

## *The Eventful Articulation of Singularities - or, "Chasing Angels"*

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To make new work, one should "personalize[...] a composed singularity of vital movements in [such] a way that it could collectively spread" (Massumi 2001) [\(1\)](#)

I want to attempt to pose a number of questions today which seem to me to keep coming back in the historically-peculiar context of expert art practices' and practitioners' entry into the higher and research degree context of the UK university. These questions will also inevitably entail a critical review of issues relating to the professional practices of writing and publication in that university context, where it continues to be the case that publishable writing in certain "thetic" registers and projects provides the measure against which other modes of research practice are tested. In order to look forward, since this critical backward-looking can be tiresome, I want in addition to focus on questions relating to new work, under the heading of "eventful articulations", or "chasing angels".

The question as to whether or not one might make new work in the higher degree research context whose quality is recognized by the extra-university arts communities seems to me to be unresolved in general terms, some of which relate to the institutional setup of the higher degree and research contexts, but also to be unresolvable, more importantly, in terms of available performance studies discourses. There are a number of historically-recent bases for this situation of discursive lack or oversight or reticence, but others which can be traced through older traditions of writing, and which as such increase the tenacity of the dilemma which results from them. We don't have time today to look at the full range so I want to identify some clusters of "difficulty" which it seems to me that some of us here need - for ethical reasons at the very least - to address as soon as possible.

The first is marked "professional, expert, disciplinary mastery"; the second concerns the "the regulatory and ontologizing power of lexicalisation and the clause"; the third concerns the quotidian, the banal, pedestrian pleasures and the aesthetics of 'making do'; the fourth concerns "textual, interdisciplinary and practice turns"; the fifth Spectator Studies masquerading as Performance Studies in the university; the sixth makes the distinction between conservative practices and their 'radical' or 'subversive' thematizations; the seventh looks at what Brian Massumi, focused on art practices, has called "qualitative transformations"; the eighth is concerned with his notion of ontogenetics; the ninth is concerned with "singularity, affective intensity, situation and event"; the tenth looks at mixed-mode metapractices or epistemic practices in the knowledge-economy; the eleventh takes the term "the body", and strikes it out; the twelfth takes the term "theory and practice" and strikes it out.

I have used terms like expert, arts-disciplinary and professional for knowledge-political and historically-specific reasons. My first observation here is that in a number of major writers of Cultural and Performance Studies in the later 20thC, "disciplinarity" tends to appear only to be rejected; and neither "professional" nor "expert" tend to figure in the index to their work. This should serve as a warning light with regard to the possibility of constitutive mismatch between expert writing and the mixed-mode work of arts-expert practitioners. Meanwhile, some of you will be familiar with aspects of the post-WWII drive toward broader approaches to a "demystified", widely-accessed and popular "creativity", together with moves in the direction of a wider and more generalised access to art-practices. I argue that these moves in the university context have brought with them the corollary of a dwindling focus on questions of singularity, arts-disciplinary mastery, and the institutional aspects of art practices. In turn, a number of persuasive publications contributed over the same later 20thC period to the development of a taste for the everyday in place of institutionally-ratified and rarified disciplines: amongst them Michel de Certeau's late 1970s "aesthetic of making-do" <sup>2</sup> and affirmation of performance in everyday life developed the Goffman tradition by focusing on the notion of a pedestrian or everyday poetics (albeit one regulated by linguistic and literary theoretical tropes). The growing popular interest in the quotidian and the banal tended, in the later 20thC, to combine with both modernist traditions of interrogation and contestation of dominant forms, and the drive to wider access to higher education, producing an ideologically-charged scenario, focused in the university at least on suspicion of the institutional in general, and on challenges to or "subversion" of knowledge-institutions (which

included theatre and dance traditions, designated spaces and mainstream practices).

The foregrounding of performance in everyday life has been persuasively articulated in Performance Studies in the UK since the early 1990s<sup>3</sup>. It was combined progressively with the development of performance as an acceptable academic discipline - which seemed to be dependent upon the availability of discipline-specific discourses; secondly with the textual and interdisciplinary turns of post-Saussurean cultural theoreticians; and thirdly with the growing student numbers registering on performance and performing arts courses. This combination of factors produced a quite particular set of constitutively ambiguous circumstances in a university which was at the same time a major player in the knowledge-conservative scriptural economy or economy of writing, *and* a major site of what were self-styled challenges to conservative ideologies.

Some of these factors and their constitutive ambiguities continue to be articulated apparently unquestioningly in texts as recently published as Nick Kaye's *Site-Specific Art*<sup>4</sup> and the Pearson and Shanks *Theatre/Archaeology*<sup>5</sup>. What is curious to me about these indicative texts, however, and indeed about the seminal texts published in the context of critical theory in the university in the later decades of the 20thC, comes from the fact that they argue for interrogation and subversion of institutions of various kinds, but do so from their writers' own positions as consummate, institutionally-authorized professionals and disciplinary experts, in academic writing, its publication and pedagogic practices. Each works within a specific disciplinary field and framework in the university, as highly knowledge-conservative institution, or in the wider university-associated community.

