
Infinity in a Step

On the compression and complexity of a movement of thought

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*Ideas are so folded in the soul that we can't always unfold or develop them,
just as things in themselves are inextricably wrapped up in nature.*

Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*

Thoughts and stones have something in common. A sad thought can fall on us as heavy as a stone, and a meteorite can cross the sky as quick as a thought. But apart from these metaphorical associations, a further relation between the ideal and the material world can be traced. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Gottfried Leibniz argued that a “[...] body has a degree of hardness as well as a degree of fluidity [... and] it is essentially elastic, the elastic force of bodies being the expression of the active compressive force exerted on matter” (Deleuze 2006, 6). Reading Leibniz’s philosophical writings, we find out that elasticity is also a requisite of thought, the pliable material of the mind (or, in Leibnizian terms, of the ‘soul’), “because the body and the soul have no point in being inseparable, for they are not in the least really distinct” (13). In other words, the matter of which (we think) bodies (such as stones) are composed and also, by extension, the matter of thought, unravels itself as elastic drapery. Reflections and actions can both be imagined as topological operations of dilatation and compression, distension and contraction, stretching and tightening of some elastic matter-thought: in order to develop an idea or to chisel a block of stone, one always has to unfold and re-fold the molecular intricacies of an extremely compressed, but also infinitely extensible, material. If matter-thought is the elastic fabric of the world, the fold is its main creative event.

In all its aesthetical, intellectual but also biological connotations, creation is an act of folding, a taking form of substance, a re-plication of some material into a folded structure (which could be a living body, a

mathematical function, a philosophical concept or an artwork). The model for science, philosophy and art (as well as for life) is therefore the *origami*, a paper-game where “unfolding is [...] not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up to the following fold” (6). The distinction between the generation and dissipation of forms, or between the complication and explication of thoughts, is always ambiguous, the double face of a process without any fixed model. The continuous passage from fold to fold, the simultaneity of formal composition and decomposition, the necessity to break a code in order to enter a new one, constitutes the ontogenetic tendencies of an autopoietic matter drawn by its own forces: bodily, terrestrial, even cosmic forces, elastic and plastic forces pushing matter and thought to take and lose form, animating the concreteness and ideality of creation without any need for *creators* or *models*. Overcoming the hylomorphic definition of creation, the conceptualization of a material [un]folding also challenges the dichotomy between *concrete* production and *abstract* thinking, suggesting that thought (as the generative matrix of creation) is not conceived *by*, but is *in* and *of* the autonomous materiality of the body, a body that thinks not only by words or concepts, but also by images, gestures or numerical figures. Here, the thinking body is intended not as the phenomenological subject manipulating, rationalizing and dominating an external world, but as “a processual entity that transforms and is transformed by the relational sensing matrices it instantiates through its movements”.¹ In other words, thought can only be generated in the *sensing body in movement*, a body that is creating and being created elastically, folding and being folded by its environment.

Being generated in (and not by) a continuously sensing and moving body, ideas appear not only as creative points of departure but also as residual effects emerging from the quickest, most ungraspable movements of thought. An idea is a *differential* of thought, a node, an intensive coagulation in the continuous unfolding of the sensing/thinking body, a body-mind event (Deleuze 2001, 181). Following this definition, we come to understand that a movement of thought is an event of unexpected violence, the inexplicable virtuality of ideas crossing the body with an imperceptible speed and torturing it with their irresistible expressive urge. Navigating your body while you stay still, freezing your movements while you walk, run or dance, ideas come from who knows where and do not aim towards any predetermined point, their infinity and instantaneity going beyond the clear coordinates of intellectual orientation. It is not *I* who thinks but, quoting Gilles Deleuze, ‘another thinks in me’. Forces think in me. Travelling at the speed of thought, ideas are energetic intensifications that escape the subject and its consciousness while dissolving into an incorporeal and inessential realm, pure virtualities to be experienced, actualized and expressed. The conception and expression of ideas happens at the intersection of movement and thought, of concrete action and abstract

