

CHAPTER 12

Performing All Over the Place

PETER SNOW

This essay concerns an ongoing series of performance investigations into the relations between thinking and action by Amsterdam based dancer and choreographer Frank van de Ven¹ and Melbourne based performance maker and theorist Peter Snow. We are interested in improvised works and composed works, and in the relations between them. So far we have collaborated on twelve performance projects and held five performance workshops.

Introduction

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that the end of practical knowledge is action and the end of theoretical knowledge is truth; end in the sense of purpose and outcome (1956). Whatever status we accord this disjunction it raises an interesting dilemma for practitioners with theoretical interests who may wish to recount and reflect on their practice. In this discussion I trace a collocation of performances, all improvised, concerning a performing relation which emerged in one place (Japan), developed in another (Alice Springs), flowered elsewhere (Melbourne), and now continues all over the place (Amsterdam, Gent, Brussels, Gent, Sydney, Leeds).

¹ Frank van de Ven spent his formative years in Japan working with Min Tanaka and the Mai Juku Performance Company (1984-92). In 1993 he founded with Katerina Bakatsaki *Body Weather Amsterdam* as a platform for training and performance. He is one of the foremost Bodyweather practitioners in Europe and works regularly internationally. Since 1995 he has conducted with Milos Sejn (Academy of Fine Arts Prague) the interdisciplinary *Bohemia Rosa Project*, connecting body and landscape with art, geology and architecture. Interest in practice and theory led to working with other dancers and theorists in extracting concrete strategies for dance from the theories of Deleuze and Guattari evolving around the question *How to make yourself a Dancing Body Without Organs*. An ongoing collaboration exists with musician Daniel Schorno, artistic director of Steim, in the *Noughts* project.

In these performances, called *Thought/Action* improvisations, in which one of us speaks and the other moves, we attempt to embody a sensuous mutuality, in which one might displace the other, even become the other, if only for a moment. For me, the process resides in a detailed imaging. Imaging of oneself, of the other, of the place, of the relations, of what happens in between, and of the many shifting moments among all these provisional modes of being. But it begins with multiple attending. And from these moments of attention we choose to image, or embody, what we will from the colloquy of observations. Chance thus figures as a determining factor, and we aim for a transparency in which other beings, other places and other times may course through and beyond us at any moment.

This mode of performing evokes and instantiates many places. Places not simply as frames or environments for performance, nor merely as conducive to or provocative of performance, nor even as performative themselves, but places as a mode of being in performance. As, in effect, a way of holding the manifold intercorporeal relations between ourselves and the images we create. Construed in this way, places are as fleeting as the intensities of bodies and the moments of performance. But also as enduring, if only as embodied memories and as ways of working and being that may be re-instantiated in this or any other place

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History

Thought/Action had its seed when I went to Japan in 1991 to do a workshop with Butoh dancer Min Tanaka at his farm in Hakushu, some 60 kms west of Tokyo, and saw Frank performing with Min's company, Mai Juku, as part of the summer festival. I was particularly struck with his way of performing. He moved like a butterfly, incredibly quick and light. He appeared at the top of a large sloping platform, rolled down very fast onto the earthen floor, sprang to his feet and fluttered with his whole body for what seemed an eternity. He was naked apart from a loin cloth. It was spell-binding.

We talked a great deal at Hakushu, but did not meet again until 1999 in the Central Australian Desert near Alice Springs, where we were participating in *Triple Alice*, a large-scale performance project initiated by Tess de Quincey.²¹ This collaborative, interdisciplinary laboratory, which operated in 1999, 2000 and 2001, drew in visual and new media

²¹ Tess de Quincey was also a member of Mai Juku (1986-92) and thus a colleague of Frank's. I have worked with Tess on several projects over the past 15 years. For example, *Square of Infinity* at Lake Mungo in the Australian Outback in 1991, *Triple Alice* in 1999-2001, and most recently *Embrace* in Kolkata in 2004 and 2006.

artists, dancers, film-makers, performers, writers, theorists, and Indigenous artists. I was involved in each of the three years as a performance maker and laboratory leader (Snow 2003). Frank was at the first workshop in 1999. We met, talked, and did a couple of exercises together as part of the training workshop. And then he asked me if I would like to join him in an improvisation on Deleuze. He said it had always been his dream to improvise with someone who would 'speak thought' while he danced. And he had not found anyone willing to do it with him. I said I would give it a go. So we slapped on our suntan lotion and started work.

