

Tender and true: the place the time the particle

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ABSTRACT

This paper is premised on two vaguely related ideas: the thinking through of a performance practice that produces itself through 'preparation' and 'doing' (makes itself on the floor); the thinking through of an interior spatial practice that performs (itself) as an ecology of differences. Territory is (made or exhausted by) movement – movement that undoes, un(de)designs, yet is active like chance and carnival. Territory arising over and over by force – enduring without purpose. A space for the shaman, or transforming (through rites and rituals); composed or assembled – to see what happens, to be active not re-active. A space, anywhere, for intuition and improvisation, for performing as living-being in such a way as to disperse 'territory', make of territory a field – immaterial wisps, whispers, scents, touches, emerging from material the matter of experience, of relations, mixes, atmospheres. A field, almost imperceptible, for quietening, for losing one's ground, for expanding the situation of the body, its velocity or shape, or its capacity for 'joy'.

The images by Jude Walton that accompany this text are evocations from a rehearsal-practice where the dancer, Phoebe Robinson, informs her body of the placement and materials of everyday objects in everyday situations. By an insistent repetition the 'things' teach her the exact relationship her fingers, hands, legs, head – her entire body bit by bit – must 'take-up' (an offering of the things) so as to remember and perform their absence. This rehearsal-practice is a collaboration between Jude and Phoebe; it eventuates in site-specific public performances.

BEFORE

This essay of writing and images is a small-thought territory where a particle-poem might arise. To make this territory, various energies and presences are required – the thoughts of others (different past and future times), language as a medium, gaps, punctuation, us two, others (as real bodies), and you (virtual and essential); each component, whether a paragraph or an image, might seem to disperse or disturb itself, or drift away (from the idea of a territory). A slight performance might emerge as a gathering of velocities and activities. This writing cannot be like (impersonate) the performance (or 'meeting') that it attempts to discuss, or like the atmosphere of the success or failure of such a performance; however, it is hope for an expansive field(work), a disorder or disassembly that nevertheless holds space – as a combination of place/time/particle; a bit operatic/comedic, a bit hysterical/catatonic, a bit gentle/relentless.

NOW

1. Transformation, or translation, of the everyday, or a making that tries to remember itself for itself, and makes to contribute its memory, produces its own event, not to represent or educate, but to be attentive amidst the multitude of memories and differences of things, textures, ambiences, meanings, climates; that's the intent, the effort, of its intention; the effort lasts for the duration (of making).

2. Each sentence is a rehearsal, an attempt to get somewhere (where one plans to be, and then on a whim takes a side road, even a short cut, that makes the trip hours longer); no three-act writing (yet a start and a stop); an illusion instead, a meditation. Rather than contain writing, form extends writing; sentences are arranged serially, not sequentially; they are (in) the place of melancholy within a certain definite joy – a kind of benevolence.

3. The composition of relations is, as writing, as performance, when started, one body moving and resting – a composition of differences (each difference itself a composition of relations) that for awhile is a 'nature': '... this composition of relations or this unity of composition, which will show what is in common between bodies, between a certain number or a certain type of bodies, between a particular body and some other body...' A glance, response, passing (of bodies, of things): Common notions, writes Gilles Deleuze, are ideas that bodies agree with under one relation or another. 'In this sense there is indeed an order of Nature, since not just any relation enters into composition with any other relation: there is an order of composition of relations, going from the most universal notions to the least universal notions, and vice versa.'² The common notions are (he writes):

1. the composition of relations between existing bodies;
2. physico-chemical or biological ideas (in these compositions) rather than geometric ones; and, if they are geometric, it is in the sense of a natural real geometry that captures a real relation between real physical existing beings;
3. nature's unity of composition in its various aspects (and this is infinite).

The composition of relations is not predetermined; it needs experimentation (investigations and connections, one thing in/to the in/outside of another; one thing/animal being a realization of the Thing/Animal in itself or within this or that relation, like molecular biology, moving further and further into entities/particles). Place the palm against the chest, lightly, fingers pointing left, then slowly extend the arm outward, with the elbow close to the body, slowly; drop the hand down, fingers toward the floor, sweep them up and draw the hand back to the chest ... this composition of relations – limbs, thought, floor, movement, time, light, space, teacher – turns the body into pattern, a figure practicing – the body is a particle amidst particles; it exposes its part(icles)-self gradually.

4. Riddled from within by a stylistic practice (a burrowing, a web of tubes and globes, a conservation of breath – an ecology of sparks, scrapes, shivers, cries) that scatters everything that would comprise a whole, a sum. Yet since the work is finished in its incompleteness, there must be a unity which is the unity of that multiple piece, of that multiplicity, as in all of those fragments.³ A practice of soft movements kept close to the body, the elbows pressed into the waist, the hands curled, the feet rubbing together.

