



If One Looks Closely at an Edge: Four Dances Remember'd

Simon Bowes

Phenomena, Various

The engine powers two 12-Volt batteries, which power everything else. I am sparing with electric light. Fortnightly, I cycle across the valley and up the hill to buy candles, five boxes of five. On this particular morning I add white vinegar spray, disposable razors. By 9.00 I am back on the cut, shaving, do not notice how dirty is the mirror. About 13.00, I spray it down, laugh to see the difference. At 15.00, stepping outside, I see concentric circles rippling outwardly as a coot resurfaces with a square of plastic in its bill. A neighbour asks: 'that diesel coming from me?' I gaze into a film of shifting colour on the water's surface. Another neighbour says: 'that's me, sorry'. 'It happens', I reply. At 17.10 I notice a rainbow, and then several people along the towpath, each pointing their phones at it. I then remember the last time I took a picture of a rainbow, the sending of it and the lack of reply. I then remember a light, diffused against the rear wall of the stage, two figures manually positioning lanterns on the

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floor with a meticulous care. And briefly, by volition, I am returned to the theatre.

PROBLEMS, ONE AND SEVERAL

Memory, Little Enough

I have begun by placing two visual phenomena—reflection and diffraction—in the immediate context of my everyday life. Here, seeing is bound up with cares and labour, which inflect my relationship with performance, scholarship and research. The memory of performance belongs to a certain place, a certain time: the time of writing, between the original proposal and the final submission, spans the years 2019–2022, years in which a global pandemic has necessitated the closure of theatres along with other public venues. In this chapter, I write of performance from memory, in the certitude that the little I remember shall prove enough.

Four Dances, Four Poems, Four Diffractions

Karen Barad (2007) has explained diffraction—as phenomena, as method—perfectly well. As method, it needs no further justification. The task is to practise it, to perform it, to embody it, but also to consider the limits that might yet emerge in any realist account.

The chapter stages the memory of four dance performances, attended in London in the years prior to the onset of the pandemic: *Crowd* (Giselle Vienne, Sadler’s Well’s), *Andante* (Igor x Moreno) *He’s Dead* (Marikiscrycrycry, The Yard Theatre, 2020) and *Can You Feel It?* (Channing Tatum, Rich Mix, 2019). Each performance stretches the definition of dance as an artform, towards theatre, or live art. Each is performed in lighting states which could be described as diffractive. The performances are remembered from within the environs in which I now live. These memories take on the form of four poems entitled: *Crowd*, *Andante*, *He’s Dead*, *Can you Feel It?* The poems are not reflections upon the performances but rather diffractions, that is, patterns of interference generated as the performances follow this or that path towards becoming something other (or, nothing other) than performance.

An Ontology

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. (Phelan, 1993, p. 146)

Peggy Phelan's conception of 'ephemeral ontology' was subsequently contested by Philip Auslander (1999), for whom 'the possibility of electronic documentation of performances alone gives meaning to the term "live performance"' (Auslander in Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 67). My concern is not to restate the argument concerning the primacy of the live over the mediated, but to reframe the question of performance's ontology within a wider discussion of virtuality.

In contemporary culture, the digital and the virtual have become synonymous. If performance has an ontology, it may yet prove distinct from an ontology of digital media. In Phelan's peculiar materialism, there is no conception of the virtual. As Brian Massumi observes: bodies are as immediately virtual as they are actual (Massumi, 2002, p. 30) as is sensation, perception and experience. What we call events (or, here, performances) are largely virtual affairs. Materialisation is just one aspect of the event of performance.

A Disappearance

Is it a problem that I now remember so little of these dances? Memories of them seem to be eroding, becoming diffuse. In terms close to Phelan's, Erika Fischer-Lichte describes performance as 'bodily co-presence' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 32), a specific, collective mode of embodiment. The cessation of live performance defines the concerns of this chapter: recently, performers have had no option but to save, record, document and circulate representations of representations. Where Phelan proposed that the task of the researcher is to 'write toward disappearance' (Phelan, 1993, p. 146), I write instead towards virtuality, as the condition of art's becoming.

An Apparatus

In responding to the loss of bodily co-presence, I desire to construct a particular kind of apparatus. The diffraction grating described by Barad (2007) is designed to map patterns made by waves in superposition. In the diffraction grating, waves do not simply appear and disappear, multiple states coexist simultaneously. The apparatus I am constructing is not unlike a diffraction grating, although it draws us closer to the concerns of my discipline, performance studies. In place of a material venue, I construct a memory theatre. In the history of architecture memory theatres have sometimes been imagined, sometimes sketched, sometimes modeled, but rarely ever built.