imagination, at the singular connective point where the absolute virtuality and openness of the mind encounters the inertia and elasticity of matter. The conception of a *general idea* (the rational definition of a self-identical subject and of an immutable notion attached to it) stands at the exact center and represents a momentary freezing, a state of apparently stable equilibrium between the two extremes of thought and action, as if both had come to a standstill. On the other hand, the *singular idea* (the vague singularity of thought) emerges as a glimpse, an intuitive *sense*, from different degrees of combination and complementarity between these two tendencies. In other words, ideas can only be generated in the continuous aspiration to pure thought (the dreamer) or to pure action (the automaton) but without fully realizing or blocking them, always keeping the thinker's movement in a sort of acrobatically balanced, meta-stable composition of body and mind.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari identify the most important and difficult outcome of creation with the capacity to transform the volatile, acrobatic fugacity of ideas and to bend the malleability of matter into a body that can “stand on its own feet”. For the two philosophers, there is a *compositional* possibility which is neither related to physical possibility nor to imagination, and which gives the most acrobatic postures of body and mind the strength to be *balanced*. Many artworks cannot stand for even one instant. For an artwork (and, by extension, for a philosophical concept or a scientific function), to stand by itself does not mean to have a top and a bottom, nor to stand upright, but only denotes the act through which a material composition (of gestures, words or numbers) preserves itself as a monument. Drawing on these conceptualizations, it is possible to consider thought as a generative event through which the elasticity of matter, the speed of the sensing body in movement and the virtuality of ideas converge into a solid form of expression. This article explores three different qualities generally attributed to intellectual creation, highlighting its malleability and its capacity to mutate into interdisciplinary directions:

- Compression, i.e. the necessity to synthesize ideas into a univocal concept, as a contraction of thought. With a connection between philosophy and mathematics, differential calculus reveals thought as an irreducible complexity where the singular units (concepts or numbers) become necessarily approximate and open to outside *infiltrations*.
- Solitude, in the sense of a limited nature of thought as a monadic act. This further *compressive* aspect is opened up by ideas of relationality and collaboration, transforming intellectual creation into an autopoietic process of connection between different subjects, and also between the different moments or occasions of the same *self*.

- Abstractness, considered here as the absolute separation of body and mind, and as the consequent relegation of the latter into an incorporeal realm of total distance from material processes, another limitation overcome, for example, in dance. *Blindspot. Solo for a Blindfolded Breakdancer* (2005), a dance piece conceived by Nora Heilmann and performed by Pierre-Yves Diacon, shows the impossibility of a separation between thought and movement, the two things being actually indiscernible as the two sides of one and the same act, brought together at the connective threshold of a sensation: a thought never being different from its energetic, nervous actualisation, a movement never being distinguishable from the sudden jumping out of its idea. The technicality and articulation of the performance, its structural organization of gestures, steps, moments of rest, and also sounds, silences, light and dark, is what transforms the flowing motions and ideas of the improvising dancer into a *balanced* form of expression.

Elasticity in Philosophy - Thinking *Differentially*

As a form of creation, thought is never totally balanced but always of a disarming complexity. In all expressive forms, “as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002, 3), a structural and functional organisation able to transform the intellectual or artistic creation into a solid organism (of concepts, of mathematical operations, of gestures and steps) cemented by a *degree of unity*. As “the art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts”, philosophical creation can also be thought through this *organic* parallel. The same level of reciprocal coherence, inherence and adherence of the components characterizes both the corporeal and mental, the material and philosophical expressions of a body. In this sense, conceptual creation closely resembles the Leibnizian body, a complex elastic multiplicity conceived, assembled and structured as a solid unitary organism by a mysterious unifying entity.