5. The specific performance/language structure's relationship to other performance/language structures is its own way of being (a medium, for instance) – rather than for new meanings or messages. It is 'present' and manifest (instantiated) and taking place – stable, visible (a poem); '... the stopping place of an ongoing movement'.⁴ The performance points to the 'movement of symbolizing itself' – as if a translation, in the 'way' of Walter Benjamin's sense of 'translatability': 'Translatability is the never realizable potential of a meaning and as such constitutes a way – a way of signifying – rather than a *what*.'⁵

6. Each move, movement, or gesture can interrupt itself, stop, start again (or start for the first time), re-cite its self, alter its self, or walk away; it can be remembered, transformed, made into a different move, movement, or gesture, be extended, exaggerated, quietened; it can become a citable form, a material – one can learn it from another, like the blowing of a kiss, the holding up of a hand, the waving of an arm. A hint from Brecht's epic theatre, a thread from Benjamin: 'Gesture is 'form giving', shaping, insofar as it not only 'interrupts' an ongoing sequence, but at the same time *fixes* it by enclosing it in a relatively determined space, one with a discernible 'beginning' and 'end'. But *at the same time*, the closure brought about by gesture remains caught up in that from which it has partially extracted itself: in the 'living flux' of a certain temporality. The 'strict, framelike closure' embodied in gesture is thus held together by a tension that Benjamin does not hesitate at times to designate as 'dialectical'.⁶ The dialectical though does service synthesis, or drama, or the sorting/ordering of coherence. It's a medium; an atmosphere arising without consequence, and dissolving and folding, thickening and thinning; dimensional in all directions, intensified time to time, cut-off by limits (walls, floors, fears, age), by tensions that restrict or release within singular acts. These are differently composed energies assembling, disassembling, like a crowd or mob or team; stopping and starting, interruption and chance, provides, like a shelter or a feast, conditions for becoming other, for being transported elsewhere.⁷

7. Benjamin writes that Brecht's gesture in epic theatre '... does not merely interrupt something external to it: the expressive intentionality of an action, the teleology of a narrative, or the causal necessity or probability of a sequence of events. It does all this, but it also does something more: insofar as it is citable, it interrupts *itself*, and indeed, only 'is' in its possibility of becoming other, of being transported elsewhere.'⁸ A performance without (desire for) intention, narrative, or sequence (but with desire nevertheless), and full of gesture-without-gesture, not outside of gesture, and not

quite inside of gesture, becoming almost-other, becoming close to turning, being neither here nor there, and trying to sense (like magic) where 'transportation' and 'translation' are (vibrations or resonances) in both movement and stillness, but especially in the moment of doing and seeing. No plot and no resolve; a plane or field to come to and go from; and what is done, and the doing, is singular, not a bit of *it* (something added up).

Distance is not the objective, nor self-containment; the 'condition' (of the performance) is continuous, one thing after another, walking, being in the dark expression of the dilemma or situation, trying to stay with 'joy', or move from 'sadness' (with Spinoza in mind); a matter of breaking-up certain composed form(s) – between movements, limbs, bodies, ideas; an attempting, and failing, to bring into physical, aural, emotional shape, aches, pressures, impressions; inventing what comes next (a new composition). For example, I am wrong about *that*; or, if I do *that* I will make the familiar shape, I will come to the same conclusion, I will react as usual, I will mistake who you are!

I am in a place where another cannot be, I am in a place of my own (you cannot identify with me); I am not myself even, I am leaving myself. And all the time I am blocked at the moment I am still, when the gesture is (thought to be) seen, the end of the action, the fall, the eyes stare – look, there it is, the aftermath, the wreckage from hitting the curb; you saw it, a citable instant; a dead give-away; there, she turned, she sat, she split, slid; she awaits, and while awaiting there is '... the possibility of becoming other than what is currently present or presented. But this future is not that which one expects, which one hopes to foresee, to calculate or even to bring about. It is unforeseeable, unpredictable, unfathomable. ... 'It can happen this way, but it can also come about in an entirely different manner.'⁹ She awaits in the company of others who are carrying-on; it doesn't matter that an-end has arrived momentarily (or forever) – the interval-event; space remains and takes place; energy melts, spreads, then congeals. The watcher looks away; the performance though is deliberate, a disposition or persistence, filled (to the brim) with interval-events, and fadings – movements Benjamin described in relation to the 'play' of the actor/act in epic theatre as the ability 'to fall out of the role, artfully'¹⁰; like a way of writing, of improvising, where the work is an experiment, a laboratory, a time/space for the return of an arrangement, or the placement of head or hand, like a phrase, or an ellipsis ... or a stuttering sentence – a return transformed learnable, snapped from its memory, or its intuition – not a contrariness or an opposition or a rejection, but the one with the other, montaged, haunted. Memory faces its remembrance; acts upon the space that 'acts' as the place for performance, an event-of-particles; the sensing of tiny unfurling inflections as they become not-quite-themselves, vaguely warmer, pressed slightly flatter.