A central example is Giulio Camillo's *Theatre of Memory*, described and modelled between 1519 and 1544, intended to 'locate and administer all human concepts, everything which exists in the whole world' (1519–1544). Camillo never found a patron to fund the construction of his large half-circular wooden structure, with its panes of glass (*mens fenestrata*), opening onto the human mind.

Memory theatre figures, primarily, in the imagination. Such theatres are works of hermeticism, heresy, mysticism, cosmology, occultism and fabulism, with models projected by Giordano Bruno, Robert Fludd and theorised by Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* (1966). The memory theatre figures as a central device in a piece of memoir (or auto-fiction) by philosopher Simon Critchley. Memory theatre would seem to consist of circulations of representations *of* representations. But these structures also frame the experience of memory in terms of intensive forces, transformations, transfigurations and becomings.

In performance, a body may become a subject, but also something more, something other—a crowd, or a cloud, a ray of light, pure movement. Such becomings are for the performer and audience commonplace, and extraordinary. Theatre is first of all a materialist practice—yet it constantly exceeds the confines of any materialist analysis. There is no realist theatre. Theatre provides a frame in which to unite the material and the immaterial, the actual and the virtual and the corporeal and the incorporeal.

Towards and against notions of ephemeral ontology and bodily co-presence, our conception of performance and performativity must admit the virtual. The movement of memory is not a successive but rather a simultaneous movement, a continual oscillation between material and

immaterial planes. What Phelan described as the ephemera may yet be redescribed as the manifestation of an implicate order, the coalescence of form and void: something other, something more, than material experience.

The Problems of Language and of Reflection

The problem is that ‘Language has been granted too much power’ and the extent of this power ensures ‘every “thing”—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation’ (Barad, 2002, p. 801).

The problem of language is a problem of representation, or representationalism. Barad (2007) describes the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent, or, more particularly, between ‘that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing’ (Barad, 2007, p. 48). Reflection has become ‘a pervasive trope for knowing’ (Barad, 2007, p. 72), producing a geometry of sameness (*ibid.*).

Against reflection, Barad describes diffraction as phenomena and as method. She writes: ‘Mirrors reflect. To mirror something is to provide an accurate image or representation that faithfully copies that which is being mirrored’ (Barad, *ibid.*, p. 86). As they continue: ‘mirrors are an often-used metaphor for representationalism and related questions of reflexivity’ (*ibid.*). In response, Barad models a posthuman performativity, at once material and discursive, giving ‘matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming’ (p. 803). Describing diffraction as method, Barad considers the implications for epistemic practices.

An Interference

A diffraction grating is an ‘an apparatus or material configuration that gives rise to a superposition of waves’ (Barad, 2007, p. 81). Barad observes that waves ‘are not things per se; rather, they are disturbances’ (*ibid.*, 76). Waves can ‘overlap at the same point in space’ (*ibid.*). The resulting effect, ‘superposition’ is a combination of disturbances. The ‘alternating pattern of wave intensity is characteristic of interference or diffraction patterns’ (*ibid.*, 78). Barad uses the terms ‘diffraction’ and ‘interference’ interchangeably’ (*ibid.*, 29). A diffractive method is not reflective, but generative, producing patterns, material—and discursive—relations, entanglements of matter and meaning.

The Problem of Art

Is it a problem that in describing the phenomenon of diffraction, Barad makes no substantive references to art? Her references to visual art are limited to brief mentions of Cubism, and Surrealism (Barad, 2007, p. 94; 360). Their engagement with performance is limited to dramatic literature, Frayn's *Copenhagen* (which features as a text rather than as a live production, giving no sense of its performative dimensions) (ibid., pp. 14–22). And given that diffraction emerges from a concept of a posthumanist performative, is it also a problem that they refer hardly at all to performance, as an art-form, a practice, a discipline? Beyond this, Barad does offer more extensive treatments of the poetry of Alice Fulton (1990) and Susan Stryker (1994). It is striking to note, however, that Barad seems to care little for art, except language arts. The concern for performance—in all its materiality—is mediated through language.

