

Environmental Utterance – A Performative Conference
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movement #0:

Utterance as ‘movement’ praxis
or the quantum leap of t/here

Dance: Verena van den Berg

Lecture: Monika Jaeckel

This presentation is based on a sequence of movements, that has been structured by reflections on the framework of 'now here'. The disclosure of this volatile space /moment/place is suggested through the intertwinement of two different modes of performative habits, both centered on movement. One accesses movement through language, and one, with the participation of Verena van den Berg, by transformation through dance in a wider sense.

As the title suggests 'Utterance as movement praxis', is the attempt to prove the possibility of – what I call - the quantum leap of being simultaneous *here* and *there*, *visible* and *invisible*.

Movement, in any interpretation, is the guiding thread for this dialog that attempts to intertwine the emergence of various sorts of utterances, to allow them into the space of action, and be rendered apparent. By “utterances”, I mean those induced by Verena’s movement praxis, the ones literally produced by my own person, and equally so, the constant presence of the less consciously decipherable utterances of the environment and entire situation.

movement #1: Intertwinement / Perception / Flesh / the sentient and the sensible

In the words of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology “.. the whole landscape is overrun with words .., it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes.. ”¹. Evans and Lawlor in the book, '*Chiasms - Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*', elaborate this more specifically as “the significance or presence that things have prior to their articulation in language”², which in fact is constituted by the substantial relation Merleau-Ponty sets up between perception, as the founding term, and language, as the founded term. In this regard all abstracted concepts (of expression and of intellectual assessment) refer back to the hold our bodies have on the world.

This is predominantly defined by the subject-object dialogue - we and the world are always already engaged with, and - as Merleau-Ponty put it - *the primacy of perception*.

He [M-P] also specified, that there is no dialectical reversal between perception and speech, rather that these are two aspects of the very reversibility, which essentially establishes the notion of the *flesh*³. It should be pointed out, that it is in particular the reversibility between the “sentient” and the “sensible”⁴, that is addressed when Merleau-Ponty speaks of the *flesh*, and not the reversibility of language and perception. But it is the specific chiasmic structure which Merleau-Ponty assigns to his notion of *flesh*⁵ that allows him to define the world’s unfolding in a reversible intertwining of the *sentient* and the *sensible* that creates a presence of the unstable version of *now*, and simultaneously the sense of location for being *in and of the world*. (*here*)

movement #2: movement of thought / absence in sense / action into appearance / ...
the other side of each

H. Arendt had a similar understanding of phenomenological aspects, when she noted that “the meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; ...”⁶ Generally the considerations of Arendt are connected to aspects of the political. Though M. Kircey, in his reflections on Arendt’s contemplations on thinking and action, emphasizes as an essential point in Arendt’s interpretation, that it is action, which enables the liminal space of appearance⁷. Likewise her [Arendt’s] definition that we are ‘of and not merely in the world’⁸ does entail a thread, that not only hints to phenomenology, but to the rendition of movement, she developed in regards of the notion of thought.

Arendt’s statement, that “[e]very mental act rests on the mind’s faculty of having present to itself what is absent to the senses”⁹, seems to almost literally touch on J.-L.Nancy’s insight that the search for sense (in all its ambiguous and reversible meaning) is like *touching on the interruption of sense*¹⁰. For Kircey this specific idea conveys that the meaning of any phenomenon can only *appear* in the mind, at the threshold of the thing’s *disappearance* from the world.¹¹ Arendt defines it as the *move back and forth* between the world of appearances and the reflection on them¹². Consequently she considers action and thinking as being intimately connected, or as “just the other side of each”.

movement #3: reversibility of intertwinement / now here is nowhere (elsewhere)

These elaborations about the complex relation between *here* and *there*, *absence* and *presence* lead to the insight, that the reversibility of intertwinement together with the inherent indivisibility of the *flesh* might become disclosed or apparent, through an enquiry into movement. Movement is addressed in this context, as an embodied praxis, that allows for being *here* while experiencing the *there*, though in fact neither being *there*, nor *here*, but in a constant move between them.