We gathered with a group of interdisciplinary artists and academics in a dry riverbed some distance from the homestead. After a brief introduction, we went off in different directions up the riverbed and turned and faced one another. We had no idea what would happen. How long it would last. Nothing had been set, other than where we would begin to walk from. We started moving towards each other ... met near a large undulating rock ... and ... performed. It was extraordinary really, prancing about in the desert in the heat and flies, covered in lotion, spouting ideas from a French philosopher while my partner threw himself all over the rocks, buried his head in crevices and leaves, and dripped sweat on my skull, or 'my brains' as he said later, but I was hooked. The rock later came to be called the Deleuze Rock. I imagine Deleuze would not have been happy about such a name, because he liked things to be changing, though rocks do in fact change and become, albeit very slowly.

So began a long distance performing relation which has gone on since that time. Every year or so, I go to Europe and work with Frank, or he comes to Australia and works with me. Each time we meet we are a little older and a little ... though perhaps more adept. At *Triple Alice 1* we also made a series of six performance works for video called *6 Vertebrae*. We continue to be interested in live and recorded improvisations, as well as new works, and the relations among them. The whole process seems to be what American performance theorist Peggy Phelan calls "a transformative becoming" which for her "is the almost elegiac function of performance theory and writing, if not of performance itself" (1998:11).

In *Thought/Action*, Frank dances or moves and I talk. It is as simple and as difficult as that. We work on site, from the French countryside to the Australian desert, from Wilson's Promontory to the Melbourne City Library, and in theatres and performance venues from Sydney to Copenhagen to Amsterdam. We literally perform all over the place. In an unpublished review of the work in 2002, *The Spirit which Dances*, French critic Bertram Dhellemmes comments.

The performances that Frank van de Ven and Peter Snow presented in Amsterdam, Brussels and Gent in June 2002, *Thought/Action*, are a pure demonstration of what interdisciplinarity can offer to creativity in all its forms. It is clear that their principle of construction (I mean in the avant-garde sense of *constructivism*, where the process of elaboration, the material made and the connections between the different elements are at the basis of a work) without being dominant or obvious is visible at each instant, as is only possible in improvisation. [From these] two men; *a priori* one dances – a complex, dynamic and open form dance – and the other speaks – a discourse addressed both to the public and to his partner, questioning more than it propounds. Sometimes they meet, imitate each other, or exchange their roles for an instant. It is an intense moment of life, at times absurd and familiar, as if all the movements and all the thoughts of a day are piled into forty-five minutes and twenty square metres.

It is difficult to define what transpires to us in the work of these two artists, the aesthetic and practical specificity that they share and which ensues, however clearly they come from two different *disciplines*, that they are together in elaborating between them a coherent – and passionate – improvisation stemming from a chaos totally open to all the movements that the body has to offer to dance and all the words that can be offered to ...the theatre (the term might seem strange here but perhaps it might be refreshed by adhering to what Peter Snow proposes in performance rather than to the morbid and bloated version that we know so well in France).

Thought/ Action

Reflecting on a practice introduces several problems. A central one relates to what is now sometimes called Practice as Research, which refers not to researching a practice, but to practice itself in an investigative and reflective mode.³ If the practice itself is theoretically inflected, what role is played by written reflection after the fact? A preliminary answer is that the rhetorical force of writing a practitioner's aesthetic is twofold. One, a provisional articulation of a practice can help clarify it, refine it, and thus aid its development. Two, it can have an effect on other practitioners, especially on those who might be learning in a workshop environment. In other words, such writing may act performatively, in Austin's sense, in that it helps to get things done.

³ Frank and I presented our *Thought/Action* work at the Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) Conference at the University of Leeds in 2005. We performed live and gave a workshop, and I delivered a theoretical paper which included footage of a recorded performance. An extract from the paper with photographs will be published in the Conference Proceedings in 2006. A book and DVD of textual and performance extracts from the Conference is under negotiation. One continuing issue in performance research is whether to present the results of investigations as live performances, recorded performances, written papers, or some combination of the three.

The task here though is how to actually *write the practice*. This is how we have done it in the programme for our work, for example for *Thought/Action: Suites 1-5* in 2002.

Thought/Action for us consists in articulating the intensities of experience in movement and words. To improvise in this way is to begin by attending in detail – to oneself, to one another, to the working environment, and to the many shifting relations between these interlacing modes of experience.

But how to go further, and theorise more deeply? This is somewhat tricky, especially when it is your [kn]own work. I suspect that here lies one of the conundrums of ‘practice as research’. How far do you go with theoretical explication? Until you have left the practice behind? Another danger is that it is relatively easy to make work sound more interesting than it really is, but scientists and historians do that all the time so maybe we should not worry. A more important issue raised in this connection is that of ‘truth’, which I will deal with briefly below.