A Complication

In 2002, Barad described performance studies as a 'nascent interdisciplinary area' (Barad, 2002, p. 807). and yet, we might argue that by the turn of the century, the field of performance studies was not only well established but all but over, in terms of its capacity for critical resistance or its affirmative potentials. To begin to consider performance as diffractive, we might note that performance scholar Richard Schechner defined performance not as a 'passive mirror', but as 'part of the complicated feedback process that brings about change' (Schechner, 1988, p. 132). By 2001, as Barad's research took on a performative turn, Jon McKenzie described performance as 'the embodied enactment of cultural forces' (McKenzie, 2001, p. 8). Part of the effect of reading these two theorists together is to consider the inseparability of the cultural from the material, and the material from the discursive.

For McKenzie, performance encompasses the cultural, the organisational and the technological. In our present moment, we can consider that performance has long passed from discipline to paradigm. We live and are governed by means of performance. Indeed, McKenzie seems to have predicted our present moment with stark accuracy: 'all performance is electronic' (McKenzie, 2001, p. 267).

A Potential

Performative approaches call into question the basic premises of representationalism and focus inquiry on the practices or performances of representing, as well as on the productive effects of those practices and the conditions for their efficacy. (Barad, 2007, p. 28)

McKenzie distinguishes, *pace* Schechner, between cultural performance as entertainment and as efficacy (McKenzie, 2001, p. 30), suggesting that performance becomes efficacious when it *does something*. The earliest conceptions of performance and performativity suggest a movement ‘from representation to presentation, from discourse to body, from absence to presence’ (ibid., p. 38). In its evolution from discipline to paradigm ‘the efficacy of embodied transgression has been reworked as the efficacy of discursive resistance, and, in passing, performative presence gives way to performative iterability’ (ibid., p. 44).

Barad questions ‘whether all performances are performative’ (Barad, 2002, pp. 808–9). In terms suggested by Hannah Arendt, we might conceive of the event of performance as a space of appearance, of co-presence; *the-more-and-other-than-human* making and remaking their appearance explicitly—but ‘only potentially, not necessarily, and not forever’ (Arendt, 1998, p. 198). The event of performance would thus be regarded as *only potentially* material, *only potentially* discursive, *only potentially* representational, *only potentially* performative and *only potentially* efficacious.

An Idea(l)

Barad writes: ‘The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a continuing seductive habit of mind worth questioning’ (Barad, 2007, p. 133). It may prove equally worthwhile to question the seductiveness of neologisms and compound words. It is precisely from within grammatical categories that Elizabeth Grosz begins to suggest the limits of materialism (Grosz, 2017, pp. 30–32; 43). In suggesting these limits, Grosz says much more than Barad about art.

‘No ... I’m not a materialist. Let me say that loud and proud’, Grosz declared in a Q&A following her lecture *Bacon, Deleuze, and Imperceptible Forces* (2012, 57’18”). She argues: ‘materialism has to always already contain ideality, for ideality to ever be possible. How can anyone think,

how can anyone talk, without there being a dimension added to an object that enables it to be represented? I think these are the forces of the universe' (57'47").

By 2017, Grosz had refined this proposition: 'Every materialism, whether this is acknowledged openly or not, requires an incorporeal frame' (Grosz, 2017, p. 28). Acknowledging that we cannot yet define the immaterial, we might speculate that ideality is the subsistent precondition that makes thought, memory, art—and theatre—possible.

A Definition

It is a problem that Grosz has such trouble defining her position, in a monograph describing the limits of materialism? She admits that for this proposition, she has no 'proper name' (Grosz, 2017, pp. 4–5). She recognises that she must 'however inadequately' attempt to describe 'the subsistence of the ideal *in* the material or the corporeal' (Grosz, 2017, pp. 4–5). The implication is that the real and the ideal are distinct but inseparable. To treat them as such does not suggest an 'antimaterialism', nor is it reductively metaphysical. Rather, Grosz seeks to affirm a 'thoroughgoing and non-reductive materialism', one which 'cannot and should not be opposed to ideality but requires and produces it' (*ibid.*, p. 4).

Barad can account for the behaviour of particles and the movement of waves, but they cannot account for art, for theatre. They will call the movement of matter a 'lively dance' (Barad, 2007, p. 37). Barad suggests dance as an embodied, materialist practice. Yet its deployment as metaphor suggests dance as something more than physical movement. In Grosz's terms, dance an 'intimate entwinement of the orders of materiality and ideality' (Grosz, 2017, p. 5), the body moving in thought and memory, space and time.