The philosopher J. Reynolds extracts the reciprocal nature of the notion of the *flesh*, as the one of our embodied subjectivity, which resides in both, the intertwining that its chiasmic structure suggests (tangibility and touching), as well as in the awareness, that is predicated on our body's reversible differentiation with itself.¹³ This reversibility is initiated by our bodily inherent intelligence of accessing the world, and movement is the form of unwitting intentionality on which our condition of being and access depends. Though certainly one, that can never be thoroughly explained, or mastered by informational knowledge alone. In the definition of the dancer Deborah Hay it is expressed in *dis-attaching from any automatic response to be creative or to fall into habitual behavior [...] by noticing the whole body at once as teacher, thus assuming the cellular intelligence of the body.*

movement #4: body / actor / emergence / the world shows up for us

The scope of this performative setting is found in the attempt to create a sentient situation, one that makes sensible the above mentioned experience, which the body so easily performs, often almost unnoticed by the overarching presumption of brain/mind domination. To be concise, what should to be translated is the experience that *the body can 'act' as a site of emergence, a boundary project, and an incipience*¹⁴.

Action in itself not only initiates something new¹⁵, it equally produces the actor, who in a type of *deliberate choice to become seen* liberates the emergence of things out of their inseparable indeterminacy¹⁶, - into an ongoing flow of movement from an ever-changing kinetic world of possibilities¹⁷. The option of becoming perceptible, that defines the initiation of the subject-object dialogue between the seer and the seen, draws together the subject's intentions onto the perceived objects, and transform them into world. The evolving dialogue allows both, subject and object, "to find their place in the world",¹⁸ and to form "a Visibility, a Tangible in

itself.” It brings us into the world, and lets the world show up for us,¹⁹ as the philosopher A. Noë briefly defines.

Most of us here today could agree that our very location seems clearly to adhere to the status of “here now”. Yet there is the conception, of an overlapping reversal of these two very ‘moments’ or better movements between here and there, that allude a quantum leap in the *t/here*. In strict bodily terms and under the aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *intertwinement* the very *positionality* of ‘now here’ falls under the primacy of process, or in the words of B. Massumi, it belongs to the abstractness of the *never present in position, only ever in passing*. He thus concludes that positionality is an emergent quality of movement, an abstractness that pertains to the transitional immediacy of a real relation – and that is of a body to its own *indeterminacy*²⁰, and its possibilities.

movement #5: never present - always passing / the quantum leap performed by the liminal cat

In all its liminality and ‘non-real reality’, in fact only a Cheshire Cat might accomplish such feats as to grin without corporeally being neither here nor there²¹. M. Sheets-Johnstone evokes with this reference the insight that, our carnal form of being, is usually considered as quite solid and confined. To get access to this riddle of *invisible visibility* that a Cheshire cat manages so easily in our imagination²², we might return to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the *flesh*, which does not confine our abilities of the sentient with a strict border. In fact he defines it as this interiorly worked-over mass, as the element of Being, that has no specific definition in *here* or *now*, but that is, at the same time, by its own immanent ties adherent to *location* and to the *now*²³.

Evans and Lawler point out, that this twist is due to the fact of the inherent narcissistic concept of the chiasmic structure of the *flesh*. In order to turn back upon itself, see and touch itself, the flesh has to divide itself into the *flesh of the world* and the *flesh of the body*, the sensible and the sentient. This chiasmic reversibility defines the *flesh’s* ‘imminent coincidence with itself’²⁴; it is the dehiscence that allows the world’s unfolding, the opening towards its infinite iterations, which further on relate to a multitude of angles for access (i.e. POV).

In V. Kirby’s words it is a grammatological intertwining of the *flesh* that involves a fold, which must continue to touch itself, even as it opens itself up²⁵. This coincidental dialogue between the *flesh of the world* and the *flesh of the body*, which makes us at once *visible* and *sentient*, enables also the felt “look” of the Other, the surrounding, and the environment upon us. It is a

reciprocal movement, in which any of them call upon us, and we vice versa anticipate transformation for an appearance for and of the world's spectacle. "[E]verything transpires as if the other person's intuitions and motor realizations existed in a sort of relation of internal encroachment, as if my body and the body of the other person together formed a system"²⁶, Merleau-Ponty said.

movement #6: differentiation / becoming visible

Although there has never been given a precise description about its factual whereabouts, many of us may recall the liminal cat in some 'sense' very well, in fact it initiates a torrent of memories around Alice's fictional adventures, and at the same time echoes the experience of reading the story. In strict terms, the fictional example of *the grin without a carnal body* is both, a reminder and remainder of the body/movement of reading, and else, that has been here, but isn't any longer.