Meanwhile in 2001 Jon McKenzie, another institutionally-authorized professional academic writer<sup>6</sup> has exposed the extent to which the supposedly subversive - or the "liminal norm" - has occupied the university performance mainstream, to such an extent that, he argues, like liminal rites of passage in pre-industrial societies, this university-performance making has lost its self-assertedly challenging currency, and serves, instead, as a pedagogic tool which "almost always reinforce[s] existing social structures" (51). (I should add at this point, perhaps, that McKenzie's own sympathies with regard to disciplinary mastery are revealed by his subtitle to *Perform ... Or Else*, which reads *From Discipline to Performance*: here, once again, is the self-declared contestation of a disciplinarity whose importance the writer himself, sympathetic to everyday performances, fails to grasp.)

I have provided here one very brief snapshot of the already-problematic situation in performance research in the university to which arts-expert performance practitioners have relatively recently been invited to contribute. My first anxiety, in these sorts of terms, is focused on the question of the lack of empirical fit, between on the one hand the institutionally-dominant discourses and practices of Performance Studies in the late 20th and early 21stC, and on the other the arts-disciplinary or professional experience of performance-making, the expert-practitioner ethos, ethical engagement, sensing, intuitive play, drive and attitude, as well as the evaluative apparatuses specific to professional practices within this new group of candidates.

In short, I am concerned not so much with the individual practitioners involved, as with a lack of fit between *two complex economies of practice* - for this is exactly what we are concerned with here. In addition, I am concerned with the manifest inability of some of my colleagues in the wider university context to engage in critical auto-reflection with their own discourse-production and with what are the highly conservative philosophical matrixes which organize, authorize and regulate that production.

In a text published in the year 2000<sup>7</sup> my colleague Peter Osborne made a number of observations, and one or two suggestions, which struck me as useful in the sorts of situation I have been set out. The first suggestion - almost a throwaway - was to identify himself and his peers as "professional philosophers". This came at a time when I was wondering, with some irritation, why so many of my colleagues, in the university, persisted in eschewing the terms "professional" and "institutional", despite the patently obvious fact that many of us were and are both professional writer-researchers and educators, and employed, gainfully, by the university as a major institutional player in the economy of writing. By professional philosopher, Osborne simply signalled, in terms of what he calls "the professional field of philosophical production", that disciplinary training which would enable authorized access to "the historically developed and institutionally structured space of philosophical positions and possibilities" (86).

Clearly Osborne's account of the professional philosopher errs, in epistemological terms, on the side of *being* and *having*, rather than *doing*, despite his stated concern with professional production. In other words, his position still derives from backward-looking, accounting, and property ownership. He should, as far as I am concerned, given that he works in a writing-focused or scriptural<sup>8</sup> rather than an oral economy, have added that he actually also functions professionally as an expert published academic writer and educator, within the university. That it is

this precisely institutional setup that enables him to *practise philosophy*, in order to participate, thereby, in certain quite specific and audited processes of production. "The philosopher", in other words, is a professional practitioner, a writer-educator mastering certain expert registers, whose writing is submitted to quasi-independent audit through the mechanisms specific to what is in fact a largely unexamined publishing industry. The latter industry, conservative and corporate, driven by marketing, is tightly linked to the university, on whose behalf, effectively, it carries out processes of evaluation and dissemination, upon which the university very quietly depends.

If we were to develop the philosopher's wording of his professional identity, to allow him to focus on writing-productivity and its evaluation, rather than on being and having, we might need to add, the following to his initial account, in order to provide a better account of what s/he practises and in what terms: *"and is able to continue to provide evidence of mastery of certain institutionalized disciplinary registers of practice, linked to certain modes of production, to certain production processes, and to certain established modes of engagement, evaluative mechanisms and modes and types of outcome"*.

My next suggestion is that in the name of professional practitioners everywhere, we substitute "writer", and "writerly", for "philosopher" and "philosophical", to give the following account of the professional writing-practitioner, who has authorised access to:

the historically developed and institutionally structured space of **writerly** positions and possibilities [and is able to continue to provide evidence of mastery of certain institutionalized **disciplinary registers of writing**, linked to certain modes of production, to certain production processes, and to certain established modes of engagement, evaluative mechanisms and modes and types of outcome ]

Next, let's substitute "choreographer", and "choreographic" for "writer", and "writerly". The professional choreographer, then, has authorised access to:

the historically developed and institutionally structured space of **choreographic** positions and possibilities, [ *and is able to continue to provide evidence of mastery of certain institutionalized disciplinary registers of choreographic practices*, linked to certain modes of production, to certain production processes, and to certain established modes of engagement, evaluative mechanisms and modes and types of outcome ]

In the terms proper to this "lesson in writing"<sup>9</sup>, we might begin to get some sense that the professional philosopher and writer both *practise writing*, using certain complex disciplinary registers. Secondly, that I myself and many of my colleagues, as professional writers and educators, also *practise a writing* misunderstood as the reified "theory"; this writing practice, whatever some notorious figures might have said about it, is once again a matter of disciplinary mastery, institutionally-authorized. More generally, we might begin, from this point of view, to acknowledge that this "writing practice" is a "knowledge-conservative" activity. Our professional identities themselves depend upon the ways we continue to *manage and develop* the practices of that disciplinary mastery, whether we're called Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Darcey Bussell, Ariane Mnouchkine or Lloyd Newson. Hence disciplinary mastery is an expert *doing*, rather more than it is a having. Its audit continues, in institutionalized contexts.