The Problem, Restated

The problem is to remember four dances. In this chapter, poetry becomes a way of writing, remembering, performing. For poet Alice Oswald, poetry is an art of erosion, 'unpredictably composed by time itself' (Oswald, 2019, 03'56"). The problem of memory is bound up with another problem, significant in the context of the present volume: 'Today just about everyone is a materialist' (Grosz, 2017, p. 16). Following

Grosz, we might yet ‘render impossible the binary division of materialism from idealism’ (Grosz, 2017, p. 18). Only by admitting the incorporeal, the immaterial, the idea(l) can we begin to meet the universe halfway.

IF ONE LOOKS CLOSELY AT AN EDGE

‘If one looks closely at an “edge,”’ Barad observes, ‘what one sees is not a sharp boundary between light and dark but rather a series of light and dark bands—that is, a diffraction pattern’ (Barad, 2007, p. 156). Citing Feynman (1995) they observe: “There is no such line ‘except in our own psychology’” (ibid.). A diffraction grating is designed to observe the paths of atoms fired through a slit. Through certain modifications—which—path detectors, quantum erasers, physicists attempt to trace and erase the paths of atoms. In these experiments ‘the original interference pattern is not recovered; rather a new interference pattern, one that takes a very different form’ (p. 316).

One implication is that we can no longer proceed on the assumption that material objects ‘occupy a single position in a preexisting space at a preexisting moment of time’ (ibid.). At the diffraction grating, time is understood as ‘an integral aspect of phenomena’ (ibid.) and phenomena are understood as ‘material entanglements that “extend” across different spaces and times’ (p. 317). Another implication is that the ‘memory of the event has not been erased, at least not in the usual senses of the terms “memory” and “erase”’ (ibid.). ‘Memory’, Barad argues, ‘does not reside in the folds of individual brains, rather, memory is the enfoldings of space–time–matter written into the universe’ (p. ix). Thus Barad understands memory as integral to matter.

Certain other observations require intuition. As Bergson argues: ‘realism and idealism both go too far’ since ‘it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it’; mistaken, too, to ‘make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but in itself of another nature than they’ (Bergson, 1988, p. 9). For Bergson, matter is an aggregate of images, an image being at once ‘more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing’ (ibid.); an existence placed “*halfway*” between the “thing” and its “representation” (ibid., *emphasis mine*). This is, Bergson contends, ‘simply common sense’ (pp. 8–9).

For Bergson, a perceived object ‘abandons something’ of its real action, in order to ‘manifest a virtual action’ (p. 37). An object given

to perception exists in itself but also exists pictorially: ‘image it is, but a self-existing image’ (p. 10). A ray of light reaching an object ‘will appear to be reflected and thus to indicate the outlines of the object’ (ibid.).

It is as a Bergsonian that Grosz asks how anything could be perceived without having a dimension which ‘enables it to be represented?’ (Grosz, 2012: 57/47”). The appearance of the outline is evidence of a kind, but not, as Barad asserts, *pace* Feynman, of psychologism, or ideality in the Cartesian sense. It is, rather, evidence of virtuality as condition of the actual, immateriality as condition of the material, ideality as condition of the real.

Bergson understands the emergence of the outline as a kind of interference, and inferences are plentiful in the field of vision. Barad uses the terms diffraction and interference interchangeably (Barad, 2007, pp. 80–81). Diffraction is Barad’s preferred example because it can be contrasted with some definition against reflection. But the cause of diffraction—a wave cut off by some obstacle—‘is present in the propagation of every wave’, and ‘diffraction plays a role in nearly all optical phenomena’ (Barad, 2007, p. 81). Diffraction is even present in certain phenomena understood as reflective and refractive. Perception ‘resembles those phenomena of reflexion which result from an impeded refraction’; it is, he continues, ‘like an effect of mirage’ (Bergson, 1988, p. 37); one further example of interference in visual phenomena.

If one looks closely at an edge, the line separating ideality from reality, and so matter from memory, disappears. Barad’s observations restate a position that other philosophers have already intuited: matter and memory are distinct, but indivisible. Observation becomes performative, a way of cutting together, apart.

The knives are carbon steel, edges whetted and between the scores of sharp edges that shape my life, cutting is common. I wrap a square of paper around the forefinger, bind the wound with electrical tape, becoming stoic, shaped by paradox.

MEMORY THEATRE

A Coincidence

In 2001, McKenzie predicted that ‘future researchers will take as given something that we can only dimly perceive today—and then may be too horrified to admit: namely, that all performance is electronic’ (McKenzie,

2001, p. 267). As the emergence of performance and the digitalisation of discourses and practices coincide, he observes: ‘this coincidence is anything but coincidental’ (ibid.).

In this most certain of futures, I labour and wait.