8. Everything is a-part, yet in-touch, and everything is exaggerated. A space can (therefore) be for (in favour of) what happens on the day – like a café is, and a street and a garden (this too is exaggerated as 'what happens' in the space of the performance has been prepared



– by conversation, rehearsal, dressing, habits, knowledge (e.g. exercise, experience, excitement)). A space becomes a medium, an atmosphere, of material, dimension, light, past, present, sound; a medium for listening and seeing, for appearing and disappearing, for myself and not-myself, you and not-you, a site for angel-visits – flows, exchanges, and meetings; someone reads, someone sings, someone fold cloth.

The 'dialectical' arises, like a brew, in movement, and is released at the instance of a stoppage, a loss of focus, a change of heart, a pause; performance opens to life where no-performing occurs. The pause is shared space – nothing to show or see, just one person and another, local: '[p]erhaps what this entails is nothing more [or] less than acknowledging what has probably always obtained: that we only take place from place to place, from time to time, between places rather than in them, in the instant of an intervening interval – and that this is what we are all *about*.'¹¹

9. A performance offers itself as a territory; a thin line, a plane; it aims to be a field for acts, for language. And, the performing is only immediacy, and (the making of) space-within-space, and the going-on of something-(or-other)-going-on (the such-and-such of someone). A person de-parts their someone-self, expands, and another event begins; it is loss, and then loss again; it is *about* a shadow or an angle. It is, *about* one thing in-another (about almost nothing sometimes).

10. When time all at once enters the stage, appears on the floor – there – there too is interruption, letting go; one becomes two, in a stroke – look, she has broken-off; look, she is left-behind. The love for performing (as an animal inside a kitchen, a theatre, a shop, a school) is shown by the chance to be solitary: 'How can one love 'separately'? Each one the other, but each time each one for him or herself, each one in solitary secret, each one secretly, in the throes of love. The other in the end can know nothing of this, can never perceive anything, nor ever even anything called seeing. One cannot love separately and one cannot love but separately, in the separation or the disparity of the pair. At an infinite distance, because *incommensurable*: I will never be at the

same distance – from you, as you, as you from me. No common measure, no symmetry. Infinite separation in the couple itself and in the parity of the pair.¹² It is impossible to act this out(side) from inside the body as if it, the separation, was visibly representable, by signals – including literal displays of the anguish of parting. A great space opens, in the heart of time, as, there, from time-to-time, is the memorial, the remembrance of the endless specificity of every time, then, now, later – its counting, its un-measure, its love for the expanse of its cut(s). The cut is felt as an experience, an event, that can come forever more, as speech, as afterthought, as 'remembrance' remembered; in(side) the cut, in the interval of the cut, stitches, or steps, or quiet, hold the times together as a/part of the 'action', the motion (leaching out, excessively). Nothing has ended; everything has changed; it is someone, he or she, who has folded the continuum, it is always a woman or a man that does the deed; it is never a neutral act of an asexual being; the cut is sexed, done in a he/she way. Each time, from-time-to-time, stopping stops precisely, stops in its own way, unlike any other stopping.

The performing makes a performance – it's a very small state of obscure yet common perceptions; it would be interesting to see if, when one stopped, and became a stopped-space, a bound interior, one could reach out one's cupped hand and give that space away (the space of the cut, for example), or the movements leading up to the out-stretched hand. I am holding it (the cut, the movement) out to you; it was not given to me, still, here, you can have it.

11. The performance and the idea (preparations, notes, readings, thoughts) of the performance are grounds or causes or pretexts or motives for another performance, another memory, talk, proposal, idea. The performance as an idea, and the idea as a performance, is dreamed of in the writing that is 'this'. The performance is not all that writing tries to think about, but the performance of the kind of performance that the writing tries to talk about must accept abbreviations, infections, and pain; it is remembering the past and remembering the future and remembering – a triple-take, an instant where one can build a

Opposite

Video stills: Jude Walton, Performer: Phoebe Robinson

make-shift shelter, become a Tiger Moth, or write fearless. Triple remembering is at hand; the body shifts toward the light (and is shifted by the light; one comes to the present and returns to it; one is 'there' and cut off from 'there' and then 'there' again; remembrances touch in such a way as to feel apart – at the slightest distance from each other they are, in any case, in-touch (by gaze, scent, saliva, sound); the body remembers it is in space and time, separate from all of the re-remembering, and at various distances from its own parts – thumb, nose, toe – and always in different and differently sensed posings and tensions.

