity dull pain, a longing, a hurt" (Mezur 2013). The rhythms of *Haptic* are not only hammering but also burning. These are no *hot* rhythms, they burn cold in duration and repletion, a repetition that is not of the same but of the difference: the contrast of colours, of sounds and movements.

II

In contrast to the bright colourful floor and wall of the stage Hiroaki Umeda is dressed in black. But *Haptic* is not the dance of *one* black body. Hiroaki Umeda is not dancing *in front* of a luminescent wall. He does not *perform* the movements. The body exists in *Haptic* not prior to the movements, like the wall exists not prior to the body. Wall and body, colour and black are moving simultaneously and with each other. More precisely: the movements crossing through the wall and body, body and floor, red and black, and blue and green. They all produce relational rhythms across the field of the performance. [2] What dances in *Haptic* is neither the dancer's body nor the colourful wall, neither the figure nor the ground. What dances is the contrast between them. "Pure edge. Neither black nor white. Nor neither nor both. A virtual line" (Massumi 2011: 89). The contrast (spatial and temporal) moves rhythmically: the dance of the virtual line.

This does not exclude form, it is rather the process of form-taking. The virtual line of contrast does not only move the dancer's body it also forms it. In the rhythmical movements an iterative pattern emerges and produces a figure: the dancer, moving. This form is neither stable nor static. As the dancer's body, its figure is not pre-given it does not move through space. The

movements are an ongoing “transformation”, not from one form to another but a process without a beginning or an end. They are rhythms of “de- and reconfiguration” (Brandstetter 2010: 343). This process is not a process of the body but of the contrast and therefore linked to perception. “The objective extraction of identity arises out of movement. Vision’s synesthetic result stands on an oscillating kinesthetic ‘ground’. Perceived stability and order emerge from perceptual chaos. Vision is the process of that passage: from the griddiness of light-struck to the practical grip of abstract oversight. From the invisible abyss of the proto-figural to relative objective clarity” (Massumi 2011: 97). And yet: the figure is not the end of vision, vision does not dissolve in the figure. Vision is not only processual but also “double”: “Looking more or less closely, focusing more or less attentively, the eye oscillates between the annulment of the process and its activity. Flicker. Between fully-hatched stability and continuing, cracked emergence. Flicker. Between the made and the making. Flicker. Between seeing the figurative stability and seeing the imperceptible float of figural potential” (Massumi 2011: 93). Vision is flickering. Vision is rhythmic. Vision is process. In *Haptic* vision is also durational. We see a dance of contrast, moving rhythmically between black and colour, glowing chaos and habitual figure, between pleasant warmth and burning heat.

III

It is the colourful light, the luminescent heat (calor), the fire that “detaches us from a visual approach to vision and makes colour the edge of that shift. Colour vision becomes less a retinal and more a bodily activity common to fairy tales in that we may pass into the image while we are looking at it” (Taussig 2006: 30-1). The field of contrast *Haptic* produces is not something we can observe from outside. Sensation is not the secondary sensation of an external event. There is no sensation of the rhythm only rhythmic sensation. [3] And yet only a fraction of sensation in *Haptic* is immediate. In the dancing rhythms sensations are changing and emerging in always different and new ways in the duration of the event. It is the alteration in time that makes the contrasts felt. Sometimes they are clearly recognizable but most of the time the contrasts are too small, too fast, too big, too slow. Microcontrast. Thousands of them dancing between the colour, sounds and bodies of *Haptic*, relating vision to sound to movement to touch, to figure to colour: an excess

of microcontrast. In the rhythm of contrast, its repetition and duration, vision begins to burn. Not in the beginning, not immediately but in duration. It is the cold burn of sensation evoked by the excessive rhythm of (micro-)contrasts.

Notes

[1] In 2000 Okamura Keiko curated an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo titled *Teion Yakedo, Land/mind/body-scapes in the Age of Cold Burn*. In the show's catalogue she explains the concept of *cold burn*: "A cold or low-temperature burn is a burn that results from over-exposure of the skin to a relatively mild heat source [...] that is not hot enough to cause immediate burning if it is held next to the skin for long enough period of time. The pain emerges only gradually as the victim is enjoying a pleasant sensation of warmth, the heat gradually works into his or her skin with eventually painful results. [...] The problem with a cold burn is that treatment may be delayed because the effects are felt only gradually, so it may actually take longer to heal. Such burns are seldom fatal, but they cause real pain. [...] This situation can be compared to life in today's society, where the uneventful repetitions of everyday life can be transformed into sources of pain" (Quoted in Mezur 2013).

[2] For the concept of movement not bound to one body but as a "virtual plane of movement" see Gil 2002. The plane of immanence "enables the construction of a virtual plane of movement where all of the movements of bodies, objects, music, colour acquire a consistency, that is, a logic or a nexus [...]. It also enables the re-organization of movements of the body without recourse to external elements, since the actual movements of the body of the dancer obtain their impetus from the virtual plane and from the tensions produced there" (124).

[3] For the concept of rhythm not being prior to experience see: Erin Manning. *Relationscapes. Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2009.

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