Theatre has been rendered impracticable. Performance now consists of ‘digital virtualities’ conditioning every aspect of our lives, and, what’s more: ‘incorporeal values and references’ (ibid.) seem entirely constitutive of lived reality.

A Dispositif

Augusto Corrieri describes the theatre as a *dispositif*, or, *apparatus*, a ‘mechanism that captures and directs perceptions and signification, even without a material architectural construction in place’ (Corrieri, 2016, p. 7). Corrieri asks: what happens inside theatres when nothing is happening? Describing the demolition of Dalston Theatre, London, in 2007 as part of the ‘regeneration’ (or social cleansing) of Hackney, Corrieri invokes vestigial forces ‘echoes, residues and figments’ (p. 56). What is at stake, Corrieri argues, is the ‘material consistency of an erased theatre’ (ibid.).

Citing Jane Bennett, Corrieri describes theatre as having ‘an inertial tendency to persist’ (Bennett, 2010, p. 22, cited Corrieri, ibid.), invoking Spinoza’s notion of *Conatus*: ‘Each thing [*res*], as far as it can by its own power strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its own being’ (p. 2).

In Corrieri’s materialist account, the will—or, *desire*—in all things must come from somewhere. ‘Performance needs the theatre’, he writes, ‘one way or another’ (2016, p. 7). Perhaps, but theatre needs ideality as much as it needs realism. The necessity is quite plain: even without a material construction, there will be perception and signification, and also memory, as a defining *disposition* in the *dispositif* of the theatre.

Memory Theatre

Against the surface of the school desk, shavings of wood cast irregular shadows. The structure before me is half-circular, marked with intricate symbols which, having carved, I cannot decipher. This model, which measured out in inches, opens to a fathomless depth. I switch off the electric light, and, in darkness, nurse the cut.

Simon Critchley speculates that the Globe Theatre ‘with its heavens over part of the stage, complete with zodiacal symbols’ may have been an ‘elaborate and geometrically exacting theatre of memory, a kind of machine for recalling the whole, a mortal portal for touching the divine, a microcosm for the cosmic macrocosm’ (Critchley, 2014: n.p). ‘If all the world’s a stage’, he continues, ‘then the theatre is the stage of the world itself: its mirror and key’ (ibid.). Critchley describes a theatre of reflection, theatre as a stage of the world. But theatre is a stage of the universe.

In the memory of theatre, a future is at stake. McKenzie writes: ‘theater once actualized the virtual spheres of literary societies, whilst ‘ritual actualized those of oral societies’ (McKenzie, 2001, p. 267). All performance is electronic. Except dance.

Four dances: *Crowd*, *Andante*, *He’s Dead* and *Can You Feel It*. From within these performances, from the little enough remembered, a different future can be predicted, willed and desired.

Reading McKenzie alongside Barad, we can acknowledge McKenzie’s predictions as humanist. A posthumanist performativity no longer takes as given ‘the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman”’ (Barad, 2002, p. 808). Reading Barad alongside Grosz, we can no longer take as given the differential categories of material and immaterial.

Future researchers will take as given something that we can only dimly perceive today, namely that all performance is immaterial. It was possible to discern, just before the closure of the theatres, that dance actualises the virtual spheres of the posthuman. If dance—and not ‘the digital’—is the defining art of the posthuman, it is not because dance is an embodied practice. Movement comes from what we are not, from the consciousness, the memory, of what we are not. This consciousness is not vestigial, or inertial, but rather, ‘liminal’. The emergence of a posthuman performative requires its own ‘liminal rite of passage’ (McKenzie, 2001, p. 22) which cannot be simulated digitally. The theatre, like ritual, has so often theorised as ‘liminal’ or ‘liminoidal’ (Carlson, 1996, pp. 198–9). Theatre stages an event where this other, anterior consciousness can reassert itself. In the theatre, as in philosophy, there will be no closure of representation; materiality is always something more. Reflection can be understood as a stage to be passed through. And future researchers may understand diffraction as a stage. But this, perhaps, we can already intuit.

FOUR DANCES REMEMBER'D

4.1: Crowd

from across the water a
the echo of a

resounding

body
traversing
stage in line
remember'd

scream

a very, very close and difficult thing, but
here, at the edge, I am nervously
optimistic, except I am waiting for the
click of the shutter, time lapsing,
collapsing free will into determinism, but
momentarily we are

loosed, cut

diagonal

all images appear through
outline

brightness
infinitesimally
distinct from

as all drafts appear to
deadline

darkness

body becoming light, light
becoming image, image

in one month's
reprieve

moving

I change my
recourse,

slow
sloww
slowww [17]

read the stars, already
rearranging

chiaroscuro

figure
becoming fact,
scene all revelation

ticket price forgotten,
stub lost

hey
Reviewer!