12. This performing, which is a presenting/entering of the body in/to space, not the presenting of a narrative that the body carries, or delivers (into space), is not so far from Benjamin's 'awakening' where the body orientates itself, perceives itself, by the almost-shock of realizing (as it comes from sleep to non-sleep) – that not only is it a body but it is the very body that it is in relation to all other bodies and objects, in the very time and very space it is in, in relation to all other times and spaces (ever). The body performs a position, and in performing (in a performance) can extend itself to fill the room (as if awakening) – the body leaves the body, magic, de/dis-locates (like the sky reflected in a puddle, an hallucination, even); space, then, of other orders: 'Space [spatiality/extension: being beside or outside of oneself]¹³ as extension strives to move away from itself and in this striving it becomes time, which in turn becomes the measure of movement, in the sense of change-of-place, that is 'locomotion.' But there are other kinds of movement, 'emotions' for instance, but also dislocations, movements that go nowhere and yet do not stay in the same place.¹⁴

She fills the room by doing what she does not usually do, and is differently alive, drawing closer to her own aliveness – by a force or focus, away from (taken leave of) '... the habitual positions of the body and its members ... [s]uch dislocations can be human, but do not have to be: they take place at that border where the body 'remembers' that it is not necessarily human ...'¹⁵ Or, perhaps it remembers it is all too human, and

is playing itself like an instrument as it is not only in the light but of the light, and of the chair and the floor and the air, and of the watching and hearing of others; she is of the field of sensations that pass through her and through which she passes – she is awake, and awakes into this, and this is disturbing, and further disturbing as the place where she is 'awakens' too: '... this movement does not stop at 'forms', even at the form of form itself: which is to say, the form of a room as container. For this room does not merely contain. It is a stage for a play that is a fragment rather than a complete work: a stage where something comes to pass, a pass-age way, perhaps, but one that is not going anywhere.'¹⁶

13. I call what I am writing about 'this-performing', as if it can be described, as if it is something-in-particular – yet it is not, nor even new or needed; it is meeting (an encounter with the strange) and working, and *being* caught in un-awakening and feeling the horror of being caught, of the constraints of limbs and thoughts – there – on the floor/platform, too earthed in the stubborn sleeping inner structure. '(t)his-performing' situates this/there as an elsewhere (just outside the back-door where separation from the glue-past can be practiced). I am therefore self-conscious, the most inhibiting of all modes, utterly dis-spiriting; I am wringing my hands: 'All our primitive or poetic expressions are either separations or non-separations: the difficulty of defining the border between sexes, between spaces, and also between high and low.'¹⁷ I am in 'this-performance' alone, separated from my corner, my bed, my table, my floor; and unseparated from myself-imagined; bordered on the border; it might be quite, or more than, enough to struggle with – a small breaking-away, a moving-without-moving – this-performing of this-border (perhaps a land, an earth, a world) – and behaving as if a border oneself, as if wilfully constituting the body as constantly distinct instead of obscurely constant; one state or medium then another: 'Perhaps there is an animal virtuality or potentiality dozing and awakening within us ... Our body is the place of this questioning. And what about the flower part in our body?'¹⁸ Trouble then, a sort of passing in and out of 'awakening' that gives the illusion of 'stillness', and of trembling – what's happening inside is a million



Above
Video stills: Jude Walton, Performer: Phoebe Robinson

lands/earths/worlds, poured through the heart, burned up, ash. Nothing left to say, no remains, except the body – with all its signs, its frowns and furrows, squints and sighs (it acts without me); it performs 'this' present, honestly; not from 'inside', from 'beneath': '... when you encounter someone who produces signs you can read the bodily signs of choices, angles, objects, positions.'¹⁹ It's too late, and, if not awake, then alive (momentarily); neither a step nor a fragment; in the end it's 'work', as one puts oneself to-work, trying not to impersonate the other; trying instead to show one's body, as provisional gestures, thinking with its given/taken company (other's writings, other's bodies, other's art, other's spaces).