For Aristotle, practice issues in action and action is bound up with virtue. We should know how to act rightly. But how we do something is always inflected with why we do it, that is, to what end? So one of the theoretical reflections on Thought/Action is to what end? I will get to issues of ethics later, and to other theoretical questions, but first I wish to deal with the question of what is ‘thought’ and what ‘action’ in Thought/Action. And ask what, if any, are the relations between them? A provisional possibility emerges. Thought/Action images the relations between thinking and enacting. Where both are corporeal activities. In this sense, Thought/Action embodies intercorporeal relations. It is an imaging of the in-between. It is an embodiment of, and a playing with, intercorporeality. But how to spell this out in practical terms?

When Frank was last in Australia we interviewed each other, in a striking example of that kind of overly obsessive, almost incestuously perverse, interest that experimental practitioners have in their own work. Or rather he interviewed me. I interviewed him later when I was in Europe in 2005. I have included some of the material from the first interview, partly because it is an unprepared set of responses to some pretty basic questions such as, ‘what is it that you are doing here’ or at least, ‘what is it that you think you are doing here’. But also because it is raw data, and thus an example of the rhetoric of practitioners as they attempt to clarify their work to themselves.

FvV: What is it that you do when you articulate thought processes?

PS: In performance with you?

FvV: In *Thought/Action*.

PS: What is it that I am doing?

FvV: For an audience.

PS: This is an incredibly big question ...

FvV: What is it that you do when you articulate thought processes? You talk about it all the time ...

PS: Yes, I know. You see, thought dash action ... you're dancing and I'm speaking ... to put it simply ... but we're both thinking and both in action. But what we are in action is of a slightly different kind, and the thinking may be of a different kind too. So what I have thought that I am doing is that I am speaking ... a lot of what is in me, a lot of what is present for me.



12.1: Pianofabriek, Brussels, 2002

Image taken from video recording made by Emile de Vlam

So I think I'm articulating what emerges for me at the time, which is sometimes about what I notice in you, what you're doing, what I feel from you, what I'm getting from what you're doing. Sometimes I feel like there's nothing there – and I've spoken about that too, and that's OK. And at those times I tend to watch you. And sometimes I talk about what's happening between us. I don't know whether that's a thinking or an observation ... two categories. Sometimes I talk about, try to articulate, what I notice in the en-

vironment, in the space, in the world, and our/my relationship to that, what's happening around us, but again that's a kind of observing, and it's hard to know what kind of thinking that is. And fourthly, if there is a [fourth] category, all this talk about categories, I don't know ... there are things that emerge that seem to be about what it is that I am engaged in at that moment. And lastly, there are things that just emerge, that could be in any of those categories, about past experiences, future experiences, imaginative experiences, or whatever ...

I've often thought that we [in general] think in words and pictures. But I don't think that when I'm working in performance with you, that I have a thought like words on a screen that I then articulate. I think that what happens is that there is an impulse to speak and I give voice to it, and I find myself elaborating that phrase, and that phrase might be elaborated poetically, I'm attentive to the poetic nature of the phrase, I'm attentive to the storyline, I'm attentive to how I phrase it, I'm attentive to how and where I direct the speaking, I'm attentive to how I'm moving, and how that relation is when I'm performing, I'm attentive to a lot of things and that moulds what I say as I find myself saying it. But, if you ask me the precise nature of the relation of thinking to my speaking then I'd have to know a lot more about thinking

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FvV: In a physical sense ...

PS: Because the thinking that I do ... when I'm just thinking, sitting here thinking [for example now], I often do have silent sentences, and pictures. But I don't often have that when I'm *talking* to you and thinking. I don't have silent sentences. I don't have silent pictures. It's as if the thought is the speaking. And it's conditioned by what's just happened before, and all those things I've just mentioned. Though I'm not thinking poetically now, I'm not thinking performatively, I'm thinking more about the argument that I'm developing, and I'm thinking more about how you're responding to how and what I'm speaking. Big questions.

It is complex. But perhaps I should not worry. Maybe the naming of a practice acts as rhetorically as its articulation. Bertram Dhellembes again (2002):

In the title of the work – Thought/Action – it would be of course too simple to accord the work of Peter Snow to the domain of thought and that of Frank van de Ven to the domain of action: the contrary is already more interesting and to not categorise is definitely the best solution. We are in fact confronted with two forms of Thought/Action, which join at the level of thought *and* on the level of action, and which become elements more characteristic of the process and the result than the fact that one attends to dance or theatre *per se*. It is of course not the subject of this work, which would be then imprisoned within itself: here it is surely a question of a unity of human experience - or of viability in the sense of what can be lived - which largely surpasses the artistic field and concerns all and every one - isn't it an inva-

riant of artistic quality? It is anyhow nearly criminal to want to analyse what transpires for the spectator and blessed are those who can watch in innocence.

In fact, Frank's questions in the interview are perhaps more interesting than the answers. For example, 'In *Thought/Action* in performance, do you think about my thinking? ... Do you think there is an analogy between the way you think and the way I dance, how I articulate movement?'

