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# Affective Commotion

## Minding the Gaps in Research-Creation

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*Is it necessary 'to begin'...?*

Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

*Inflexion:*

*a tendency that precedes*

*not the obscure not the unformed*

*but that which is apprehended as it is transformed*

*a creative in-between\**

*Inflexions:*

*an in-between journal of transformative tendency  
at the creative crossroads of philosophy, art, and technology<sup>1</sup>*

### **How /Now**

At the start of his essay in this issue, “Clone your technics: Research-creation, radical empiricism and the constraints of models” Andrew Murphie makes a claim for the ‘how’ of research-creation: “Although ‘research-creation’ often feels dramatically experimental - and is genuinely exciting - it is not unusual. Not only is all research research-creation but research-creation is a common cultural condition, even if traditional institutions sometimes pretend otherwise.”

Minding the gap of research-creation involves attention to the ongoing everydayness of the

singular. The brief dash that separates the two terms might leave one feeling breathless—how to move from one to the other, from the pedestrian rigor of research to the dramatic gesture of creation? Such a movement entails more than words—here, in the “Nodes” section of *Inflexions*, these collected essays explore the potential of language not as only as expressive medium but as one element of a composition of forces, exploiting *linguistic overtones* that strive for a precision of feeling without making claim to exhaustive meaning. In the very phrase research-creation, the dash is deployed to delay and extend meaning, to render language strangely visible or to convey a strange mouthfeel (how do we speak such punctuations?) in its sensational elements. Research-creation animates the strangeness in the everyday by reminding us of a lived reality of relation too often obscured by a retroactive distancing between mind/ body, self/ other, subject/ object, artist/ artwork, discovery/ invention. In making the subject of our first issue “How is Research-Creation?” we at *Inflexions* not only want to call attention to the already creative work of writing, thinking and producing concepts, but at the same time, reactivate the rigorous mystery of research as what Deleuze terms a ‘dark precursor’ rather than simply a searchlight in an archive, to imagine the synthetic work of research as making space for the new.<sup>2</sup> Research implies an attentive posture, an openness to what is already happening, an expanded perception of what we are already participating in. Priority falls not onto one term or another in the assemblage of research-creation, but to the ‘creative inbetween’.

Minding the gap points to the generative nature of compositions, rather than simply exploring the end points of connections. All the essays collected here are attentive to the practice of composition as both a bringing together and as the lived and creative reality of the composition itself. Alfred North Whitehead, defining creativity as the principle of novelty (in a quote that moves between essays), describes composition as the creation of ‘novel entities’: “at once the togetherness of the ‘many’ which it finds, and also [...] one among the disjunctive ‘many’ which it leaves. The many become one, and are increased by one”.<sup>3</sup> Research-creation minds and mines that extended moment between these two.

Betweenness: the question of movement is at the heart of any inquiry into research-creation, but a movement from one to another is not what is at stake here, but rather the question of what it

means to sense the mobility of thought itself. As a journal of research–creation, *Inflexions* seeks *not* to set up models, define a practice or delimit a field, but to practice ourselves, to engage in the creation, exploration and use of techniques for the generation of newness, not the radically new as a break but newness as emerging from modes of participation, contact, transduction and relation—those which produce a ‘novel togetherness’. Attention to such novelty requires a mode that Henri Bergson terms ‘intuition’, a method of entering into duration in such a way that, with work, one becomes aware of other durations, above and beyond our own.<sup>4</sup> Intuition for Bergson is always a creative re-discovery, a future anterior, a sensational tactic, a reversal of the inflexion where experience slides into utility and functional perception. According to our modest proposal, research-creation should be understood as a method of intuition, a technique for expanding perception that puts it into immediate contact with sensation, in what Brian Massumi here calls the “thinking-feeling of what happens”. An expansion of perception brings us into “affective co-motion”: by opening us to more possibilities for being affected, we increase our own power to affect in return.