In these sorts of terms, "disciplinary mastery" is not likely to be usefully qualified as "embodied" (a term used in today's programme): the qualification rephysicalises the performer to the detriment of her status as expert-practitioner. That expertise, besides, always requires her exercise of a judgement which is far from "embodied" (it is too complex for this to account for it), even though its outcomes, in a dancer, are focused in/as bodywork. Judgement always signals, let's not forget, those disciplinary choices not made, which ghost (hence thicken) the physical. Every bodywork option taken, in addition, always includes in it evidence of decisions made in an ethics of practice. Taken together, these sorts of disciplinary choices are diminished once qualified as "embodied". Disciplinary mastery, that is to say, is always relational: it is undertaken somewhere, by and for someone, with reference to (and thereby rearticulating the terms of) one or another disciplinary tradition - for Deleuze, for example, that tradition is philosophical<sup>10</sup>, and ceaselessly rearticulated - and to some end or ends (which signal positioning and the political). Where we differ, as professionals, is also worth signalling, but in order to do so we need to start from the explicit acknowledgement of our institutionally-ratified professional identities. I return to the question of expert arts-practitioner specificity in the context of what Massumi<sup>11</sup> calls "qualitative transformations".

My next question, with issues of disciplinary mastery and professional identity in mind, concerns the extent to which, looking back over some 30 years of university writing-production and dissemination in the arts, it might also be possible for us to identify, in the writing which excited university professionals over that period, an anti-institutional bias and a *thematized* contestation of dominant cultural forms, performed - ironically enough - from within the university as knowledge-conservative institution. Peter Osborne has identified the 1960s and 1970s US avant-garde in terms of a generation of American artists entering the university for the first time, a situation overlaid with memories of WWII and lived experiences of the Vietnam War.

He notes of conceptual art of the period that it was viewed as "a mode of artistic production [purportedly determined] by a philosophical form"; and he proceeds to wonder whether this might not seem to locate it in opposition to the older conception of art as *sensuous particularity* or *aesthetic*. He goes on, then, to ask a question I find interesting in the present context, and that I should want to pose to the "discursivists" in Dance Studies: "what does it mean to specify or delimit a particular kind of art with reference to its [supposed] determination by another cultural field?" (86). What might it mean for disciplinary mastery and creative invention, in the performing arts in the research context and beyond it, to specify or delimit dance with reference to its supposed determination by the cultural field of discourse production, with a particular emphasis on theories of representation, problematised identities, and on the production of expert registers of "performance writing" *from an expert spectator perspective* - since it is from this expert spectator perspective, whether its writers declare it or not, that much performance-writing is actually produced. Once again, I am pointing to a mismatch between dominant "performance-writing" positions, and expert practitioner positions themselves.

There are political implications which emerge from the position I have set out above, and a certain challenge: if the discourses concerned with the subversion of dominant forms have appealed to some of us professionally employed by a university institution such as this one, how might we, from a self-marginalising, self-affirmingly "subversive" position, concerned with liminalities and hence not with institutional decision-making, effect "knowledge-political" change in the university itself as institutional setup? I have spoken and written elsewhere, at some length and to no great effect, about the hypocrisy of those of us who continue their assault on institutions from within the university as institution, and through the expert mastery of writing - almost as though some of us were still stuck in an unresolved Electra or Oedipal crisis. Patently I am not arguing against critical engagement with dominant forms, from within the university as knowledge-conservative institution (since my intervention here is itself critical of certain dominant forms). Instead, I am arguing that critical interrogation only "works", where we first master the discipline concerned - and acknowledge (in meta-praxiological terms) our own disciplinary mastery as such. Few published Performance Studies writers actually interrogate their own writing-production, in compositional, indeed aesthetic terms.

My own suggestion here, as writer-educator, is that we might all benefit, in the context of authorised practices in the university, from separating out, when we review the writing of notorious seminal figures in the later decades of the 20thC, what these writers or this writing *thematize*, from what that disciplinary writing also *performs*. If you have ever been struck, as were some of us here, by the 20thC suggestion that there is no distinction to be made between form and content, then you might want to go back and take another look at the writerly conservatism of those who made that suggestion. Published writing in expert registers and established disciplinary fields enables the writer concerned to thematize the interrogation of dominant forms (except those represented by the university itself and the publishing industry). In this case, there is a mismatch between what that seminal writer *says*, and what he *does*.

You may have some difficulty with my observation which emerges from these comments, which is that however radicalising notorious writer-educators like Barthes, Foucault and Deleuze, might have *felt* (and continue to *feel*) to some readers <sup>12</sup>, at particular moments in student lives, these same professional writers had perfectly conserved, in that writing, the codes and conventions of expert or professional writing itself, in terms appropriate both to the academy, and to the corporate world of the publishing industry. They simultaneously thematized and articulated apparently radical proposals with regard to dominant forms or modes of production, while *practising* the latter. Each of these writers, meanwhile, has signed his output, in such a way as to assert his intellectual property rights over it. It is signature work, this writing so many of us have referred to, by which I mean that it does not simply find its place in a greater intertextual system. Instead, it is owned; singular; property; conservative of proprietary registers and values. It is appropriate, as the publishing industry itself has attested.

Each of these writers, in addition, whatever claims he might have made with regard to knowledge-systems, intertextuality, logocentricity, theories of the other, the metaphysics of presence, or the "becoming-body", has perfectly maintained a wholly conservative, institutionally defined and institutionally evaluated writing as the

means to his effective articulation of that project. The thetic qualities of the registers mastered, the institutionalized access to and mastery of "the historically developed and institutionally structured space of writerly positions and possibilities", are startling, when we return to look at what each writer-practitioner *practised*, as distinct from what he thematized.