A body is *kept together* by a soul. Nothing pre-determinedly human seems to characterize the Leibnizian definition of the *soul*: a human subjectivity (or soul) can only emerge as the after-effect of a process of internalization (a *folding*) reaching its most complex level. Leibniz explains the emergence of the interiority of the soul through the appearance of “point of view” as a power of arranging cases from the *inside*, a possibility of judgement and, therefore, a condition for reality to be perceived and for thought to develop. In this sense, point of view coincides with a progressive restriction of matter’s elasticity into one particular

position, or focus, from which reality starts to take form, while the subjective soul makes its appearance as “what remains in point of view, what occupies point of view, and without which point of view would not be “ (Deleuze 2006 24). The first requisite of conscious subjective thought and of its conceptual organization is therefore an act of compression whereby an elastic matter/thought passes through the restricted region of a point of view. As an infinity, an *ideal condition or a virtuality* implicit in matter/thought, the idea can only exist by adapting itself to the *measure* of an enveloping soul and can only manifest itself through its actualization into a subjective thought.

Having lost its primacy as a pre-determined source of thought, subjectivity becomes a compressive force which can recognize and define (or *conceptualize* itself) as a *thinking subject* (a *sufficient reason* for thought to develop itself) only after including an event as its predicate (in this case, the event of an idea crossing the body, the event of forces thinking in it). The *creation* of a concept (the concept of a subject) is thus a sort of despotic appropriation of a fluid and open outside by a metaphysical, dominating inside:

Everyone knows the name that Leibniz ascribes to the soul or to the subject as a metaphysical point: the monad. [...] to designate a state of One, a unity that envelops a multiplicity, this multiplicity developing the One in the manner of a ‘series’. The One specifically has a power of envelopment and development, while the multiple is inseparable from the folds that it makes when it is enveloped, and of unfoldings when it is developed (25).

In the Leibnizian conception of the world as a *series* of bodies that is neither finite nor undefined but infinite and infinitely extendable, the notion of the monad creates a possibility of comprehension/compression of this infinity by a unitary subject that can only be individual and can only include the world under its own individual concepts.

Being a philosopher-mathematician, Leibniz associates the compressive thought of the monad/soul with three mathematical *operations*. The first one is the creation of the infinite series of prime numbers, philosophically intended as a series of absolute identities, each reducing infinity to *one* whole entity (1, 3, 5, 7 ...). The second operation is the conception of ‘definables’, i.e. of all those notions that are derived from primary principles and work according to an infinite combinatory logic of *wholes and parts* ($4 = 2 \times 2$ or $8:2$, and also 3 and 1 entering a particular relation +) (52). Together with its [de]composability into wholes and parts, a body also possesses different qualities (such as the speed of a moving body), each one of these qualities constituting a series converging towards a limit (such as the infinite degrees of speed): ‘Parts or wholes do not exist any more; they are replaced by degrees for each character’ (54).

The third way in which infinity is conceived by the monad's thought is therefore through the definition of qualities, a definition which is mathematically expressed by Leibniz through *differential calculus*, i.e. the calculation of the limit between two series that are always convergent and that tend infinitely towards a limit. A branch of mathematics created by Leibniz, calculus deals with almost infinite and infinitesimal quantities, as an approximate calculation of the rate of change of one quality in relation to the rate of change of another one in one instant of time (such as the instantaneous speed of a body, as the derivative of distance in relation to time). Transduced into philosophical terms, this mathematical operation shows the way in which the monad/soul can consciously perceive (or *calculate*) the infinite qualitative gradations of a body, every quality being delimited by infinitely stretchable limits and being designated by differential relations (or degrees).

A particular quality can never be delimited as a definite quantity (or defined as a circumscribable attribute) but is always expressed by an infinitesimal cipher contained between two variables: a speed becomes an event, a predicate of the moving body *thought* as a concept. If the world's material mechanisms work through the continuous transmission and reception of movement, "like ripples [or folds] that a stone creates when it is thrown into water", or like vibrations created by the emerging of a thought, the psychic mechanisms of the monad's consciousness need a contraction, a selection of sent and received vibrations, in order to include, perceive, express, a portion of the whole world more clearly. In other words, a monad/soul extracts a clear *differential zone* from an infinity of minuscule dark vibrations, and in this way, a predicate can be included into the creation of a concept. Beyond (or outside) the monad's clear perceptions, a continuous thread connects all different series (or all qualitative limits): the world now appears as a unique series of indiscernible bodies all reciprocally linked. The differential, or the limit, between all the series (i.e. the approximate separation of individual bodies and souls in the continuity of the world) is conceived by Leibniz as the result of an operation external to the monad, a mathematical calculation by God itself. (57)