Movement should be discerned as quite different as just being a trajectory between one position and another. The act of reading involves as constant movements of subtle adjustments by the eyeball. Similarly, maintaining a sitting position concern moves while not totally unconscious, they do not require direct investment in applied movement, either.

Positionality in the event of action, that exceeds being as such, certainly emerges into the liminal space of appearance, albeit as faint as the eluding reverberance of a grinning cat. Massumi defines the body, that is in motion, as not coincidental with itself, but with its own variation. "In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own non-present potential to vary."²⁷ Consequently when we look at movement or dance, we see the opportunities, as well as the obstacles and limitations. We see a world-for-movement, it reveals the world as the very domain for action, that it comprises. And that is in Noë's words again, why we see the environment, when we look at dance.²⁸

The Finnish choreographer K. Monni sees dance as generally questioning "*how our bodily inhabiting in time and place comes into being.*"²⁹ An awareness, that lets the body intrinsically participate, even when just looking at extended movement, has meanwhile become quite evident and acknowledged through neuroscience. And this is only one of the reasons, why there is a dancer who allows for this intrinsic experience by enabling a different form of utterances. Reynolds emphasizes, that it *is not usually through conscious reflection and analysis that a dance or other language game is learned, but through repeated embodied*

efforts³⁰. But these efforts do not necessarily have to be seen as conscious rehearsal, as easily can be observed in the recurrent encounters of a small child in exploring its surroundings. So in turn that as well accounts for the unwanted or occasional encountered movements that are made right here, in exchange and contact with the dancer and the environment.

movement 7: the paradox of 'feeling' phenomena / visible through invisibility, which is defined through movement

Certainly it is rare to be able to recall the incredible ability which resides within early pre-language world-encounter-explorations. However despite the conviction of our intellectual abilities the phenomena - the world is built upon, are literally harder to be conceived than a non-existing liminal cat. V. Kirby consequently ascertains our inability to grasp reality as being made up of individual objects by referencing the radical view, that "*[s]pace and time are phenomenal, that is, they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena; neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena.*"³¹ Failing to acknowledge that we are dealing with "phenomena", whose very being is always and only an articulation of entanglement³², that fosters their emergence, conveys the incapability to catch the simultaneity of being *here and there* and thus *elsewhere*. Merleau-Ponty writes: "When we speak of the flesh / of the visible [...] we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible." ³³

Kirby sees here in Merleau-Ponty's understanding and especially in his insistence, that *the material ground of the senses (Nature) does not constitute a realm that can be violated by its imperfect translation into the separate linguistic register of the ideal (Culture)*, a closeness to Derrida's conviction, as *that what grounds, and goes as language, is the brain-twisting suggestion of difference itself*. And in this specific context, what defines *the ground of reference* is systematically inherent, while concurrently the indication of "language" is very distinct from any common or literal form. The importance of what is addressed does not lie in *the difference between one thing and another, but in the process that gives rise to the perception of an event as a divided phenomenon*³⁴. And that is as Merleau-Ponty writes "what has no name" and thus is defined by its chiasmatic structure as *the flesh*.

movement #8: the situation is more than local.

In fact tracing Barad's outline of a central point in quantum physics³⁵, namely "that the objects and the agencies of observation are inseparable parts of a single phenomenon"³⁶, also clarifies Kirby's understanding of Merleau-Ponty's Vision, as that of *an originary chiasmatic structure, that sums up to a difference that never is simply loss or failure, but an alterity that is an intrinsic expression of the intra-ontology of Being itself. It is not another entity on the border of my being, an entity that marks the limits of my situation and what can be known from what is unknown.*³⁷

And following the above mentioned points, this presentation reaches the ensuing conclusion, that, if the bodily situation is taken as chiasmatically defined, then "the/our" situation is eluding the local.³⁸ Intertwinement and its intrinsic phenomenal difference, that simultaneously is defined within itself, enables the emergence of *t/here* through movement/action and its *dis-* or *non-local* location.

Now, in regards to the double-sidedness of the elaborated text/time, body/space relation within this talk-performance. The introduction of various methods of movement praxis seemed to be an appropriate support for the appearance of those utterances (expressions) that may provide an insight into the *ever passing, never existing presence* of quantum leap's *t/here*. This experiment operated at the vanishing point between the *sensible* and the *sentient*, accenting on action, turning into language, and contextuality, while recalling the inherent ability to intertwine and reverse *now* and *here*, as also *past* and *future*.