What might it mean to argue here that radical perspectives, in this framework, are only achievable to the extent that the writer-inventor has mastered the discipline which affords her or him access to the profession and its means to thematize radicalism effectively? What might we infer, on performing arts' behalf, from this curious capacity of the supposedly radical practitioner of institutionally-defined writing, that he or she has also performed largely without critical auto-reflection, the role of perfect professional obedience to the demands of the conservative institutions of writing and publishing? Each has remained wholly obedient, if I might put it this way, to the order of the clause, to the order of subject and predicate, and, what's more, to the order of lexical choice (where nominalisation tends to dominate process words, for example, in certain complex registers). Yet one of Peter Osborne's other useful observations is that writing, when it is a matter of expert registers, also *ontologizes* - or confers being, in terms of semantic norms upon - what it might otherwise seem only to write "about".

What might it mean to claim that terms like "*the body*", or "*theory and practice*", ontologize in terms of the conservative orders of writing, when they are applied, in the university research context, to expert mixed-mode practices? These are, whether you want to hear this or not, linguistic colonizers of mixed-mode heterogeneous practices. When Foucault and Deleuze, in conversation in 1972, are published in these sorts of terms:

No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall. <sup>13</sup>

they are doing rather more than to write "about theory and practice" - whatever these two nouns are understood to mean. That these nouns would seem to be understood *commonsensically* - rather than in expert/technical terms - by many readers <sup>14</sup> does not help the "knowledge-political" task we have before us. Each term, in my experience, signals something reified. The Foucault-Deleuze writing, read in different contexts of use, ontologizes, or asserts the pre-existence of a particular mode of being, with regard to what they might otherwise seem merely to write *about*. For example, it asserts, as already-given, a difference between "theory" (always first) and "practice"; whereas my argument is that wherever these terms are used, what we are doing, even as readers, is to *practise* something, always in relational terms (by which I mean somewhere, to some end or ends, on someone's behalf). Yet this sort of observation by Foucault and Deleuze has been popular, in my experience, because it seems to fit empirically with dominant received ideas, according to which "*theory*" is one "*thing*", and "*practice*", similarly nominalised, an other. Of "things", Brian Massumi has observed more recently however, that "a thing is when it isn't doing...when it is in a state of arrest..."). When Foucault and Deleuze went on, in 1972, in these sorts of terms:

Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another (206)

they were using politically-appealing tropes while also establishing a schematic "word-world", conjured up in terms of highly conventional patternings which are syntactically-specific in a literal and not a metaphoric sense. These patternings, then, were both political, because they were positioned with regard to then-dominant "world-views", and entailed point of view, and they continue today to be world-productive, rather than world-representing. What they achieved, regardless of user-intentionality, was and continues to be the nominalisation (asserting "thingness" over process) together with the ongoing separation of what actually constitute two different modes of activity - or *practices* - through an apparently still appealing recourse to spatial metaphor. Such spatializing tropes asserted the pre-existence of a mappable and architecturally-constructed "world" which also happened and still happens to be dehumanized, anonymized, deprofessionalised and depersonalised. In this landscape, in other words, *nobody is present and active*. (Yet so many of us felt, at the time, and in that context, that we recognised it, if not ourselves in it.)

What we might need to note, in 2003, is that both nouns used in that early 1970s quote emerge from a professional-writerly Imaginary; and, to the extent that they *refer*, they do so from within the parameters of a writerly and educational professing, *through* the mechanisms specific to it, and in terms of the quite particular scriptural economy of the university. Their *habitus* <sup>15</sup>, if I might be so bold in retrospect, was writerly - as was their training, their mode of engagement, the processes and modes of production specific to them; their professional and public identity, in short.

If their own professional practice, as a consequence, could only be initiated, produced in and regulated by the terms specific to expert writing, within the scriptural economy, on what bases might we expect their observations to have anything whatsoever to give to mixed-mode art-expert disciplinary practitioners - **unless**, that is, we are

prepared to assert that mixed-mode expert arts-disciplinary practices are actually produced on the basis of a textual model, through textualist means, and to textualising ends<sup>16</sup>. I am not prepared to accept this assertion - but before I provide my reasons for this refusal, I want to add, with regard to these seminal or notorious later 20thC writers, that much of the writing itself is challenging, provocative, inspirational, fine in detail, argument, and observation. What it is *not* is expert-arts-practitioner-centred. When Žižek muses, in his recent *Organs Without Bodies*<sup>17</sup>, on Deleuzian approaches to art, he takes that art as already given, proffered as such; already signed, already exhibited, already viewed, already sold, already *written about*: "Perhaps Jackson Pollock is the ultimate "Deleuzian painter": does his action-painting not directly render this flow of pure becoming...?" (5). "Pollock", named here, presupposes a body of painting and of art-critical writing, through which other readers will reproduce "the artist" *as name, within a textualist economy*. The word, here, reinforces the effect of various institutions whose judgement has already been brought to bear on - indeed to produce and reproduce - past mastery. It is unavailable, as such, to the production and evaluation of new work.