Because if there are analogies, the next question is – can you think my dancing? Can I dance your thinking? Is that shallow? Or is that something that appeals to you? Can you think the structure of my dancing? Or the content of my dancing? Do I dance the structure of your thinking? Can I dance the content of your thinking?

So far, there's been a unity, your *Thought/Action* has been together, your thinking underpins your speaking. Do you see any vision, any sense, in breaking it open?

What is the role of the audience in *Thought/Action*? Is that similar to that of any audience in any performance?

... my next question. It's a cluster of questions. I'll just read them. Can you think in space? Are you just a skull in performance? We've talked about that. Can you project the space inside your head into the space of the performance arena? Can you think into other people's heads? When I'm a dancer I sometimes think that I'm addressing other people's bodies rather than their minds. So can you think into other people's thinking?

Do you have a proprioceptive picture of your thinking? Is your thinking placed? Is it a skull? Do you think front or back? Does it relate to a space for a performance arena?

Improvising place

In one of my early reflections on the work, I started thinking about how we attend while we are improvising, and how we attend when we think later about what we do. And I made a distinction between the three homonyms: sight, site and cite. (The paper, "Sight/ site/ cite," was given at *Triple Alice 3* in 2001.) By using 'sight', I wanted to emphasise that as performance practitioners go about their business, they are continually observing their bodies and those of their colleagues in their places and spaces of working. Of course it is true that the more one works, the more one notices and in greater detail, and the more that those observations are inflected with the aesthetic of the practice. By 'aesthetic' I mean not just the look of the practice but all its processes from training through performance to cultural significance. Observation is neither

neutral nor unmediated. However the simple fact is that, as practitioners, we are restlessly and ceaselessly perceiving what is going on with all our senses as we practice. And it has to be said that a lot of what is going on in practice at the level of performers' bodies is available for observation and reflection only to those who participate as practitioners.

In using 'cite', I noted that performers are forever citing their corporeal experiences. They note, reflect on, and comment on their observations; both as they work and later in discussion. We are invariably drawn to reflect on what is going on, what has gone on, and what might go on, as we practice. We cite the intensities we experience as embodied moments in our work. Being in relation, rather than being individual, is the minimal unit in this type of practice. By 'relation' I refer to what transpires between practitioners, and to what modulates between moments in a practitioner's own work. Clearly both kinds of relation exist in place and over time. Citation in this sense, then, refers to a process of locating and noting, which facilitates being able to remember, recapitulate, re-gather and move on, both in training and in performing.

By using 'site', I wished to show that mediating the two processes of observation and reflection is that we practitioners are a kind of site, in the sense of a place of becoming. Not a building site or a site of infection, although they each point to interesting resonances for the bodies of practitioners, as places where processes of construction, destruction, and transformation might ensue. But rather that we are implaced beings, in process, imaging our worlds in shifting patterns of embodied intercorporeal intensities. And if beings are implaced, then they are always in some kind of site, always *in situ*, but *in situ* as a developing mode. In performance especially, bodies are remaking themselves, being made and remade, all the time.

The performativity of body as a site or place of becoming is a prevalent, almost ubiquitous, metaphor in discussions of performance. But it is rarely made clear what it could actually refer to in practice. I am suggesting that one way of locating performativity is through the three embodied processes of observing, reflecting and becoming – what I have called sighting, citing and siting. I should add that I see the three interweaving processes as a triad rather than a continuum. It is not only that becoming mediates observing and reflecting. Each of the processes mediates the relations between the other two. If bodies are continuously becoming in performance, so too are places. And the performativity of place is keenly seen in improvisation of this kind, which plays with, depends upon, and draws from both these modes. In performance, places are also being made and unmade all the time.

In *Getting Back Into Place* and *The Fate of Place* American philosopher Edward Casey has done a lot to reintroduce place to the academy,

much as body had been reintroduced by others before him (1997). An ironic feature of this ‘rediscovery’ is that place, like body, had never really been forgotten in performance practice. However, Casey’s central argument in the latter text, and it is a very provocative one, is that in the history of philosophy, at least since Kant and the Enlightenment, space has displaced place. This of course has filtered into the theatre. Practitioners always talk about ‘the space’ in the theatre and in performance; witness Peter Brook’s highly influential *The Empty Space* (1990, 1968). Casey says that place has been marginalised and should be re-instated and re-valorised. He claims that a close, one might say Derridean, reading of philosophers from Kant onwards reveals that place is not only critical, it is ‘there’ in their writings, though largely in the aporia.



