

THE DELEUZE-IAN/GUATTARIAN PERFORMANCE: PERFORMANCING AT N-1 DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers music performance in light of the possibly most radical move away from the Cartesian idea of the body as informed by the higher order rationality of the mind: this is a performance informed by Deleuze's and Guattari's body without organs.

The paper examines the particular performance activities of 'hardware hacker' Nic Collins, of 'live converter' Kaffe Matthews as well as 'infra-instrumentalist' Phil Archer's sonic interventions. These performances greatly reflect what I term a 'Deleuze-ian/Guattarian performance' as they sculpture sounds that deterritorialise rhythm and make sonic bifurcations possible; they blur the point and free the line; and while pushing towards multiplicities, they rejoice in the schizophrenic transfinite! The paper examines the role of technology in what I call "performancing", which is performance conceptualized as a rhizomatic activity, and questions whether technology aids in working towards the creation of multiplicities and towards making sonic bifurcations in performance possible.

1. INTRODUCTION – THE BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

What is D&G's (D&G) body without organs, **the BwO**?

D&G tell us that it is no longer a body subordinated by the mind, no longer an organic system, no longer a vessel that contains organs, but the BwO is an assemblage of parts and organs, of actions, and flows; it is a state that can never be reached, and it is "what remains when you take everything away" [3:151].

The D&G body is conceived in ways that question the hierarchical and systemic organisation of the organs; it is conceived in ways that open up to new connections, a body that is occupied and populated by intensities, flows and gradients; but only those intensities that are neither negative nor opposites can pass and circulate. The BwO is not space, nor in space, it is intense matter that occupies space, it is "defined by axes and vectors, gradients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements" [3:153]. And it is more than that; the BwO is a "component of passage" that not only causes intensities to pass, it also produces and distributes them. It is that reality where "alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an

organism – and also a signification and a subject - occur" [3:158-59]. In the BwO the organs become organised into that unwanted relations of composition, the one know by the name of 'organism'. It is upon recognizing this imposed state that the body protests about having been made an organism, of having had its body stolen. The body howls: "They have made me an organism! They've wrongfully folded me! They've stolen my body" [3:159]. The elimination of the body in the BwO thus projects this body towards a body without organs *without Body* - a **BwOwB**.

What if we were to inject performance here: as a process of constructing a body without organs without body (a BwOwB), one in need of reterritorialisation by the intensities that it itself produces and distributes? Would such a BwOwB still be able to cause intensities to pass, to produce and distribute? And is it indeed the BwOwB that remains when you take everything away? Is it possible that, if according to Deleuze and Guattari, the BwO is a limit that one is forever reaching out to [3:159], having a BwOwB would imply that one will have ceased to be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted all together: all that would remain is pure consciousness? And can pure consciousness produce and distribute; can it signify and subjectify?

2. DE-STRATIFY AND DE-SUBJECTIFY

But let me pause here.

A D&G reading tells us that the destruction of the body cannot be implied, as destroying the body would mean death [3:162]. The BwOwB can only exist if a destratification of the BwO has not taken place too abruptly, as "every destratification must observe concrete rules of extreme caution: a too-sudden destratification may be suicidal" [3:503]. The BwOwB cannot make the BwO into a body of nothingness.

Indeed, one has to proceed with extreme caution if negating the body, so that it may not purely be a way of differently organising the BwO, the body cannot die; but it must exist as unformed matter, as "matter-movement" [3:511-12]; D&G want us to move away from organisation, from function and development towards notions of speed, slowness, movement and rest [3:255].

So, let us keep moving, let us desubjectify, destratify, and seek a D&G performance in elements and particles, not in organised and functioning, or non-functioning bodies.

The D&G performance does not annul the organs but makes room for new relations to enter; the BwOwB is one such relation. The D&G performance asks us to see our Self (Moi) as a threshold, “a becoming in between two multiplicities” [3:249].

Let performance be contagion, a mode of expansion and propagation introducing disruptions into systems of exchange! Let performance not be guided or judged by that epidemic called production, rather, a D&G reading must expose performance in terms of becoming, not becoming as progression or regression along a series, not as evolution, but as involution, as something creative. D&G incite us to discover the task of performance as what I call “performancing”, that is performance as a rhizomatic activity, an activity with multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points, in which the diagonal can break and free itself, an activity in which multiplicities become constituted, constitutions multiplied and becomings constitute multiplicities.

Performancing is entering the smooth space of the sea, a directional space, rather than a “dimensional or metric” one; one with continuous variations, with no distinct forms, but a “space of affects” [3:479], filled by events rather than properties, a space in which new forms (the BwOwB is such a new form!) are continuously being developed. Let us not see performance as a becoming-sound, a becoming-instrument, a becoming-technology. Becoming is never imitating; it is, as all becomings, becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, -imperceptible, and “all becomings are already molecular” [3:248 + 305].