As part of our work, *Inflexions* seeks to engage in what Deleuze and Guattari call the “modest task of a pedagogy of the concept, which would have to analyze the conditions of creation as factors of always singular moments”.<sup>5</sup> As Murphie notes, cloning technics is one such practice—in making technics available for other attempts, what is made apparent is the ‘differential repetition’ produced—a singularity. The question of research-creation does not seek to understand how these modes relate to each other, but instead to operate in the “reality of the excluded middle”, to linger in the indiscreet gap between them, to make resonant and mobile the eventness of their sensible connection. Research-creation explores becoming, which more than any object is what art is, is what concepts do—it puts the movement back into thought. Another word for becoming is ‘relational potential’, what Erin Manning describes in her essay as “encounters with emergent environments from which relations or articulations are born”. A critical example of such an environment is the body itself. The body as the “locus of research-creation” is a recurrent theme in these essays, its creative potential understood as the double becoming of affecting and being affected.

## Unthought experiments

*Inflexions* emerges from a series of “relational environments” that took place and continue to unfold here in Montreal. In part the journal responds to Derek McCormack’s question from his essay here: “How to make after the event sense of the processual, relational affectivity of a movement, a gesture, the playful use of an apparently useless object, the movement of the body when talking about movement, or the touch of a hand given over to the response of another?” Part of an ongoing series of experiments in research-creation, [\*Technologies of Lived Abstraction\*](#), two workshops in Montreal—[\*Dancing the Virtual\*](#) (May 2006) and [\*Housing the Body\*](#) (August 2007)—sought to develop techniques that provoked and made sensational a “movement of thought”. As Manning describes this: “Thought in motion is a creative proposition for thought at work”. These events were attempts to activate the virtual, practical séances that explored the pressures of enabling constraints as that which forces creativity to emerge as a line of flight. In some ways, they can be imagined as “unthought experiments”, methods for thinking-feeling the virtual. A central concern in these events was precisely this question not only of “after the event sense”, or a recognition, but how to practically continue the work of research-creation, or what Manning calls “making multiple sense”. *Inflexions* is part of the attempt to imagine the experience of these discrete events as acts of ongoing transformation. The essays that follow are themselves attempts at research-creation, activating the sense of essays not as objects but as images of thought, themselves eventful—as essaying, or trying, an activity that always contains within itself the (productive) possibility of failure.

This issue opens with a challenge to expanding our habitual recognition of what counts as “academic thought”. Andrew Murphie’s “Clone your technics! Research creation, radical empiricism and the constraints of models” claims with outrageous practicality: “all research is research creation”, that is to say, “an assemblage to produce the new”. In exploring the ‘how’ of research-creation, Murphie argues that although this type of experimentation is not itself new, the moment is now for beginning to identify certain key ways in which a type of research-creation we might want is coming into view. The ‘how’ for Murphie is a question of technics, the creation of an immanent order, the semblance of a ‘truth of a variation’ that emerges when attention is

paid to the ‘noisiness’ of relation, one usually filtered out in models of thought drawn from the ‘cognitive turn’. A technic is a mode of attentive engagement with the inbetween, an awareness of the creativity of ‘worlding’, a term he borrows from Massumi. Another way to describe a technic is as the “differential repetition involved in relationality”. The kind of research-creation that we want, Murphie argues, is one that seeks to “to create the new with awareness that this is what we are doing”. This awareness, he claims, is what “makes all the difference in the world”. Attention and awareness characterize the form of agency that Murphie argues for, a research into how participation occurs, where agency is not the autonomous action of a subject but a mode of participation that produces becomings. As such, Murphie explores experiments in thinking ‘with’ throughout this paper, from his participation in events such as *Housing the Body* or the [\*Assemblage for Collective Thought\*](#) (with Anna Munster), through a variable series of encounters with dogs, from his own dog Tommy, through Pavlov and Kant. Murphie draws on these experiences, even when the encounter is simply a dog wandering through an open room at an academic workshop, to explore what happens when the boundaries of what constitutes a field of inquiry are made sensible to an inflexion of directed attention.