12.2: Wilson's Promontory, Australia, 2004

Image taken from video recording made by Laszlo Dudas

Casey draws on Merleau-Ponty to say that humans are not only embodied, they are always implaced. He actually goes as far as to say that bodies, in their implacement, carry with them three vectors, ‘up down’, ‘left right’, and ‘front back’ (1997: 205). And this orientation to the world is always there as part of our embodied experience. Universalist claims such as these are something to be wary of, but they are part of a provocative rethinking of the relations between place and body which should be very helpful to anyone interested in reflecting on performance. In a paper given in Sydney in 2004 to one of the seminars out of which the essays in this book have grown, I noted how corporeal memo-

ries of place intersect with current itineraries and future possibilities. Remembering is often a kind of wandering through places; and corporeal memories give rise to place as a mode of being.

A year or so ago, I was at home reading, my second favourite occupation after going on holiday with my family to other special places, when I noticed a young girl with a bicycle walking around our land. (We live in the Dandenong Ranges outside Melbourne in an old wooden house on an acre of exotic and native trees, including several 25 metre high mountain ash, backing onto the Sherbrooke Forest National Park.) It was clear she was leading a friend who also had a bicycle. I went out cautiously and said hello, how could I help you. The leading girl, who would have been about 11 or 12, said, "Oh, hello, we used to live here before my Dad gave you the house". There was a very fragile air about her, tremulous, and wanting. I asked her if she wished to look around and said please go wherever you want and take your time. I watched judiciously from inside while she took her friend on a journey around the garden – to her old cubby house up the back that her father had made as a facsimile of the house for them one Christmas, to the rope swing hanging off the giant pine tree, to a secret tree surrounded by ferns where they sat on the lower branches and threw white snowdrops onto the ground – this was obviously a special place – and so on. They meandered in spirals and circles all over the acre, without seeming direction or purpose yet with clear purpose and direction. And I realised by the care that she took, and the pleasure she gained, that this was her place, still, even more perhaps than it was my, or our (family's) place.

Six months later, an older girl with a young man came to the front door, and introduced herself. It was the young girl's older sister, though she didn't mention that. She wanted to look around inside the house. As she did, she looked with pleasure at the walls and ceilings and told me about her mother's favourite colours – we had not repainted the interior. And she showed her boyfriend what had been her bedroom. Still her place too. I suppose we all carry around places within us; remembered itineraries, ways of walking around the 'territory', ways of standing and looking, noticing, attending, smelling, touching, ways of inhabiting, or just being in that place. What has all this to with performance, or indeed with improvisation? Well I suppose in the first instance, all the 'incidents' that I have described were a kind of performative re-enacting, or regathering, of experiences of place.

I remember going back to my grandparent's house in New Zealand where I grew up and where I had lived, not just as a small boy, but also later as a student after my grandparents had passed on. This time I just stood on the footpath looking over the stone wall that we had climbed on as children, up the path to the front door. I remember my grandfather

bent over the lawnmower, his hair freshly cut. And the curtained window. When my father came to take us out (I am sure I am imagining the same curtains still being there) we would peer out waiting for him to come, and when he did, we would rush out the door to greet him and go out for the day. And when we returned, the door would open a crack and we would walk slowly up the path and into the house.

I can still smell my grandmother's roast lamb. And my grandfather's workshop in the garage; he had been a shoemaker and the smell of leather and tools was very strong to a child. Tasting the grapefruit or peaches from the laden fruit trees that had been grown from pips – so we were told. I remember being too small to see up over the kitchen bench, and watching my grandparents washing and drying the dishes, and I wanted to be taller than the bench so I too could see over and also take the cutlery in a bunch in my hands and dry them expertly one by one as they did. I forget who washed and who dried but I am sure it was a 'ritual'. And I waited for the exact time when I would be able to see over. But it never came. Or rather it did without my noticing, because one day I realised that I could already see the taps and through the window out to the fruit trees.

As I write this I am aware that it is a kind of improvised reverie. I did intend to start with the visiting girl, but that was all I had prepared when I started typing. The rest has just flowed, only now I've become self-conscious, aware of the process and referential to my present state of being. And suddenly my analytical brain has clicked in, and now I'm aware of the clacking of my two-finger typing on the keyboard at my friend Brendan's place. Somewhat unfamiliar, but I've stayed here several times before. I'm in my underpants and nothing else – the blinds are drawn – because it's Sydney daytime with its prickly heat and the air is so thick with moisture you can touch it on your lips and nostril. (From "Thought/Action" for Place and Performance Seminar, 2004)

I have argued elsewhere that embodiment should be considered to consist in intercorporeal relations (2002). But implacement, no less than embodiment, is relational. That is, we are never simply in one place but always in many places. Perhaps not physically simultaneously, though even that is possible when you consider corporeal memories, residues of past experiences, and current experiencing. So we are never fixed in any one place. By virtue of our semi permeability and thus our openness to the worlds we inhabit, as well as our remembering, we carry with us many places and therefore exist in a kind of 'in-between placedness'. I know this is a clumsy expression. Perhaps being 'implaced in the in-between' is better. Still, to the extent that to be implaced is to be so by virtue of being embodied, experiences of implacement are a species of intercorporeal experience. In that sense, as I noted earlier, place could be

seen as a way of holding the manifold intercorporeal relations between ourselves and the embodied images we create.