One of the most recent mathematical formulations, Gregory Chaitin's theory of algorithmic complexity,' is a re-elaboration of the Leibnizian (and Pythagorean) idea of the world as an infinite (but not indefinite) mathematical series, into the field of information theory. Chaitin's theory of complexity shows absolute compression and unification (the search for an essential law, such as π) more as tendencies than as accomplished facts: with its interminable chains of zeros and ones, Chaitin's differential calculus of the number Ω (an information theory version of π) reveals the impossibility of a [de]finite calculation of the precise limits of a computer program. In this sense, *differential* reveals the complexity and instability of

thought, as an amplification or an opening, the sudden *clearing* of an idea in the compressed monadic mind. Three centuries earlier, Leibniz himself had already intuitively tried to supersede the limited and limiting possibilities of a *compressed* philosophy by postulating, in resonance with a Baroque aesthetical and ethical sense of *chiaroscuro*, an infinite openness, a modulated gradation, between the two limiting extremes of a series (such as light and shadow, or zero and one). A sort of stretchable relational line between two unitary terms is thus established. It is at this point that Leibniz's thought makes a whole turn on itself and reveals its elasticity: being caught in the Baroque (artistic and mathematical) taste for gradation, his philosophy gets entangled into the limits of its own *monadism*, being divided (or stretched) between the fascinated attraction for the world's complexity, and the necessity of its rigid envelopment into the totalitarian mind of the monad. In Leibniz's unstable philosophical construction, mathematics appears thus as an example of thought's elastic adaptation to different modes and methodologies, and of its capacity to expand the limited *clear zone* of the monad's consciousness.

Collaborations *In* and *Between* subjects- Thinking *Relationally*

You never think alone, all enclosed in your monadic consciousness; thought is always of a collective nature. In Leibniz's monadic philosophy, the consciousness of the individual soul is the effect of the internalization of an individual point of view. Every monad is completely closed and rigidly autonomous in its capacity to consciously perceive and think. For the philosopher, souls cannot really touch each other; they do not possess the necessary elasticity for a true contact to take place, but can only stiffly and harmonically adapt their positions and movements to each other:

Monads have to be conceived as dancing. But the dance is the Baroque dance, in which the dancers are automata; there we have an entire 'pathos of distance', like the invisible distance between two monads (space); the meeting between the two of them becomes a parade, or development, of their respective spontaneities insofar as their distance is upheld; actions and reactions give way to a concatenation of postures allotted now and again through distance (Deleuze 1993, 78).

The harmonic convergence of individual points of view implies a relation between different souls that, without losing their singularity, are able to find an accord almost without perceiving, without knowing or without touching each other. The harmony between the thinking and perceiving monads is described as a 'concertation':

if there is a preestablished accord among all these monads that express a single and same world, it is no longer in the way that the accord of the one might be transformed into the accord of another, or

that one monad might produce accords in the other. Accords and their transformations are strictly on the inside of every monad; vertical, absolute ‘forms’ that make up the monads remain disconnected, and thus we do not go from one to the other one after the other by resolution or modulation. Following a second and strictly Baroque analogy, Leibniz appeals to the conditions of a choir in which two monads each sing their part without either knowing or hearing that of the other, and yet they are ‘in perfect accord’ (152).

The Leibnizian conception of a concert, or a choir, of disconnected souls, delineates the monad’s conscious activity as an act of perfectly tuned harmony, revealing the nature of thought (and therefore of philosophical creation) as necessarily linked to a sort of collaboration ‘at a distance’. Amplifying the limits of the monad’s solipsistic thought and expanding the idea of a *distant collaboration* of souls, Alfred North Whitehead’s concept of the ‘actual occasion of experience’ introduces the possibility of a relation, a contact, a sense of touch among souls. In Whitehead’s own words, in every ‘actual occasion of experience’ (such as a perception or a thought) an object is ‘prehended’ by a subject. The distance and independence of monads from each other and from the world is replaced by an affective influence: a prehension, i.e. an activity of the subject, is directly provoked by the object through the awakening of a feeling or an ‘affective tone’. It is important to note the non-anthropomorphic nature of prehension as a non-human affective response and as the immanent affective ground of all perceptions (physical prehensions) and thoughts (conceptual prehensions): the stone prehends the water it falls into. Highlighting this *prehensive* character of the ‘actual occasion of experience,’ Deleuze traces a fundamental difference between the Leibnizian and the Whiteheadian philosophical methodologies:

For Whitehead it involves prehensions being directly connected to each other, either because they draw on others for data and form a world with them, or because they exclude others (negative prehensions), but always in the same universe in process. For Leibniz, to the contrary, monads exclude only universes that are impossible with their world, and all those that exist express the same world without exclusion. [...]: they ‘express one another’ without harnessing each other. We might say that in the two instances monadic or prehensive units have neither doors nor windows. But for Leibniz, it is because the monads’ being-for the world is submitted to a condition of closure, all compossible monads including a single and same world. Now for Whitehead, to the contrary, a condition of opening causes all prehension to be *already* the prehension of another prehension, either to control it or to exclude it. Prehension is naturally open, open onto the world, without having to pass through a window (1993, 92).

Prehensions are acts of opening, of unmediated affective connection, to the world. Behind the apparent solitude of the soul, the *multiple*, pluralistic nature of the occasion as being itself composed of many prehensions and, on its turn, as converging into a collaborative nexus of prehensions, is what allows the creative emergence of the *new*: ‘The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the ‘many’ which it finds, and

also it is one among the disjunctive ‘many’ which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctive among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one’ (Whitehead 1978, 21). This prehensive collaboration does not need any sort of control or surveillance from the outside (as was the case with the monad’s dominating character and with its need of a further divine presence); rather, it is the result of an ontogenetic material tendency towards aggregation. Compression (as a synthesis of the many into the One) acquires here a new sense: it becomes a togetherness, or a *relationality*, as the main aspect of creation, i.e. the condition through which novelty can only emerge in a *compressed* affective collaboration, or a ‘conrescence’ (literally, *growing together*). An individual subject does not pre-exist but *coalesces*, or is drawn together, from different prehensions, i.e. from different affective responses between an internal and an external environment. The alternation of subjective compositions and decompositions, and the different affective gradations between different occasions of experience constitute an ontogenetic tendency of matter, a force of cohesion attracting different elements into a persisting whole while, at the same time, leaving the process open to the influence of other forces and other elements. In this sense, subjectivity dissolves into a continuous process of *subjectivation*, a synthetic contraction of different prehensions in one single moment, and a linear continuity between different occasions in time.

In other words, subjectivity is mainly temporal. In each present occasion, the *instantaneous* influence of the immediately past half-second gives way to the anticipation of the immediate future. In a Nietzschean sense, in order for the instant to pass, it has to comprehend in itself the present, the past and the future, the present having to coexist with itself as past and future. The present, therefore, reveals a synthetic and, at the same time, an ever-flowing nature. To the elasticity of matter/thought, the Whiteheadian concepts of ‘occasion’ and ‘conrescence’ associate the elasticity of an infinitely compressible and extendable time, and of the subjectivity which is born in it. In Henri Bergson’s words, this temporal synthesis constitutes the ‘duration’ of the present:

But there can be no question here of a mathematical instant. No doubt there is an ideal present – a pure conception, the indivisible limit which separates past from future. But the real, concrete, live present – that of which I speak when I speak of my present perception – that present necessarily occupies a duration. Where then is this duration placed? [...] Quite evidently, [...] what I call ‘my present’ has one foot in my past and another in my future (Bergson 137-138).

The elastic nature of time explains the persistence of memory and of personal identity despite the individuality of every present, actual occasion: in every moment, the past is still and the future is already present. The oscillation between re-enactment and anticipation is defined by Whitehead as ‘the work of the

mind', and by Bergson as the work of 'consciousness': thought always implies a *relation*, an *improvised contact* or a relational embrace, more than a monadic waltz, between the subject and its own past-future *self*. It is not only a plurality of thinking subjects, therefore, but the plurality of one subject which is *synthesised* out of multiple occasions, transforming thought into an already *relational* creative act. Following Bergson's philosophy of time, we understand thought as the temporal compression of a multiplicity of moments (or occasions) in the elastic *duration* of the present. At the same time, a continuous becoming of the present into past and future weaves the linear continuity from which a subjective consciousness emerges as an after-effect of thought.