The fine, provocative writing of a Barthes, a Foucault, a Deleuze functions then, *philosophically*, as the outcome of schooled, long-standing and sustained professional practices of observation and writing-production. As such, these writers' work can be aligned - where expert performances are our concern - with the position and the activities of expert spectating, reflection and abstraction. It generalizes, as Spectator Studies invites it to do; and it brings with it and maintains the ground-plan on which expert observation itself, as well as the object of expert observation, are staged. Its objective, from that usefully distanced position, is the further production of writing in expert registers. What's more, I would add that despite the declared aspiration of some of these writers to transcendancy, that philosophical art-writing also articulates its context of writing, and whatever was troubling as well as passionate and aspirational, in that context of which it provided a discursive (and published) component. From this point of view, as Hal Foster has pointed out, critical-theoretical writing should perhaps be seen as symptom pointing us to the ongoing troubles and passions specific to its context of production.

But let me come back to my refusal: I am not prepared to accept any such writerly assertion, in spite of the authoritative voices which argue for the discursivist nature of dance<sup>18</sup>, since it would be to give way to the late 20thC, historically-specific, and now outdated *textual and interdisciplinary turns* of the post-WWII context; to those post-Saussurean turns, according to which art practices were modelled on the text. Of this post-Saussurean turn or turns, Osborne has noted, their power derives "from its combination of simplicity and generality, ...its indifferen[ce] to the specificities of [the materials] concerned", which "had the effect of creating ...a new trans- or anti-disciplinary object, the text" (22). Yet the material specificities of expert dance are not a matter of indifference to the profession and its margins; nor is choreographic practice, whatever other forceful voices might argue, either "text", or "discourse practice", despite the desire to make it so, of various academics in the university. The textual turn and the interdisciplinary turn seek to substitute the pursuit of "meaning" for a concern with the specificity of aesthetic mastery.

Under the regime of the late 20thC textual turn and its dominant models of writing-production in the university, what was sacrificed, according to Peter Osborne, was an engagement with the formal, sensible, transformative and existential specificities of the expert mixed-mode arts-disciplinary practice itself. What was sacrificed - indicatively - was an expert-practice-centred enquiry into composition, which Massumi also identifies, where *effective/affective* art practices operate, in part at least, in terms of "the unfolding of an absolutely singular [and exemplary] worlding relational whole" (174). Massumi goes on to suggest, with regard to composition, that it involves the personalisation of "a composed singularity of vital movements [effected] in [such] a way that it could collectively spread"(250).

"Collectively spread" has considerable interest, in my experience, with regard to expert decision-making in the devised-practice workshop. It enables us to sidestep, at the same time, still problematic notions of practitioner-intentionality-informed decisions, as well as equally problematic notions of cultural determination/s and representations.

From this point of view, and with no disrespect to notorious later 20thC professional writer-educators, I simply want to argue that the discursivist "worlding" of Foucault, Deleuze et al, whatever their professed (hence, thematized) sympathies, does not fit, empirically, with my own experience of expert-practitioner choreographic practice - pursued, negotiated, driven, developed, dissected, defined, refined, despaired-of, compromised, re-thematized, reinvigorated, in creative-professional registers. Where so many and so markedly differentiated action-types are involved, signalling such diverse ongoing work-practices and processes, who would be able to declare, seeing only the outcome, that this complex, ongoing, painful, challenging activity is *not* an appropriately challenging and illuminating *research activity*? In the case of professional creative practices, it is also a research

undertaking whose outcome is critically judged in the wider arts communities - which thereby serve, in part at least, a similar function to that of the publishing industry's audit and "support" of written research outcomes in the university. The wider arts communities, in turn, and regardless of the self-marginalisation of certain artists, impress their measure upon arts-practitioners' decision-making processes.

In that same quote, then - "practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another" - these seminal writers in the post- WWII context were actually *writing about* (and objectifying, without identification of subject or agency) *two registers of writing practice* - which they were not able to grasp as such - performed to different ends. "Theory" then, whatever Foucault meant by the term, is not a "thing", but rather a set of authorised and appropriate institutional practices, some explanatory and some - in expert or technical registers - professionally-specific and hence excluding; performed in certain institutionally-recognised registers then, and to certain institutionally-authorised ends. Let's say so, and then reword the last quote from this perspective:

*innovative arts-expert practices, viewed in the times of their emergence, can be seen (for example, by the choreographer) to perform a set of relays from one disciplinary point to another; meanwhile, a grasp of mixed-mode meta-practices enables us to identify abstractable or schematic relays, in expert practices, from one arts-disciplinary point to another .*

I want to ask you to keep this revision in your mind's eye, while watching one set of after-images of complex professional practices which come from Christopher Wheeldon's work for the Royal Opera House with Darcey Bussell and Jonathan Cope <sup>19</sup> . I want to know why so many of my colleagues find this video so difficult not to watch, so much as to discuss. Is it possible that what I call the "new critical orthodoxies" of the later 20thC fail to provide appropriate means of engagement for some of us to view innovative, signature practices which are both conservative of the disciplinary core, **and** liable to expand it from within? Is it possible that expert spectating, within a closet Spectator Studies in the university, fails to find interpretative apparatuses which might exhaust the "art effect" or the interpraxiological engagement which is Wheeldon's, in this disciplinary metapractice pursued to creative professional and research ends? That they lack, in particular, the means to deal with what is singular within its composition?

In the place of that engagement with singularities, the discursive reproduction of certain syntactic patterns - such as those entailed in uses of the term "the body" - *asserts* the pre-existence of similar schematic patterns organizing the extra-textual real. They ontologize on the basis of performance product, identifying effects and confusing them with causes.