Intensities of experience / making it up as we go along

Improvising in performance for us begins with the capacity to attend to what is going on. We aim to attend carefully to what is happening 'to' and 'in' ourselves, our partner, and the places in which we are working. And we choose to embody material from what emerges. In this sense we aspire to be mindful, in a corporeal sense, of all the micro- and macro-intensities in our working environs, and of the relations between them. Sensitised to this collocation of intensities the aim is to be able to concentrate them, offer them, receive them, play with them, and move on. To be sensitised in this sense results of course from training and working together. Just as quickly as a moment is born, we can move on and it dies, but resonances remain. These remains or remainders continue to provide a bed, or reservoir, which feeds the work as it develops and unfolds.

To my mind, it is as if we are following a line of flight, in the Deleuzian sense, or rather, being carried along by one. In this process of becoming it simply goes and takes us where it will. It is an obsessive, self-pleasuring, delightful, self-energising, transgression. And by attending carefully to the networks of corporeal moments, it is possible to traverse or be carried on a journey that has many intertwined threads, many linked trajectories. Quite often this is a spiral, looping back on itself to re-visit and re-incorporate past moments in new guises, only to move on ahead in a new direction. In this sense improvising is both a territorialising and a deterritorialising gesture. Ground is being made and unmade all the time.

Of course the moment you make a choice in improvising, the moment you actually engage in something and start to perform, you are re-territorialising; you are actually shutting down. But of course you hope that at the next moment you will deterritorialise, and then re- and de- and re- and de- and so on. 'Deterritorialising' for us refers to the moment of emptiness from which we try to begin our improvisations, and to the moments of quiet, almost of emptiness, to which we aim to return during an improvisation. The embodied process of emptying is a mode of anti-structure. I discuss the mechanics of improvising more in a moment. But I will reiterate that often while improvising I feel that it is not as if we do this and that, or we will this and that, rather that it just seems to happen. Things get done. One puts oneself in appropriate positions. And composition emerges. One is not orchestrating a line of flight. One is simply on it. I am not banishing agency here – that much should be clear from my points on training and experience – but rather

pointing to the intriguing relations between flow and agency in performance.

To return to the provisional explication of *Thought/Action*: as consisting in articulating intensities of experience in movement and words. What is experience, and what are intensities? According to Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenological investigation into embodiment, or more specifically into perception which he regarded as the touchstone of embodiment, was a groundbreaking study, the relevant phenomena are moments of lived experience (1989, 1962). For him we are always embodied beings and always in relation to the world including to others, unlike a Cartesian body which is a divided being and somewhat sealed off. (Though for Descartes we are always in relation to God.) This was a radical development. For Husserl, the relevant phenomena were the 'contents of consciousness' which could be 'bracketed off' (1973, 1950). This is quite interesting for me in relation to the process of thinking in *Thought/Action*, but nonetheless the contents of consciousness are not necessarily embodied.

So for an enquiry such as this one, which is into a performance practice, I consider myself to be practising an empirical phenomenology, which depends upon recounting the actual and verifiable details of the living experiences of artists and using these as a basis for theorising. Rather than the common phrase 'lived experience', with its resonances of objectification, I prefer 'living experiences' to emphasise that bodies are always in process. Similarly, I prefer 'bodies', or 'embodiment', to 'the body', again to emphasise process (For an exemplary analysis of 'process' see Whitehead 1978, 1929). Bodies are of course ubiquitous in contemporary discussions of performance. There is the toaster body, the electric grid body, the exhausted body, every kind of body you could possibly imagine. Invent an adjective, write a book about it, and people will discuss it. The plurality is welcome and amusing.

Living experiences exist at both the macro-level of the social or inter-social and the micro-level of the intra-corporeal. It is the micro details that are available only to performance practitioners. This assertion may raise the ire of some scholars who are not practitioners themselves, because I am parcelling off a realm of experience that is not available to them as spectators. Of course it is true that audiences are able in some sense to share performers' experiences and vice versa, but not the micro-experiences which underpin the generation and circulation of meanings in the artist-audience exchange. I once heard the actress Billie Whitelaw say in a public seminar, that she based her performance of Beckett's *Not I*, for which she is justly celebrated, on the imagined suffering of her nephew who had committed suicide and lay pinned to a barbed wire fence for some days. This was deeply shocking to some

audience members. How dare she utilise her experiences to work on Beckett's character; to which my response was, which experiences would you have liked her to use, yours? Nevertheless, whether people liked her process or not, the point is that no-one could have noticed or even guessed from her performance what her micro experiences were. To say that audiences cannot inhabit the intra-corporeal experiences of performers is as obvious to me as the evident, and not nearly so controversial, corollary that performers cannot inhabit the micro experiences of spectators. So I stand by my claim that there is a realm of experience at the micro level, the level of sub-individual sensations in performers' bodies, which is available only to practitioners themselves. How to spell out this notion of micro experience?