ReviewerTwo

It ain't metaphysics,

it's art

a very, very close and difficult thing, to
sustain interest when rendering-visible
lapses into rendering-the-visible

figure, joined
apparition of crowd:

rave scene
slowed down
scaled down

a field of
sense

obscured
by meaning

right when you most

expected

something entirely
predictable:

the movement
surges to match the
tempo of the music and I

fall
soundly
asleep

—after Giselle Vienne,
Sadler's Wells 2017

4.2: Andante

on the
stern deck
through the fog

of a winters morning
I make out the smoke of wet
coal from the most admir'd vessel
on the cut
and as the
neighbour remarks
how beautiful is the
morning a figure walks
into view, in flowing gauze
surgical blue against olive skin
upstage a large, white, concave
structure, inward arc, white flooring
edged with another whiteness,
promising
heightened visibility
paper twists
of silver fulminate
becoming lightening,
as three other figures
enter, turn, twirl, hum,
sing, each movement and
sound so stark and clear and
simple that there are no answers,
nor even are there questions, only facts,
so that attention becomes, briefly,
possible

When the
lights fade up,
stage obscured
entire: thick white smoke,
one indivisible field of textured
brightness, smoke becoming / cloud /

as fulminate becomes lightening; not
the
same / cloud / found in skies, but / cloud
/
unmistakably

the audience walk out, in ones, twos,
scores,
I am silent, speechless, breathless, for
those remaining / cloud / still stubbornly
performs the memory of the dance still
held together independent of mind

—after Igor x Moreno
Andante, The Place, 2017

anything confirmed, I am comfortable
having things suggested, pleased
enough to infer, and to be wrong, again

there are – ghosts and
then there are – ghosts
figure caught – play-drowning
in the shallow – draught
of an – inflatable paddling pool
and a voice – eerie operatic
bodies forth a – refrain 'I am suicidal'

the head held – above water
against – turbulent light
just smoke and – a colour wash
against my – forgetting
dead and – not-yet

3.3: He's Dead

two flags – atop two
masts, one – banded
black brown – the other
faded – old-fashioned
just – rainbow-coloured,
stage so – hermetic
might as well be a – fourth wall

dancing – indivisible
Ghost, I cite you – directly:
we are living – the disaster
of optimism – hope employed
to do a dastardly – thing
ghost I – recall
another poem – another haunting

—after Marikiscrycrycry
the Yard, 2020

as if the presence of the observer was
entirely incidental, a restitution or
recovery of a kind, I glimpse, briefly,
another sociality, another culture,
another way, and I have no wish to be
confirmed, or deferred to, or have

5.4: Can you feel it

The streetlight illuminates
the cat's eyes, she is looking
squarely at me as she pisses
on the towel you dropped

by the radiator

I wake you up and we listen

after the show you say you
preferred the other show

how it begins:

one looks like a child,
holding the pantsfront
convulsing, while
the other strews garments,
shoes,

each is enraged:

what happened?

a bottle of water
lodged in the rigging
my companion is
momentarily rapt
as we all are,

it does not fall

a Nina Simone song,
the Nine Simone song
you leave the country,
i move across the city

in the next house

the cat escapes the box
circles the rug chasing
an invisible mouse

gets a clot
rear left leg,
then right

dies, it happens

I cannot remember the ticket price but
the veterinary fees were a hundred and
fifteen pounds – well spent

in the meantime
I think no

more about it

until I must start – imagining
a place from which to – remember

performance – a place –
to disentangle sense –
from meaning

(you know I never lived
on the water)

You replied – sometime later
I feel – renewed

Yeah I can – feel it too

and we, like each of the figures

somehow compose ourselves
in a thin film of shifting colour
recalling how it ended[18]
the care with which they
positioned the lanterns
on the stage floor,
so that the rear wall
dissolves into depthless
light until I am return'd

—after Channing Tatum

Rich Mix, 2019

BEING CUT, BECOMING-STOIC

Memory cuts, moment to moment, event to event. Dance—and poetry—exemplify this. Barad’s own compositional method requires a cut, an ‘agential cut’ which ‘enacts a resolution’ within entangled phenomena, between uncertainties both ontological and semantic (Barad, 2007, p. 148). Barad seeks to affirm; it is entangled phenomena, and not bounded objects, which are the primary ontological unit (ibid., p. 139). The cut produces the phenomena. All cuts require apparatuses, or ‘boundary-making practices’ (ibid., p. 168).