I do not want to abandon that abject term, "the body", quite yet, because it seems to me that it has become a discursive reflex used in the workshop and the specialist journals, as much as it is in the university. The term "the body" is ontologizing: it asserts a particular position of being and observation, with regard not to expert arts-disciplinary bodywork practices - which are actually doings, not things or beings - but to an everyday or pedestrian body, arrested in its apparent "thing-ness". In Performance Studies it is at one and the same time *aspirational* - it aspires in modernist terms to a "general theory" - and *servile* (it attempts wrong-headedly to objectify practices of expert subjectification). In its recourse to the noun and definite article it is anonymizing and it is deprofessionalizing. That use attempts, regardless of user-intentionality, to impose itself upon movement, sensation and affect, in Massumi's terms; to neutralize or anaesthetize the teleoaffective potential of certain disciplinary practices. It is lexically and grammatically synoptic; it assumes the position of observation of the authoritative subject, while objectifying its other. Its use, besides, in places like this one, is curious to the extent that while Darcey Bussell and I equally "have" "a body", equally "are", "the body", neither of us would want, as professionals, on that basis, to be located at different points on a single physicalised continuum.

The expression, "the body" is equally ontologizing in its erasures and implicature: its use in the research-practice situation harks back to a range of social sciences disciplinary registers. Its relationality is fixed: it brings with it a particular floor plan on which the arts-practice and the expert spectator slot neatly into pre-ordained positions, from which clearly defined expert practices emerge. The position of the user of the term "the body" is that of expert-spectating, and as such it belongs only within a Spectator Studies, in the university, which does not speak its name. (Spectator Studies, as some of you are well aware, is only marketable under the mask of Performance Studies, the fastest growing and most democratic fold of the disciplinary field, as well as the most obedient and readily resourced. I have nothing whatsoever against Spectator Studies, and I am sympathetic to those who assert the creative engagement of spectators. Nonetheless, I would not pay to watch one at work.)

The expression "theory and practice", as we saw in Deleuze and Foucault, asserts the pre-existence of an imaginary and conservatively regulated, scriptural world of writing, within which what are actually two modes of complex

practice are separated out, categorized and opposed. This is a similar world to which Bourdieu referred in 1980 in what he called *The Logic of Practice*<sup>20</sup> where he noted that "[i]t is not easy to speak of practice other than negatively". This was not least the case, he added at the end of the 1970s, in the case of "those aspects of practice that are seemingly most mechanical, most opposed to the logic of thought and discourse" (80). Where a "language of consciousness", Bourdieu added, could be opposed to "the language of the mechanical model", such an opposition would remain compelling, to the extent that it corresponds to a "dominant world-view". Such oppositional formulae and the "thinking in couples" which informs them, in other words, are affectively invested, rather more than they rationally re-present what is materially exterior to them.

They are also compelling, in my experience, to the extent that they were once authoritatively formulated, but have passed, more recently, into commonsensical speech used in certain sorts of contexts. They can be perceived, inappropriately, to be friendly to those of theoretical disposition or attitude, in these contexts. I cannot stress however too forcefully the troubling implications, for the future of expert performance-making practices in the research context, of commonsensical formulae used *notionally* to certain immediate pragmatic ends, in contexts of mixed-mode performance-making practice.

Where the formal and authoritative, world-creating wording, which was situationally, contextually, and relationally specific in its context of emergence, has now assumed the status of commonsense, and is used notionally within an oral economy of practice, by mixed-mode practitioners, to seem to satisfy an immediate, almost certainly interactive need, then what is actually a gross distortion is being practised. That distortion further damages the hypothesis, to which I am otherwise operating, which is that these are in fact two singularly different economies of practice, with wholly independent organizational and regulatory machinery, modes of operation, temporal functions, expected outcomes, and knowledge-economy status.

There is much at stake here and there is no easy way of saying this: if you are using terms like "theory and practice" or "mind and body" with regard to a mixed-mode professional context, please stop. If you are taking up that old formula "the thinking body" to refer to expert practitioners and practices, please stop.

In Brian Massumi's argument none of these terms, each of which by the way has an everyday significance as well as a technical one, is appropriate when our principal objective should be to attempt to identify the means to effecting *qualitative transformations in art-making practices*, to which we can by definition only look forward. At stake in Massumi's observations on writing's looking backwards (to "anaesthetize") and the forward-looking of qualitative transformations, is thus the question of the temporal order of inventive practices, in contrast with the times of naming and analysis, which are ontologizing, imposing writing's orders on the complexities and differences involved in experience, while asserting (and often persuading) that these are "already there".

The time specific to what I call *chasing angels* is fragile. Expert practitioners cannot be sure that they have "caught one", except on those occasions when the decision made is applauded in the time of the emergent event. In addition, an angel tends to be not-yet-seen, but recognizable when she appears, as well as always singular. This is a curious epistemological burden. It is equally the case that angels are marked by luminosity, rather than by substance, not least where they appear between expert performers and the choreographer, rather than in a materially-single substance or site. Because they are not located materially *somewhere*, they disappear, as quickly, in the same event, and troublingly. In Ariane Mnouchkine's account of making *Tartuffe*<sup>21</sup> she indicates that in the case of this nowhere (substantial) of emergence, spectators tend in the event to assume that "the actor has done something", because that seems to provide a material account of the immaterial; whereas something has actually emerged which is "owned" by no single performer, and is event-relational. Hence angel-time as well as its knowledge-status is fragile, and the means of its recognition, before the event, by professionals, always involves a half-desperate hope, a calculation, always a gamble.