14. This is a way to say that there is only the beginning and the ending that comes with the people (alone and together) who enter the time and space from far far away from themselves, and yet are as close as blood and breath to themselves (and cannot be other-wise) – in which case the performance/work is a possible condition, a mis-shapen animal of several hearts, a relation between 'works': '... this hugely difficult concept familiar to visual artists, 'theory-practice', cannot be, it cannot present itself as a content, in some present. It can only be the name given to an experience of relation to and with others.'²⁰

15. She sees, she is seen, she does not see, she thinks while being seen, and there, in her thinking, is a secret, that's the wall and that's why it is necessary for someone to crawl (or when it begins it seems necessary, it was becoming necessary for ages) across the room toward the window, and for no good reason, or for goodness knows why, or for the goodness of something, or for the best (it was for the best, she said) – is it good, for instance, to die as many times as possible, and to be tangled-up with the dead. The moth is learning, as an image, as a composition, and is excessive to the bones and flesh; she is a thought, an idea, and probably illegible from the outside – and going nowhere. She is learning that space decides what one sees (to become); that the inside and its time play across the field of light, like angels. She burns up her moth image quickly, and that requires the entire room.

LATER

This is the writing's end; there are still other texts to read like: '... of a heart that begins to vibrate (*Towards a poem...*)'²¹; there are still questions about working with the heart. The heart holds the scene, and the scene holds the heart; to prepare this scene she has to learn by heart, has to invent the heart that skips a beat or jumps into the mouth. She walks her heart-failure; the performance is mourning, is ritual(s) (touching a teapot, shaking a towel), small halting manoeuvres that make a place, or many, to see if the heart knows what it mourns; its drama, its rush to the head, is over before she knows it, and she, the aftermath/moth, goes on with the (slight) memory of that twinkling, evidence that she survived being an-other – death passed. ('We no longer know if our next step reaches life or death. At the heart of the other, at its presence or pre-sense the risk of giving oneself death meets the chance of (re)-gaining life.'²² The making of the poem-performance comes, if it comes, by moving toward (and with) the separate separated hearts, heart to other heart, as they separate/join, join/separate, beat by beat. It is the scene of murder and of birth: forgive(ing)(ness) as a long exhalation, as a kink in the neck; Cixous calls it '... the mystery of forgiveness ...'.²³ She writes: 'I don't even know if forgiving exists. I don't know if there is such a thing as forgiving. In general, our practice of forgiving is a revenge.'²⁴ It's funny, horrible, and the performance grows and transforms into a poem without ever knowing if it can or will, or if it will forgive itself other lost-hearted efforts of work, of trial and error, of mistakes and deliberations. The poem is air: 'An instant is that particle of time in which the tyre of a car going at full speed touches the ground, touches it no longer; then touches it again.'²⁵ The 'this-performance', is a particle or a performance of one, two, or several particles, a particle poem. 'I ask you ...', writes Clarice Lispector, '[w]hat is the weight of air?'²⁶

NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988), 115.
2. Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy*, 115.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold, Leibniz and The Baroque* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xiv.
4. Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities* (Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 91.
5. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 92.
6. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 100.
7. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 63.
8. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 103.
9. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 105.
10. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 107.
11. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 114.
12. Jacques Derrida, in Martin McQuillan, *The Oxford Literary Review 24* (Durham: University of Durham, 2002), 27.
13. 'Spatiality/extension' follows Weber following Hegel's interpretation: 'Spatiality' here designates precisely what Hegel, interpreting the notion of 'extension,' describes as 'Auseinandersein': 'being beside – or outside of – oneself'. Weber, 173.
14. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 173.
15. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 173.
16. Weber, *Benjamin's-abilities*, 175.
17. Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 124.
18. Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 132.
19. Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, 136.
20. Hélène Cixous, in Martin McQuillan, 50. Of Hélène Cixous's writing Martin McQuillan says: 'The experience of encountering such art is itself the experience of a failure to master the experience and so remain suspended, without reference to a fixed position within a set of relations of reading.' McQuillan, 50.
21. The full title of the text is: *Felix Culpa – or, of a heart that begins to vibrate (Toward a poem at the conjunction of Derrida and Cixous)* Toyotaka Ota, in McQuillan, 173.
22. Ota, in Martin McQuillan, 181.
23. Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata, Escaping Texts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 39.
24. Cixous, *Stigmata, Escaping Texts*, 39.
25. Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1992), 86.
26. Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, 86. Lispector finishes her last book, after the question about air; with: 'And now – now it only remains for me to light a cigarette and go home. Dear God, only now am I remembering that people die. Does that include me? Don't forget, in the meantime, that this is the season for strawberries. Yes.' Lispector, 86.

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