Performancing is performance freed from its respective code; it extracts “particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes”. [3:272].

The D&G performance urges us to see beyond units and consider molecular and individuated multiplicities, as apparent unity in a set, such as found in the Mandelbrot set for example, also always exposes multiplicities. In that way, the periphery in the Mandelbrot set “is filled with a halo of tiny copies of the entire set, each of which is surrounded by its own halo of still tinier copies, and so on, on smaller and smaller scales, without end” [8].

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Let us celebrate performancing where “masses and flows are constantly escaping, inventing connections that jump from tree to tree and uproot them: a whole smoothening of space, ...” [3:506].

The creation of the not-yet!

3. NIC COLLINS, KAFFE MATTHEWS AND PHIL ARCHER

3.1. Hardware Hacker Nic Collins

Listen to Nic Collins’ sonic activities drawn out of the hacking of various hardware items, a process that abides by the rules of “if it sounds good and doesn’t smoke, don’t worry if you don’t understand it” [2].

These are new, weird and wacky sounds derived out of ordinary everyday electrical appliances. There is soldering, scratching and scraping, twisting and pounding of devices until distorted, sweet, entirely unexpected and out-of-this-world-kind-of sounds emanate from very much in-this-world-kind-of devices. “New spaces of malleable and combinatory sites” are opened up; the devices allow for “a perpetual multiplication of significance creating hybrids of inferences”, which in turn produce “hybrid decoded and deterritorialized phantasmagorical meanings” to borrow the language of Joseph Nechvatal [7].

What we have here is sonically de-stratified bifurcations that rejoice in the Schizophrenic Transfinite!

3.2. Live converter Kaffe Matthews

Open your senses to the not-yet world of Kaffe Matthews’ laptop performances, who, while bearing the self-assigned description of ‘live converter’, creatively ‘involves’, rather than progressively evolves, sonic materials. Matthews’ performancing is a navigation of the smooth space of the sea (the title of her CD “eb+flo” - [5] - may suggest the sea’s inherent continuous variations); it is not solely a making of sounds in themselves, that too, but also the making of their texture, density, colour, grain, and shape, which all aid in blurring the point, freeing the line, a sculpturing of sounds that deterritorialises rhythm and makes bifurcations possible.

Matthews’ performancing is a making of the not-yet. By focusing on the qualities of sounds themselves, by looking towards sine tones - the smooth sound; the completely pure sound - and by commencing sonic activity with nothing, not even with one’s own preconceptions of how it should sound, but with pure energies of a particular space, Matthews not only gives room for the not-yet to appear, but she is also constantly in the process of returning to the molecular; a molecule from which she then builds, one that has the potential to increase the number of sonic connections, to push towards bifurcations and multiplicities.

“I’m responding to the resonance and the energy of a space”, she states [4]. The ‘work’ (a word I will henceforth use for the lack of a more appropriate one; one which would entail notions of process, and not necessarily reek of concepts such as ‘result’) “Weather Made”, a collaborative project [6], is one such that exposes performance as a becoming, one in which weather data picked up from strings of a kite turns into planes of sonic activity, multiplicities of sounds. Whereas Matthews prepares an instrument with laptop computer and software, it is the weather that plays it; sound becomes “a central mixing pot” accessible to all [4], and sound is continuously sculpted by movements of the smooth space of the sea, incessant variations are exposed, new forms developed. The energy of each sound is dispersed, transfinite schizophrenia, awaiting to partake in the not-yet!

3.3. Infra-Instrumentalist Phil Archer

Participate in the performancing of Nic Collins’ staunch follower Phil Archer’s modified, mis-interpreted, re-examined familiar music appliances, such as the CD player. Archer intervenes and appropriates familiar objects, those that have become so intimately known to us, in order to re-

situate them as either totally new objects or, by referring to the known objects, as some that reminisce of the known [1:19]. Objects are made to reflect upon themselves, while our perspectives of the familiar become radically altered.

Archer's work "CD err" (2001, Bourges) [1:9] for example makes sonic multiplicities apparent. "CD err" is a collection of sonic snippets derived from recordings of others; sounds become extracted, then randomly layered in order to free up coincidental new materials; imprinted onto CD-R and replayed on Archer's modified CD walkman, with which he can intervene into the playback behaviour of the materials themselves (making audible skips and distortions as well as the CD's inherent mechanical noises). Archer's sonic improvisations not only put into question categories of compositional and improvisational activities, but also re-shape the act of music making into one of pure performancing: sounds are freed during the rhizomatic processes of Archer's sound making: a process that considers both compositional and improvisational sculpturing, as well as the building, deforming and programming of devices, in which sounds are not created within a framework of rigid forms and structures, but rather, by the making of relationships, by exposing the sounds' inherent tendencies and combinatory possibilities, and by allowing for redefinitions and repurposing of internal sonic relations. New connections are constantly being formed, materials re-structured and re-worked. "[D]ense, phantasmagorical forces develop", and "things [are] heard only from the depths of [an] inclusive ecstatic density – withdrawn into itself, perhaps – adumbrated and darkened by its obscurity – but bound tightly together and inescapably grouped by the vigor that is hidden in virtual depth", to appropriate Nechvatal's language a ultimate time [7].