What is also at stake here is disciplinary specificity itself, of which I would simply say, reductively, that most disciplines are constituted *after* evaluation of something or things produced and classified; stand still and look back, or reproduce new insights with regard to the already known. Massumi considers these to be *an-aesthetizing*. In complete contrast are those creative practitioner disciplines whose *production processes* are calculated not so much in terms of that discipline's past, but on their capacity to provide the potential for singular, qualitative transformations of it.

When Massumi writes, then, about what he calls "continuities under qualitative transformation" - one set of which involves expert bodywork which combines persona (a set of abstractions materially manifest) and another,



disciplinarity (another set of "incorporeal materialities") - I begin to imagine that I am hearing something which would not have been out of place, for a few fleeting moments sewn unevenly through the time available, when Christopher Wheeldon began to work, on *Tryst* with Darcey Bussell and Jonathan Cope, or when Kim Brandstrup entered his rehearsals for *Hamlet* <sup>22</sup>.



Choreographer Kim Brandstrup at work with Arc Dance Company in rehearsals for *Hamlet* at Jerwood Space, London, summer 2003 ([open gallery of images in a new window](#))

Whereas ontologizing practices, Massumi notes, are inevitably backward-looking, backward forming, and backward-fixing, *ontogenetic processes* are those which might engender the fleeting *being* of art in the event of expert practice. Because ontologizing wordings assert being on the basis of already-obtained observations and knowings, they are unable to account for qualitative transformations, in an event of singular emergence.

That the as-yet-unperceived is recognised when it emerges depends on the choreographer's expert ability to slot into place a considerable number of heterogeneous schematic patternings, some elements of which will tend to trigger particular sorts of engagements on the part of spectators (as well as, in all probability, of dancers). The fine detail produced through experience and perception is ceaselessly shuffled and slotted again, I think, and differently, by different participants and onlookers. (A performer's "It feels right" is of a quite different order, for example, from a spectator's "I couldn't take my eyes off it", even though the words may be excited by what is otherwise taken to be "the same" performance moment.) Hence while all participants may engage the same sorts of generic patternings - one of these involves narrativity in dance; another the structure of the event; another the constitution of dance persona and/or dance characterisation; another regulates different perceptions of what constitutes expert practice and what constitutes less than expert mastery - it is vital to note that this "practice" which seems to unite us is strongly differentiated internally. In Kim Brandstrup's case, some of his shufflings and slottings of material - none of which can be identified singly as 'being somewhere specific', since his process and aspiration are both movement-focused, rather than place or space-focused - are narrative-productive in function, but these may not be acknowledged as such by dancers or onlookers. Because I 'know the story already', I find that in the event, I 'clock' its turning-points (or articulations, or 'thresholds'), without needing to discursivise these as such. I retain them as a temporal and spatial abstraction, and not as an action-regulatory story. Many are ballet-disciplinary while others see performers sidelined by design or musical performance; some involve the staging of virtuosic performer singularity; some involve the intricate and to the onlooker innumerable operations of hypotyposis. Hypotyposis, a major player in the performance economy, is at work when spectators seem to see more than they actually see (feelings specific, for example to *Hamlet*, rather than movements specific to the dancer who performs the role); and seem to know more than is given, even when that 'not-given', brought by the onlooker in its particulars and detail, is vital to the narrative. I seem to recognise a something which, on the basis of that "seeming to recognise", does not need to be provided by the performer or choreographer. Rather, what needs to be provided is the space and time vital to my contribution, and a number of schematic frameworks. On this basis, dancers can actually do less than they seem to do, as long as spectators recognise the pointers, and work to fill the gaps. Of the relationship between narrative schematics, and those actions through which expert-performer singularities are made manifest, by the way, Massumi enables me to observe that where narrative schematics intrudes thresholds, the performer singularity and the singularity of the performer-performer or performer-choreographer interaction, give way, to a perceiver, to questions of composition itself, to questions of choreographic expertise.



Before I conclude I want to dwell a little longer on the question of the qualitative transformation, but from the point of view of creative and professional imperatives pursued in the research context. My argument here is firstly, and very reductively, that qualitative transformations are what challenging art professionals are looking for, and that this *looking for* places them always ahead of academic writers, just out of reach; secondly, that qualitative transformations, if these are also to be targeted and identified as such in the research context, require of some of us that we take on board the burden posed by the need to make explicit the precise bases for our evaluation of art disciplinary practices in the university context, as well as the knowledge difficulties this task brings with it, in a university still marked by some of the ideological ambiguities that I have attributed to the situation of the later 20thC.

This making explicit requires that we focus on what I have called the production metalanguages - some of which are teleoffective - specific to arts-expert performance making along with the mechanisms entailed in making aesthetic and ethical judgements which these often tacitly enfold. That this is a field of undertaking which is particularly delicate in the university, at least, is illuminated for me by Peter Osborne's observation that the university's emphasis on meaning-production in place of the aesthetic and the judgements entailed by the aesthetic is post-Kantian, and hence has a long history to it. Noting that

ever since Kant's transcendental critique of the intuitive grounds of ...cognitivism severed the connection of aesthetics to semiotics, in the aftermath of the birth of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, at the end of the eighteenth century, the two fields of enquiry have been fundamentally estranged.(21)

today, he adds, it is no exaggeration to say that "this split ... between signification and aesthesis, meaning and sensibility", "divorced the theorization of the formal sensible qualities" of the art work "from its representational function". Its counterpart, he goes on, is that modern analytical practices "treat [the] signifying function in abstraction from both its sensible and its existential qualities".