Certain cuts produce certain events. For Grosz, events ‘induce problems for they are erratic, unique, unrepeatable’, whilst ‘problems, pressing ones, generate not so much solutions as concepts that may be in the vicinity of the problem, oriented to the problem, that develop ways of living with the problem’ (Grosz, 2017, p. 146).

Where Barad invokes *meaning*, whilst Grosz invokes *sense*. Barad will construct new phrases, whilst Grosz parses old ones. Barad argues the implication of intra-action involves a ‘reworking of traditional notions of causality’ and agency (Barad, 2007, p. 177).

Grosz proposes a deeper, ontological separation emerging from a most traditional view of causality, derived from the Stoics, perhaps the ‘first thoroughgoing materialists’ (Grosz, 2017, p. 23). The Stoics distinguish

between causes (bodies) and effects (incorporeal) (ibid., p. 25). Grosz observes: ‘If all causes are bodies and only bodies—even if they are qualities or states of bodies—then effects, by contrast, cannot be regarded as material’ (p. 30). Effects are incorporeal: ‘real but not material, subsistent rather than existent’ (ibid.).

The stoics name four incorporeals: *void*, *space*, *time* and *lekton*. (Grosz, 2017, p. 37). Grosz suggests: ‘space, time, and the void are the immaterial conditions for any material something’ (p. 31). In the Stoic view, void is real, though subsistent, and not existent: the void ‘subsists as a possible condition for place’ which is independent of body, of mind, and of ‘reason’s capacity to conceptualize it’ (p. 34). Place, by contrast, is the ‘region of the void that becomes inhabited or occupied by bodies’. Void surrounds place, a ‘pure extension to infinity’, (ibid.) Its only limit is ‘the edge it shares with place’ (pp. 34–5). Time and space are understood as the ‘incorporeal conditions of the causal force of movement’ (p. 37). The fourth incorporeal, *lekta*, refers to the ‘capacity of bodies or material somethings to become more and other than what they are’ (p. 31), the particulars of sense adhering to bodies, which ‘minds are capable of comprehending and words are capable of articulating, a mediation between different kinds of body’ (p. 38). This mediation is not dependent on language, but includes language. For the Stoics, *lekta* are ‘sayables’ (30–1), which ‘articulate states of affairs’ (ibid.)—not so far, perhaps, from ‘performatives’ in Austin’s sense (Austin, 1962, p. 6).

Grosz observes: ‘a cause, cutting, has an effect, being cut, but it is not a body that is being cut, it is a body that, by the cutting, is transformed from unwounded to wounded’ (p. 30). ‘Where is “being cut” to be located?’ (p. 43) she asks, and answers: in sense, which ‘resides on the surface of events and in the depths of bodies’ and which ‘must link the inside of bodies—their nature, qualities, their inclinations—to the outside of events, to the incorporeal sense that somehow hovers over the flesh and scalpel’ (ibid.).

Meaning emerges from an intra-action. Sense is always already there, part of the substance. Locating ‘being cut’ in sense, Grosz at once distinguishes between material and immaterial and coheres them. Grosz’s insistence on sense is informed by a deep, longstanding engagement with Deleuze and Bergson, two philosophers who have consistently acknowledged the virtual as the condition of the actual. ‘Every materialism, whether this is acknowledged openly or not, requires an incorporeal

frame' (p. 28). Stoic materialism refers to this as the void, which is the precondition of place, indeed of space and time.

In *On Touching*, they describe virtuality as 'a kind of *thought experiment* the world performs' (Barad, 2012, p. 210). Virtual particles 'teeter on the edge of the infinitely fine blade between being and nonbeing' (ibid.). In *Transmaterialities*, they observe: 'most of what matter is, is virtual' (Barad, 2015, p. 395). The virtual is 'a constitutive part of all finitude', (and infinitude) which 'calls us to a new sensibility' (Barad, 2012, p. 215).

This call does not come from the body, nor even from language, but from the void: 'flush with yearning, bursting innumerable imaginings of what might yet (have) be(en)' (Barad, 2015, p. 396). Barad is a latecomer to the void, to virtuality, to many of the concepts defining philosophies of immanence. In search of proof, they neglect intuitions. Yet they arrive at the edge between realism and idealism. On hearing the call, we might acknowledge that realism takes us only halfway towards an understanding of what moves us, and where movement comes from.