Sensing in Movement - Thinking *Bodily*

When you think, you do not only collaborate with other subjects and with the different temporal instances of your own self; you always collaborate with a whole environment. Beyond the individual existence of the subjective soul as woven, or synthesised, through an almost linear connection between different temporal moments or occasions of experience, the material concreteness of the body is conceptualized by Whitehead as an intrinsic part of the external environment and as being continuous with it: "if we are fussily exact, we cannot define where a body begins and where external nature ends" (Whitehead 1938, 21). In other words, as opposed to the mono-dimensionality of the soul, the body appears multidimensionally linked to its environment. What happens, then, in the passage from a sequential subjectivity to an extended corporeality? The concatenation of a subjective soul (a consciously thinking mind) finds a parallel in a corresponding material coagulation; the soul *implicates* (or, for Leibniz, it 'dominates') a body.

In the net of reciprocal material relations woven between all bodies, Bergson's analysis describes the emergence of 'my body' (or the phenomenological body-subject) as a different entity that is not only known from without through external perceptions but also from within through internal affections. In other words, when the perceiving and the perceived body exactly coincide, a perception becomes an affection, or, a feeling of one's own body simultaneous to the stimulation by another body. At the same time, when the interval between my body and other bodies decreases, subjective perception becomes a subjective action. Affection, perception and action are the three coexistent aspects of the sensori-motor circuit, a schema of bodily distribution of afferent excitations and efferent movements. The body-subject is conceptualized as the center of this schema, the nodal point or the solidification between the registering of an already past occasion and its prolongation into a not-yet realized future. In-between past and future occasions, the

concreteness of the bodily present coincides with an instantaneous connection between sensations and movements:

Now the immediate past, in so far as it is perceived, is, [...] sensation, since every sensation translates a very long succession of elementary vibrations, and the immediate future, in so far as it is being determined, is action or movement. My present, then, is both sensation and movement; since my present forms an undivided whole, then the movement must be linked with the sensation, must prolong it in action. Whence I conclude that my present consists in a joint system of sensations and movements. My present is, in its essence, sensori-motor (Bergson 37).

In the sensori-motor present of the body, a sensation always marks the threshold between past and future, the prolongation of past experiences into new ones, and of perceptions into actions. Between an antecedent perception and the execution of a subsequent movement, Bergson individuates 'affection' as a tendency to move, a movement begun but not fully executed, a force which makes the body elastic, tense and ready to jump. The mark, or *registering*, of this felt affection in the body is a sensation: more precisely, the body feels itself *in* a sensation.

Nora Heilmann's *Blindspot* is a live improvised performance progressively taking form as the spatial explorations and the sensations of the performer develop themselves in the duration of twenty minutes. There is no music and the dancer is blindfolded. The start is given by the dancer's orientation and feeling of space: after leaning against the wall, he takes a few steps running, followed by a few, quick movements of the legs. The whole performance is catalysed by his sensations. In the moving body, sensations are registered by the nervous system which, contracting many vibrations into one instant, synthesizes the body's immediate past: the multiple vibrations and frequencies transmitted by an apparently static wall, for example, are condensed into an instantaneous sensation of solidity. We could say that, in sensation, the body *moves with* the wall. In other words, the dancer is already moving before taking the first step. The vibratory, synthetic nature of Pierre's sensations makes his body pass through different phases, or *fields*, in one moment: it is therefore possible to distinguish the different orders of one sensation, because every single sensation is already an accumulation, a coagulation, a synthesis of different levels, corresponding to the different qualities of the wall (temperature, consistency, texture, etc). Transduced into the phenomenology of perception, the passage of the body between different qualities *in* a unique sensation coincides with an interchange between the sensible fields related to the different sense organs. The different levels crossed by Pierre's passage in the sensation constitute a sort of profound modulation, overflowing every single field and crossing all fields, as if the wall could also potentially be an odour, a taste, a sound, a vision, revealing the wall-sensation as *rhythmic* in its snaking among the senses. The clear perception of the wall is therefore