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, notes a distinction in German between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* as referring to two different modes of experience (2004, 1960). '*Erlebnis*', he says, refers to the experiences that one has. In a sense they are objects (2004: 49). One can say 'I have had this experience'. '*Erfahrung*', on the other hand refers to experiences that are being undergone, being negotiated (72, 84). They are experiences that are being integrated and thus overturning what is already there and widening our perspective. This latter notion of experience, with its emphasis on process, might better be referred to as experiencing. So rather than talk about intensities of experience we would speak of intensities of experiencing, but it is an unwieldy phrase. Although the wider context of Gadamer's discussion is an investigation into hermeneutics as a philosophy of understanding, a specific context is an inquiry into a philosophy of art, and it seems to me that we can take these observations of experience into a discussion of embodied experience in performance.

Intensities for me are moments of located and concentrated sensation. They are what Derrida calls a 'shudder in the nerve ends'. For me, sensations are micro movements in a performing body. They are specific moments of experiencing. They are embodied moments which have been created, brought into being. They have been attended to, selected and articulated. I propose that at the micro level of detailed practice, improvising can be seen as consisting in three embodied processes: attending; editing/selecting; and articulating. So it is not just any set of experiences that are relevant to improvised performance. It is those that are attended to, selected, and articulated as intensities.



12.3: La Chapelle Moutils, France, 2002

Image taken from video recording made by Bertram Dhellemmes

Is there a training to make one better at this process? Can one train to improvise, and, if so, how? The notions of 'productive capacities' and 'liberating sets of possibilities' are useful here. We might say that training offers performers a wider range of possibilities from which to draw, and a deeper pool of capacities from which to access, in order to make their work. I have written on Bodyweather training providing such a reservoir for Frank and, along with other trainings, for myself (2002). It seems to me useful to consider the actual processes by which performers train. There are many specific questions. How do they train? What do they train for? How do they locate their material in their bodies? By considering in detail the methodologies and processes by which particular practitioners train in order to access and embody performative material at a micro- or sub-individual level, it should be possible to show how this material is utilised in making improvised performances in a variety of settings. I have done this elsewhere extensively for Bodyweather practice (2002). I can only do it briefly here for *Thought/Action*. However, I propose that for all performance practitioners, this process, which could be called 'creative authoring', consists in an imaging of the in-between.

I do not have space here to spell this out in detail. Suffice to say that at the micro-level, which is the level of the sub-individual sensations or intensities of a performer's body, what is always going on is both an

imagining that is already corporeal, and an enacting that is always and already being re-imagined, and it is this continual oscillation that is imaged and thus embodied. Bodies are always in relation: in relation to the world, in relation to one another, in relation to parts of bodies, in relation to selves, in relation to imagined beings and imagined states, and places, and times. To be able, therefore, to image these multiple relations is to be able to embody them, which is to be able to attend, edit/select and articulate them. But if the relations exist at both macro- and micro-levels, how can one image them simultaneously?

For me, *imaging* is a process of both *imagining* and *enacting*. By that I mean that in every single moment of a performance – and I believe that this can be generalised to any kind of performing practice – performers are imagining and enacting at the same moment continually. It is a flic-flac between the two. I do not propose this as a binary opposition, but rather as two aspects of the same process, which is that of bringing embodied intensities into being. I do not conceive of imagining as something purely to do with fantasy, in the sense of a disembodied daydreaming, though of course fantasy is at the heart of imagining, and exists in performance as well. But for us it is a fantasising in the actual here and now, a corporeal fantasising, a mode of attending; we do not drift off elsewhere. In that sense, imagining is already corporeal. For a performer, if something is imagined it is already partly enacted and thus embodied. Similarly, when a moment is being enacted, it is being re-imagined, because a new possibility is being awakened. It seems to me that it is in en-acting that images find their materiality, and it is in re-imagining that there is the possibility to again move on.

Imaging in this sense is an imagining and enacting of multitudes of intensities. And embodiment is precisely the process of imaging intensities of experience. In each of attending, editing/selecting and articulating, one imagines and enacts intensities of experience at the micro level. In each process one is in place and in relation at the macro level. At both micro and macro levels, therefore, the detailed process of creating performative moments resides in an embodiment of relations. Embodiment in performance practice can thus be seen to be networks of intercorporeal relations or intercorporeality (Snow 2002). At all levels ethical questions arise.