Acknowledging that all of our apparatuses are boundary-making, we return to the edge of the virtual. As Massumi considers: 'The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded and sadness is happy' (Massumi, 2002, p. 30). And what calls us is not new, not even in neologisms or compound words. There is only an anterior feeling of being cut, between cause and effect, that suturing phrase, *always already*, returning us to an origin, elsewhere, otherwise.

FORM AND VOID

Barad describes their monograph as a diffraction grating, an apparatus designed to illuminate important material differences, relationalities, and entanglements in the lively dance of mattering' (Barad, 2007, p. 37). In this chapter, I have figured four dances from memory, attempting to render perceptible their incorporeal dimension, opening to a form of sense which 'floats on the surface without penetrating the identity and continuity of the body, a thin film at the limit of things and words' (Grosz, 2017, p. 39).

With reference to Bergson, Oswald describes an order which inheres in matter: 'we have only to stop speaking, we have only to stop composing

and performing and singing and thinking to hear it' (04'06"). Oswald has described poetry as an art of erosion.

Like Barad, Oswald is sceptical of the power of language: 'the invention of writing has given a little too much power to the lastingness of poetry' (Oswald, 2019, 01'38"). Perhaps writing towards disappearance give too much power to the ephemerality of performance. Certain performances, like certain poems, meet the 'edge where the mind gives up and matter begins to describe itself' (ibid. 03'40"). Splicing sections of Fulton's poem *Cascade Experiment*, Barad writes: 'even the cut that separates can further the entanglement!' (Barad, 2007, p. 466). Barad's later research evidences a deepening commitment to poetry, as they cite passages from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (Barad, 2014, pp. 5–6) and Susan Stryker's *My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix* (Barad, 2015, pp. 414–8). Barad's own diffractive readings of poetry constitute an attempt, perhaps, to consider how matter might describe itself.

For Bergson, matter describes itself through outlines, shadows, reflections of light and every conceivable form of interference. Diffraction is just one—complex—mode of interference. The diffraction grating is an artlike structure: a frame for chaos, like all of the frames, boundaries, which define the arts as planes of immanence. Art requires a cut. Grosz affirms it: the first gesture of art is the fabrication of the frame (Grosz, 2008, p. 10). The diffraction grating might be the first frame of posthumanism, one which always already exceeds its own materialism, offering 'empirical evidence for a hauntology' (Barad, 2014, p. 180). The theatre is *always already* full of ghosts (Carlson, 2003, pp. 6–7).

The memory theatre described by Critchley is first a theatre of reflection, of mimesis. Yet Critchley comes to acknowledge the limits of reflection: 'Memory is repetition. Sure. But it is repetition with a difference' (Critchley, 2014: n.p.). For Critchley, 'memory needs to be imagination. Transfiguration ... the theatre of memory cannot be reduced to [one's] own memory. It has to reach down into the deep immemorial strata that contain the latent collective energy of the past' (n.p.). Finally, Critchley returns to poetry, because poetry 'lets us see things as they are', revealing 'particulars being various ... lets us see things as they are anew. Under a new aspect. Transfigured. Subject to a felt variation' (n.p.). Entwining memory and imagination, spanning material and immaterial planes, memory theatre is, necessarily, diffractive.

At a time when just about everybody is a materialist and all performance is electronic it seems imperative to reassert the theatre as incorporeal, immaterial, idea(1), subsisting ‘even without a material architectural construction in place’ (Corrieri, 2016, p. 7). Beyond the digital, there is the other, anterior, virtuality. In this moment of seeming separation, I labour and wait. The only counsel I offer is patience, for that is the future of research.

I had stopped thinking about performance until some diesel spills onto the cut, I am returned to the theatre. In staging this return, I am forced to consider a paradox, named by Grosz, after Foucault, as the paradox of an ‘incorporeal materialism’ (Grosz, 2017, p. 150). This paradox has required me to modify Barad’s apparatus in order to redescribe the diffraction grating as memory theatre.

The memory theatre—like all of the frames defining the arts—is a boundary-making apparatus, a *dispositif*. We may come to prefer diffraction to reflection as an ordering principle for theatre as a field of illumination and difference. The preference returns us to repetition. As Deleuze asserts, ‘Difference must be shown differing’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 56). Sure. But what the theatre requires and produces may be called diffractive only to the extent that diffraction is, precisely, the interference of the real and the ideal.

Presently, the theatre remains a place that emerges at the edge of the void, *always already* on the cusp of return.

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