accompanied by an amodal 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 link between a past (wall) and a future (movement) (what Whitehead defines as the ‘work of the mind’, in other words thought) is felt rhythmically, a sensation appearing in the body as the mark of the imminent emerging of a thought in the mind (the idea to move). Crossing Pierre’s body as a vibratory wave, sensation traces it with levels or thresholds according to the variations of its own amplitude: before being qualitatively qualified as a wall, it is conducted and diffused along the nervous system. Ideas appear as immanent points of the wave, critical moments of unpredictable qualitative change (rather than realizations of a transcendental choreography). The multiple encounters with other bodies (for example the horizontal perception of the floor and the vertical bumping into the wall) bring the dancer’s body to different critical points: energy is continuously distributed in different directions, stasis becomes motion, the body is affected, alters its speed and accelerates. He feels the wall, he runs, stops against the opposite wall, feels again, the tactile qualities of space affecting his motion.

The paradoxical relation of affection (or, for Deleuze and Guattari, of ‘affect’) to the body (as being *of* it but always escaping, *outside* of it) unfolds as a vibratory event, an intensive state of the body exceeding itself and its own confines or subjective positions. In this sense, affect is defined by Brian Massumi as an incorporeal, abstract dimension, the unleashing of a bodily potential before and beyond the realisation of a perception or a movement (5). Echoing Massumi’s words, we can argue that the abstractness of the body coincides with its never being present in position but only in passing, with its being never actualized but always real, in a moment of instantaneous emergence arising and disappearing again like the crest of a wave. This abstract dimension of emerging tendencies traces the concrete corporeal space of the dancing body with multiple coexistent vectors, virtual vectors which are nevertheless inseparable from the process of their actualization, in a coexistence and reciprocal influence of virtual and actual levels. Out of these multiple tendencies, only one is actually selected and realized as a concrete bodily movement: an infinity of potentials is reduced, or compressed, into a unique step: “Moments of rest: when we feel the potential field of movement, circulating as a ‘before and after’ of the actual physical trajectory of a body in motion. Movement after rest: when the body could go in any potential direction in order to always escape its own [...] bodyimage” (Heilmann).

Jumping, walking or kneeling down, the body never moves one single step at a time. Considering movement as a sum of poses or immobile steps (such as the different points of a back or a handspin) means to construct the whole in advance. This equals to retroactively freezing motion in thought through a linear progression of static points. The limited idea of a choreographic reconstruction of movement can be expanded through the Stamatia Portanova “Infinity in a Step”

conceptualization of the moving body as materially entering an already existing wave (the flow of particle/waves revealed by quantum physics as the rhythm of matter). From this point of view, every step immerses the body into the molecular motion of the matter (air/floor/walls) surrounding it, an aggregate of particles among particles. Recurring to topology as the science of the intensive, qualitative tracing of movement (rather than of its measurement), we can imagine the abstract schema (or diagram) of the qualitative transformations undergone by the body in its performance. In the continuous gliding or slurring of movements, every gestural unit appears as a synthetic compression of micro-gestures that cannot be easily isolated, presupposing multiple articulations of heterogeneous elements imbricated into each other (for example toes, ankles, knees, legs, as the different topological points of a step). A continuous topological elasticity draws the concreteness and rigidity of the body with a plane of multiple tendencies going beyond the restricted, compressed consciousness of the dancer's body-subject and its conception of a linear sequence of steps. The body as always ready to fold itself into a myriad of different positions, gestures and shapes.