Murphie’s model of research-creation is thus grounded in a radical empiricism, a variation on the work of William James, in its attention to the “force field of real relations, of immanence, of contingency and immediate ecology”. In arguing for the contagious force of technics, Murphie’s advice is to “clone your technics”, not in order to establish models, but to open up awareness to ‘differential repetition’. Technics lend themselves to communication and experience precisely because they involve a ‘doing with’, the suggestive force of the how that seeks to produce the now—the experience of a singularity that “makes all the difference in the world”. Technics are the “enabling constraints” of research-creation in their very immanence, a standardization of repetition in terms of experience (try this!) in order to become aware that in the attempt we are changing them. Only in this way, Murphie argues, do we participate fully in the mobility of thought, rather than a mobilization of thought, getting away from what Avital Ronell calls “the test drive” mode of experimentation which seeks utility and preterritorialized outcomes into a mode of experimentation that recognizes there is no testing that is not already fully part of the creation of the world.

In describing the pleasure of critical events such as *Dancing the Virtual*, in which participants did not present finished research but rather engaged in “platforms of relation”, Derek McCormack characterizes this collaborative labour by quoting Bruno Latour: “The critic is the one who assembles, who provides arenas in which to gather”. Both in her essay here and in her role as founder of the [Sense Lab](#), one arena in which *Inflexions* has flocked together, Erin Manning’s work resonates with this critical disposition. In “Creative Propositions for Thought in Motion”, Manning fabricates such an assemblage from the practical examples of Andrei Tarkovsky, William James, Lygia Clark, Gilles Deleuze, Amanda Baggs, Alfred North Whitehead and Robert Irwin in order to not to model research-creation, but like Murphie, to begin to suggest technics that must be explored in their singularity. Beginning from the claim that “thought in motion is a creative proposition for thought at work”, Manning lays out a series of imperatives (Lure the feeling! Make multiple sense! Know not what a body can do!) where movement is the site of a creative practice of “thinking-feeling” in order to “activate the conceptual at work in the pre-articulation of the experiential”. To take Tarkovsky as an example of such a technic at work, Manning deploys a kind of “editing-with” in her use of these examples—not an imposition from without but an attentive response to the virtual potential each possesses. This mode of editing is at once evocative and provocative, and asks us to carefully mind the gap such editing entails. In this essay, Manning places herself into the milieu: “begin with the interval and admit it into experience. Rethink what counts as art, as practice, as thought, as writing, as politics. The relation is as real as anything else – it is the associated milieu through which all else comes into contact.” In “attending to the circumstances”, Manning argues for the centrality of feeling to the rigor of thought, for a rigor of feeling to match that of thought. When sensation shades and colours perception, the potential for relation is expanded. Manning argues for relationality in place of a more limited notion of interactivity. She quotes video artist Amanda Baggs, to describe the potential such an expanded perception allows: “Far from being purposeless, the way that I move is an ongoing response to what is around me. Ironically, the way that I move when responding to everything around me is described as ‘being in a world of my own’, whereas if I interact with a much more limited set of responses and only react to a much more limited part of my surroundings people claim that I am ‘opening up to true interaction with the world’”. In her own rhythmic editing, Manning creates a set of propositions that seek to put thought into

motion, abstracting in resonance an actualized potential of the inherent openness to connection of the artist-thinkers she explores and the assemblages she provokes.

Research-creation asks us to pay attention to the transformative powers of process in and of itself. As a geographer whose terrain is the “relational field of an expanded empiricism”, Derek McCormack, in “Thinking Spaces for Research-Creation”, explores the allure of errancy, beginning with a quote from Bernard Cache: “In this unruly geography there is always time: time to take a detour and leave the shortcut behind.” As a journal, *Inflexions* defines itself as interested in inter/trans/non disciplinarity, but the question of research-creation demands not a free for all but a careful attention to the persistent potential of discipline itself as a technique, like the training of dancer or athlete which is not only about repetitive, goal oriented movement but a singularity of performance. McCormack asks: in what ways does research-creation posit a sense of the “more than disciplinary” and why does that matter? In geography, McCormack argues for an errancy of encounter as that which inflects the disciplinary with a sensibility. Research-creation becomes that which allows the mind to wander: “an ongoing prehension of spacing-timing as the ontogenetic condition for thinking-movement”. This requires more than simply creative forms of representation, rather: “A starting point is to understand space in processual and relational terms: to think space in its making rather than as a made”.