Listen to the inkjet printer that has ceased to be a pure imprinter of textual information, for in Archer's work "Latin" the motors no longer carry paper and ink, but now cause the movements of pencils and pens, creating percussive sounds. The supercollider patch spurts out samples of a steel drum at random pitch [1:17], thus partaking in the making of assemblages that open and multiply connections. Here is a performancing that feeds on notions of mis-, ir-, inter- and re-.

Archer's performancing is one of negation, not a negation of sounds, but of agendas of in- and ex-tension (of tension, too), of notions of hyper-, meta-, and cyber-. The instrument "in-tends" rather than "ex-tends" beyond the semi-romantic notion of instrumental virtuosity to involve into the constrained, into the simple and few rather than the many, into the reduced and restricted, into infra- rather than the super-. Celebrate the instrument within the non-instrumental, and do not think that sounds are random, coincidental or unpredictable, lacking form or structure; what we find in Archer is performancing at $n-1$ dimensions, a performance in which the multiple is made, not by adding but by subtracting "the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted" [3:6]. And what more: Archer's work is exploding with uttermost sonicality (the latter relating to sound just as musicality tends to refer to music)!

4. CAN TECHNOLOGY CREATE A RHIZOME?

Consider, then, whether technology can drag performance into an activity of performancing, whether it can, wants to, and knows how to, create a rhizome. Can technology blur the point, aid in abandoning coordinates, free the line and the diagonal, deterritorialise rhythm, and favour nonpulsed time; can technology bifurcate? And how is it, can it, and should it, be involved in the making of the not-yet?

One thing technology can do is to bring out individuated elements, like sounds: it allows us to travel inside them, stretch and condense them, touch or leave them untouched. Technology has the potential to signal a return to a basic element; it can constitute the promise of a return. This is, however, not a return understood as a regression. The inherent potential for a return to the elementary unit is also not a question of the unpredictable, which, at times, can be implicit in the use of technology. No. It is a question of the demonic animal, of forming a multiplicity, a becoming. There is no need for the Oedipal sentimental family pet, such as "my" violin, "my" trumpet, or "my" laptop. The use of technology is not about getting rid of the instrument, of the human being becoming replaced by machines, and finally it is not about technology either. At it's most basic, the D&G performance is, what I see as the basis of human life, a question of a return to the unit, to a unit *without* the aid of technology. And the unit here is not a single element, or item; it is not to be regarded as the lowest subdivision of a whole (what is the whole in a performance, let alone in life, anyway?). The unit is an individual but at the same time, it has the potential for increasing the number of connections, as the unit is already in itself a multiple.

I am not interested in the extension of that unit with technology, nor am I interested in extension at all. The instrument is not your puppet! Just as the Deleuze-ian puppet strings are not tied to the will of the puppeteer, but to a multiplicity of nerve fibres, forming another puppet in other dimensions, which again is connected to the first [3:8]. We do not manipulate our instruments (the saxophone, the faderbox or the keyboard) in a tool-like manner. Our instruments are not strapped to our extremities; they are not instrumental prostheses. But, our instrument is tied to a multiplicity of nerve strands, connective tissue and previously formed (expanding into newly formed) bodily connections.

Performancing is about being able to involve into a unit *without* technology. It is only after the return to the basic element constituting our practice that we can resort to technology, in order to take that unit into a different dimension.

The creation of such new dimension does not imply that we can pick up our Oedipal family pet and be closer to the demonic animal. It is not about killing the family pet in order for it to be replaced by the demonic animal. And there is also no need for merging the two kinds, for forming an alliance with the family pet and the demonic animal, as, in order to make a rhizome, we cannot make two out of adding one to one. This is not a way of forming a multiplicity. In order to form a rhizome, we cannot simply add one ($n+1$) after the other ($n+1+1$), and thus form a multiple. We are made to think of dimensions or "directions in motion"

[3:21] rather than units. We are asked to subtract “the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted”, and always write at n-1 [3:6]. To form a rhizome, we need to performance at n-1 dimensions. And finally, for technology to aid in forming a multiplicity, to find ways of detaching, connecting, reverting, and multiplying that unit, and for it to steer us toward a rhizomatic performance and make us discover the not-yet, technology, first, has to become rhizomorphous itself. It has to become an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” [3:21], in which anything can be connected to anything other. Then we, who are in between two multiplicities ourselves, having entered into new, nonhierarchical relations (such as the BwOwB), are able to rejoice in performancing at n-1 dimensions.

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The not-yet!

Performancing with the BwOwB at n-1 dimensions!

5. REFERENCES

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