The different potential vectors crossing Pierre's steps do not only transform its own body surface into a malleable field open to different motor possibilities, but are also prolonged towards the outside. In just one movement, his elastic body opens a series of coexistent connections in an infinite multiplicity of directions: being mnemonically and sensorially connected to the wall that propelled its motion and to the floor that supports it, its horizontal, vertical, diagonal prehensions of the environment are simultaneously crossed by a persistent matrix of relations. The unique restricted pathways taken by the body in its continuous forward motions are actually populated by all the transversal, multidimensional links entertained with ground, air, walls, atmosphere, etc. In other words, every single step is already *relational*, a fluid occupation from which the *modelling* of space emerges as an after-effect: “[I]t is no longer a thing that is modelled in space, but space that is modelled by ‘a thing’ (the body); material gives form to the immaterial (space as a set of relations)” (Gil 116). In this way, a new space/body assemblage is formed at every new step (Gil 124). Every step as the weaving of a collaborative network between the body and its environment.

Pierre's body is always in search of its stability and equilibrium. The preservation of bodily equilibrium is always dependent upon the recognition of one's own self-image as the integrated combination of different but well-coordinated and positioned bodily parts in relation to a distributed space. All motor pathologies (and pathologies of body-image recognition) reveal the subterrain of molecular components and the de-centred character of apparently unitary bodily images, where a

body without an image is an accumulation of relative perspectives and the passages between them, an additive space of utter receptivity retaining and combining past movements, in intensity, extracted from their actual terms. It is less a space in the empirical sense than a gap in space that is also a suspension of the normal unfolding of time (Massumi 2002, 57).

In Pierre's body without an image, the perceptual feedback on movement derives from proprioception: "There is in fact a sixth sense attuned to the movement of the body: proprioception. It involves specialized sensors in the muscles and joints. Proprioception is a self-referential sense, in that what it most directly registers are displacements of the parts of the body relative to each other" (Massumi 2002, 179). "The dancer creates new spaces as he recomposes his movements and orients proprioceptively" (Heilmann). Registering quality as a condition for movement (for example, floor hardness as condition for jumping), Pierre's body links it to the posture, position and orientation of its single components. Before and beyond the re-construction of a complete bodily image, proprioceptive sensations pass, in continuous and decentred streams of electric signals, through the body's neurological network system.

The temporality of proprioceptive sensations eclipses the body from subjective time, as an interruption or a gap in empirical time and a punctuation of its linear unfolding, a suspension in which movement is without qualified form, a transformational moment in which something attracts and something is irremediably attracted. As an example of movement articulation from anatomical and motor disarticulation, break-dance is a good example of motor disconnection, by multiplying and accentuating the composed character of the performance and the electrified cuts between the body's jerks. The dancer cuts movement apart and pushes it to the extremes, twisting a turn until the body is spinning on shoulders and butts: "Flow being broken into multiple rhythms, polyrhythmic relations. Movement as a break into the static of form. Rest as a break into flow of movement" (Heilmann). Stopping motion through a multiplicity of sudden *freezes* or holding the positions between steps, Pierre highlights the coexistence of fluidity and jerks in the same plane of kinetic consistency. On this plane, hits (sudden muscularized stops that can be on the beat or syncopated) and isolations (moving one part of the body, like a shoulder or a hip, while keeping the other parts still), *krumping* (rapid-fire moves of the chest and pelvis) and other precise movements that *lock* or stop in place before the next one begins, emphasize the *broken* nature of motion, while the body is traversed by a flow of electricity constituting the energetic continuum of dance.

After all, how do we unravel and give a sense to the complex knot of body-mind-environment, and of thought-movement-sensation as always coexisting and fading into each other? The concept of the body as always qualitatively changing along its movements, distributes the sensation of movement (rhythm) onto its

whole surface, rather than making movement depend on a central point (consciousness) preceding and directing it according to physical and gravitational laws. In this sense, the thought of movement coincides with a movement of thought. Rather than being abstractly separated and antecedent to the moving body, thought coincides with movement in the critical moment of its appearance (or of its sensation). While a body is consciously moving, it is also always imperceptibly, rhythmically thinking. A thought is in other words incorporeal, a bodily creation emerging between sensation and movement: a jump of the body as the solid, balanced expression of a movement of thought.

¹ From the call for papers for the event *Dancing the Virtual*, available at <http://erinmanning.lunarpages.net/htm/projects/events.htm>.

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