And ending with Merleau-Ponty: "The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of 'psychic reality' spread over sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations"³⁹

"Language is everything, since it is the voice of no one,
since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests."

(Paul Valery)

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- ¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.155
- ² F. Evans and L. Lawlor, *Chiasms*, State University of New York Press, 2000, p.5
- ³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.147, "... we must think it [the flesh], as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being.
- ⁴ F. Evans and L. Lawlor, *Chiasms*, State University of New York Press, 2000, p.13
- ⁵ "This notion [of flesh] and its chiasmic structure of reversibility establish a balance between intimacy and alterity (as well identity and difference and unity and plurality) that Merleau-Ponty apparently feels is even greater than the balance between the intrinsic to the "subject-object dialogue" in *Phenomenology of Perception*.". F. Evans and L. Lawlor, State University of New York Press, 2000, *Chiasms*, p.13
- ⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Harvest Books, 1983, p.133; "The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; remembrance, by which you make present to your mind what actually is absent and past, reveals the meaning."
- ⁷ Maurizio Passerin D'Entreves, Routledge, 1993, *The political philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, p.77
- ⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Harvest Books, 1983, p.22
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75-76
- ¹⁰ Nancy, Jean-Luc; *Corpus*, Fordham University Press, 2008, p.125; "We are touching on a certain interruption of sense, and this interruption of sense has to do with the body, it is body. And it's no accident that the body has to do with sense, in the other sense of sense, sense in the sense of sensing, in the sense of touching. Touching on the interruption of sense is what, for my part, interests me in the matter of the body."
- ¹¹ M. A.. Kicey, Dissertation: *Risk and Responsibility*, "A Strange New Form of Life: Thinking, Acting, and Endangerment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt", p.339
- ¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Harvest Books, 1983, p.167;
- ¹³ J. Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*, Ohio University Press, 2004, p.13
- ¹⁴ N.Stern, *Implicit Bodies through Explicit Action*, International Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy, 2008, p.27
- ¹⁵ Arendt, *Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1998, 8f
- ¹⁶ M. A.. Kicey, Dissertation: *Risk and Responsibility*, "A Strange New Form of Life: Thinking, Acting, and Endangerment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt", p. 344, 2010
- ¹⁷ M. Sheets-Johnstone, *Corporeal Turn*, 2009, p.30
- ¹⁸ F. Evans and L. Lawlor, *Chiasms*, State University of New York Press, 2000, p.4
- ¹⁹ A. Noë, *Out of our Heads*, Hill and Wang, 2009, p.65
- ²⁰ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, p.4-8
- ²¹ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Corporeal Turn*, 2009, p.20
- ²² "... a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!", L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p.58
- ²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.147 "As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not elsewhere, but one cannot say that it is here or now in the sense that objects are; and yet my vision does not soar over them, it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its ties." and 139-140
- ²⁴ F. Evans and L. Lawlor, State University of New York Press, 2000, *Chiasms*, p. 10
- ²⁵ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke University Press, 2011, p.129
- ²⁶ Via V. Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke Univ. Press, 2011, p.129 - M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Experience of Others*, 1982-83, p. 52
- ²⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, p.4
- ²⁸ A. Noë, *Knowledge in Motion*, transcript Verlag, 2007, "Making Worlds Available", p.126
- ²⁹ K. Monni, *Exploring the sense and meaning in dance*, 2008, <http://choreograph.net/articles/exploring-the-sense-and-meaning-in-dance>
- ³⁰ J. Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida*, Ohio University Press, 2004, p.16
- ³¹ "Space and time are phenomenal, that is, they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena; neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena.", p.315; Meeting the Universe Halfway
- ³² Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke University Press, 2011, p.126
- ³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.136
- ³⁴ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke University Press, 2011, p.127
- ³⁵ as defined by one of the founders of Quantum Mechanics: Niels Bohr
- ³⁶ K. Barad, *Meeting the Univers Halfway*, Duke University Press, 2007, p.315
- ³⁷ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke University Press, 2011, p.136
- ³⁸ Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies*, Duke University Press, 2011, p.136;
- ³⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p.155