In short, McCormack’s essay asks us to pay attention to the ontogenetic possibilities inherent when wandering turns to wondering, as a stretching out of affective response to novelty that can “move thinking otherwise”. How wandering provokes wondering as a movement of thought calls attention to the ways in which the bodily practices of geography, of fieldwork, of immersive experience of the world and an “an affective investment in a range of bodily practices and competencies: walking, seeing, touching” are all too often short circuited by the disciplinary demands of an unstable discipline fearful of falling off balance. “Straddling” disciplines, geography has sometimes sought to resist inflections as the errant pull of the body in motion, seeking stability. McCormack instead suspends “the imperative of sense-making as a process of interpretive, after-the-movement signification. And shifts to sense-making as a generative pre-representational process,” touching here upon a central question of research-creation—what are

the forms of sense that the body makes? Moving away from the question of “what” is research-creation towards that of the how, McCormack calls attention to where “the balance between thinking and research shifts from explaining the nature – or the ‘what’ – of experience, but to the process of ‘experiencing, the method of its course, the *how* of its changes’(Dewey, 1958, 235)”. The attention to somatic techniques involve that sense that constraint is in fact “enabling”, that affective openness involves a training in relationality, an attention to what we are already doing. This is the awareness that Murphie calls for, that which ‘makes (a) difference’.

Stamatia Portanova’s “Infinity in one step: on the compression and complexity of a movement of thought” turns our attention towards the potential of a different discipline of bodily training—that of dance—in order to reimagine balancing not as a fear of falling but as a way of imagining the “body-mind event of an idea”. This “meta-stability” is the creative action of the fold, explored here in the light of Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz and seeking to understand the parallel elasticity of matter and thought. For Portanova, dance, here in the form of Nora Heilmann’s *Blindspot*, is a mode of folding that shows the “impossibility of separation between movement and thought”: a balanced form of expression. By balance, Portanova is not describing stasis, but borrowing a term from Manning, the ‘pre-acceleration’ of a qualitative movement that makes sensational those micro-movements that usually go unnoticed. To understand this balance, Portanova draws on Deleuze and Guattari to understand creation as a compositional possibility, a mode of balancing that allows for an autonomy of creation as a kind of becoming- environment. For instance, to stand on one leg, the best way to stay in what only “appears” as a static pose is not to concentrate on rigidifying the body, but to expand relation such that the floor, gravity and the air around you become part of the compositional effort. The effort or thought of relation is thus, as Portanova reminds us, “always of a collective nature”. Like Manning, Portanova is less interested in creation as the work of an individual and more of a “becoming-environment”: “When you think, you not only collaborate with other subjects and with the different temporal instances of your own self; you always collaborate with a whole environment.” Thus the dancer Pierre in Heilmann’s piece moves with the wall before ever taking a first step, a ‘technic’ (as in Murphie) of “differential repetition” or *re-pli*-cation in which the wall is no longer just a surface to move against but is repeatedly reengaged in its potential: “the clear perception of the wall is therefore

accompanied by an a-modal rhythmic sensation, while Pierre *differentially calculates* its qualities; the tense body *senses the wall* as rhythm, vibrating between the anticipation of a future movement (pre-acceleration) and the reminiscence of a past perception”. The elastic stretchiness of such movement is thought “thinking in us”, not the rational calculation of a subject but the virtual potential of “infinity in a step”.