Ethics of a performing relation

Performing with someone, and for someone, is an ethical relation. Performing always involves ethical relations. It is about a way of being together with other people, and ethics is always about how. Of course it is also about what and whether. Whether I do this, utter that, move here, move there. And now what, what do I do now? But pre-eminently it is a

question of how. And here technique intersects with ethics. In fact I would say that technique is itself an ethical question. As we have seen, how I access performative material, in my body, in my psyche, in the other's body, in the other's psyche, are key issues. Can I think his dancing? Ought I to? If so, how? How do I image it, which is to say how do I enact it, articulate it?

To take only one of these questions. How do I access material from my body? And this is not just a question about creativity – as it was above – about how I do it, about what training I will subject my body to and why, about what I am looking for. It is also a question about how I dispose myself. About what kind of ethical position I will put myself in to be in relation to another. How much of myself will I make available? What will I demand that my partner makes available? And in what way? How will I prepare myself to be ready and open enough to create? Both in general, for the work; and specifically, for a performance. In a practice that depends on permeability of one to other, and thus on the possibility of intercorporeal relations, these are critical questions. But there are others. What is to be in a performing relation with another in front of an audience? Before witnesses. And what of the differences between training, rehearsing and performing?

To have an ethical relation with another, you must already have an ethical way of dealing with yourself, which is to say with your work. Artists are always the first witnesses of their work, and this is no less true in performance even though the act of doing is contemporaneous with the act of witnessing. In performance it is artist, followed by other, then audience. (I am reminded of an anecdote from the Russian Ballet, told to me by my friend, the Polish-Australian actor Wenanty Nosul. If you don't do your exercises, first day you notice, second day friends notice, third day public notices.) But in a strange kind of way, when one becomes close to another, becomes intimate in performative terms through training and performing, one becomes an immediate, if not a first, witness of the other's work. Is there such a thing as an ontological witnessing? For many times in performance I simply behold Frank in wonder. And in that sense I am the measure of him. And conversely, and more to the point, he is the measure of me. What kind of place is this, this place of being and becoming? That is so interlaced with wonder. With one and another, and with wonder.

In *Entre-Nous*, Emmanuel Levinas elaborates an ethical position as always “for the other” (1998, 1991). That is, if to exist is always to exist in relation to others, and we know this from Merleau-Ponty, then an ethics of existence is going to be always bound up with our disposition towards others. And this is a clear how. How do I be with him? But first, how do I be with myself, and therefore how can I be with him? The

relation emerges, and is thus always more than the subjectivities of each. But paradoxically the intensities of being are made more manifest as the relation emerges more strongly. By being for the other, the relation emerges and one becomes. That is to say, the relation emerges, and each becomes. But is one then not for the relation? In Aristotelian terms, perhaps the end of performative knowledge is neither action nor truth, but both action and truth in relation.

But are we not also for the audience? For this is clearly an ethical relation as well, and I violate it all the time. The following is transcribed from a recording of the paper I gave on Thought/Action to the Practice As Research In Performance conference in Leeds in 2005. This section was improvised.

When Frank and I were on our way to perform in Brussels in 2002 we had to travel down a very extensive city ring road to get there. So I became interested in circles. I had also been reading in a review that there was something called a 'cock ring' which gentlemen in the nineteenth century used to tie their penises to their legs so that it wouldn't displace the tightness of their breeches. And the double circles emerged in the improvising. I started talking about these sorts of things. I'm sure people were looking and thinking 'who's this weird Australian talking about these strange things', perhaps talking too fast so they couldn't understand my English. But then at one key stage in the performance I started talking about islands, because it was just after the asylum seekers and boats were running aground in Australia, you remember, people were being put off on an island outside Australia. It was an awful business. But at the same time Pim Fortuyn was running for office in Holland. And Frank and I had been talking about this, and it was a very difficult issue for him.

At a key point in the performance I turned to Frank and said, "Who do you vote for? Who do you vote for? Who do you vote for?" And he was backing away and backing away and backing away, because it was a very raw issue for him. But I, transgressing, kept going. In the end I used the Pim Fortuyn refrain that he had sought election by. And Frank then had the grace to leave the stage. So I was left by myself. No longer was I for the other. I was for nobody. So I just kept talking. But he had the grace to go around the stage, come up behind me, and very gently place his hands over my mouth, close my eyes, and lay me to the ground. Even though I was no longer for other, he certainly was.

My partner had the good grace to deal with the experience, for me, for our relation and for the audience. And place? The place was Brussels, and Amsterdam, and Australia, and everywhere else we had been or imagined. As I noted early on in this essay, places are fleeting, as ephemeral as the intensities of bodies and moments of performance. But

places are also enduring. Embodied memories linger, and ways of being and working may re-emerge in any place. Like the little girl who, though she has moved elsewhere, still lives in our place.

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