In “The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens: A Semblance of a Conversation”, Brian Massumi stretches the shadow of a previous interview with Arjen Mulder, subjecting Mulder to a kind of possession in a critique of interactive art and in an argument for a different conception of “dynamic form”. This curious format foregrounds an issue central to the practice of research-creation—the way in which it calls into question subjective boundaries by making individuals themselves zones of resonance. In critiquing a certain “tyranny” of interactivity as all too often remaining within the action-reaction circuit, Massumi lays out a series of claims around an alternative mode of understanding the relationality of art, what he terms a “speculative pragmatism”, a technique of experience that expands perception to engage a double vision capable of perceiving what he terms “vitality affect”. Drawing on Susanne Langer’s concept of “semblance”, described as a “place-holder in present perception of a potential ‘more’ to life”, or a “living in potential”, Massumi considers the question of how dynamic form as semblance appears in art. Like Murphie, Massumi argues for the ‘everydayness’ of relationality ‘in its own right’, but wants to make a claim for the value of the aesthetic, and especially for the idea of form at a time when these ideas seem to have fallen out of favour, in order to understand precisely the value of such ‘useless’ experience that, as he describes it, can only be lived *in*, not lived *out*. Shifting the terms of debate so that the term up for valuation in ‘interactive art’ is art itself, Massumi argues for the uselessness of art as precisely that which allows potential to be felt. The contemporary moment demands that we “need right now to revisit the *aesthetic* in relation to interactive art”, to understand what art does, what it makes appear. One such thing is that:

Art brings back out the fact that all form is necessarily *dynamic form*. There is really no such thing as fixed form – which is another way of saying that the object of vision is virtual. Art is the technique for making that necessary but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the

things we live by. Art is the technique of living life *in* – experiencing the virtuality of it more fully, living it more intensely.

While the challenges and excitement of new media art have led to a turning away in some quarters from the question of aesthetics, Massumi argues that questions of form become even more relevant in the light of these changing definitions of art:

How *do* you speak of form when there is the kind of openness of outcome that you see in a lot of new media art, where participant response determines what exactly happens? When *the* artwork doesn't exist, because each time that it operates the interaction produces a variation, and the variations are in principle infinite? When the artwork proliferates? Or when it disseminates, as it does when the work is networked, so that the interaction is distributed in time and space and never ties back together in one particular form?

As such, Massumi wants us to open our eyes to an abstract movement of the aesthetic event, one that requires a seeing with *and* through actual form. Form is understood here as the apparition of potential in present experience, a doubled vision of both the object and a lived relation: “The potential we see in the object is a way our body has of being able to *relate* to the part of the world it happens to find itself in at this particular life's moment”. To see in this way is not just to see an object but an event, which is fully real movement, in the sense that the virtual is fully real, because “something has happened: the body has been capacitated. It's been relationally activated.”

This double vision of aesthetic experience is an opening to relationality via technique: “when you're getting there technically, I think it's because you've shifted the emphasis from interaction to lived relation, and are starting to find ways of operating on the qualitative level of thinking-feeling, where you are pooling styles of being and becoming, not just eliciting behaviors”. These are what Manning and Massumi call “techniques of relation”, techniques that seek to expand potential via the virtual. As Massumi critically argues: “it is only because relation is virtual that there is any freedom or creativity in the world”.

Such virtual relations are what *Inflexions* as a journal seeks to evoke and produce. The title of this journal, tweaked from the work of Bernard Cache and Gilles Deleuze, comes from the moment of *sensible* changing, prior to a determined destination, a ‘transformative tendency’, the moment of what Manning calls “preacceleration” or how “movement can be felt before it actualizes”.<sup>6</sup> The essays in this first issue seek to activate and extend that moment of uncertainty and potential to explore the creativeness of the inbetween. In an interview, Cache describes inflection as between “chaos and modulation”, fundamentally concerned with the potential emergence of new qualities.<sup>7</sup> Inflection is also a form of the gaze, one attuned to the movement of modulation. A journal of research-creation, *Inflexions* shares this goal of generating doubled visions of the world that may produce a vertiginous giddiness and may also induce contagious mutations.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> From the *Inflexions* statement of purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze 1994, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead 1978, 26.

<sup>4</sup> See Bergson 1998 and 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, 12.

<sup>6</sup> See Deleuze 1993, Cache 1995, Manning 2008 (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Cache 1999, 26.

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