What might it mean to declare that, firstly, because the explicit operations of judgements of taste and value have tended to be marginalised in the writing produced under the heading of critical-theoretical or cultural-theoretical registers in the knowledge-political climate specific to post-WWII, some of us here are unable to accept responsibility, in the research-practice contexts, for those judgements of taste and value we tend, on the other hand, to utter in the bar after the show? What might it mean, secondly, for expert art practitioners in the research context, that the burden of the history of some of us in the university, is such that we are better able to "deal with" pedagogic practices and their outcomes which will never meet professional criteria, than with the professional?

Osborne has added, by the way, that attempts to eliminate the aesthetic from consideration of the artwork have simply served to produce the opposite. That is, the aspiration to either the popular or the anti-institutional avant-garde and the supposedly demystifying strategies or semiological rearticulations these aspirations have involved, have simply, through their "failed negation" of it, provided evidence of the "*in eliminability of the aesthetic* as a necessary element of the artwork" (102). Let's say so here, even if that means casting aside some of our later 20thC received ideas and the residue of their affective charge.

## Conclusion

The qualitative ("knowledge-economy", epistemic <sup>23</sup>) transformations, which I argue Wheeldon sought in his pairing of Jonathan Cope and Darcey Bussell with James Macmillan's score (and a particular, professional agenda), were not "owned" by any one of these artists. Rather, "what Darcey Bussell ~~knows~~ can do" is emergent, in wholly relational terms - that is, literally dependent upon the professional input of the choreographer and other dancer/s. Hence the qualitative transformations which have marked her career did not and do not exist "in" the dancer, as her ("embodied") intellectual property - as some might want to claim for solo visual artists; instead these are *worked* (and *work*, or not) in complex relational circumstances.

The notion, then, of a 'body-knowing', once more a nominalisation of what are in fact multiply-interactive processes, merely identifies a performer's past mastery and technical competence, not what she might do, today, in the workshop, in testing how the aesthetic implications of a particular working relationship might feel, and what they might enable her to do. The term "embodied knowledge" - because of its implication of inherence - fails to allow us to identify the qualitative transformations which are both evidence of her creative engagement with choreographer and other dancers/composers/spectators, *and* they are *un*-owned by her. I would go so far as to

claim that she is likely to be surprised by their affective power over her, when through certain sorts of interactions "they" seem "to appear". She sets out then - because she is an expert and her signature counts - to "personalize[...] a composed singularity of vital movements in [such] a way that it could collectively spread"(250).

That collective spread is vital, in the workshop, because as professional, her concern is also with "composition [which] involves the unfolding of an absolutely singular worlding relational whole" (174). In the case of the choreographer, we might infer from Massumi's approach, part of her or his art is to `catalyze "a relational emergence", which will appear as a recognised-not-yet-seen. That catalyzed relational emergence, and the composition which gradually emerges from it, is, Massumi suggests, philosophy in/as action. Its wholly "conceptual newness", in philosophical terms, "is there, in the event, *enacted* " (176).

## Endnotes

- [1.](#) B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* , Duke University Press, 2002
- [2.](#) M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* , trans. S Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1984. First published in French, as *Arts de faire* , Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1980).
- [3.](#) see for example Alan Read's *Theatre and Everyday Life* , Routledge, 1992, and my own *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text* , Macmillan, London, 1994.
- [4.](#) N. Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* , Routledge, London and New York, 2000
- [5.](#) M. Pearson and M. Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* , Routledge, London and New York, 2001
- [6.](#) J. McKenzie, *Perform...Or Else: From Discipline to Performance* , Routledge, London and New York, 2001
- [7.](#) P. Osborne, *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* , Routledge, London and New York, 2000
- [8.](#) the "scriptural economy" is a term used by Michel de Certeau to account for the university and its role in the knowledge-economy.
- [9.](#) I owe the term to R. Barthes, and to his painstaking work, as professional writer-educator, to deconstruct writing in certain expert registers.
- [10.](#) Deleuze's reconfigurations of the writing of Foucault and - for example - Spinoza are notable in this regard.
- [11.](#) Although other observations by Massumi, in this seminal text, will have greater immediate appeal to some readers, his most important contribution to art-writing is this notion of "qualitative transformation", which requires of some of us, in the university, that we indicate to our higher degree candidates how quality might be identified, with regard to expert performing arts practices, on what precise bases, and according to whose expertise.
- [12.](#) Hal Foster has already signalled, in his *The Return of the Real* (MIT Press, 1996) a certain bemusement when looking back, from the end of the millennium, at the passions and misapprehensions specific to many of us who were caught up (I use the term advisedly) in "the events" of the late 1960s and 1970s.
- [13.](#) Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* , Cornell University Press, Ithica, 1977
- [14.](#) At this point I generalise, wilfully, out of irritation with all of those colleagues who misrecognise "theory and practice", taking a commonsensical view for granted, reproducing that misrecognition among their students. Both are practices, in pragmatic and relational terms.
- [15.](#) "Habitus" is P. Bourdieu's term, from his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* .

[16.](#) see Hal Foster (above), on the "textual turn" and what its popularity, in the university, caused some of us to do.

[17.](#) S. Zizek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* , Routledge, London and New York, 2004

[18.](#) The discursivising urge seems particularly strong amongst published academic dance-writers, for reasons which recall a similar urge amongst performance studies writers in the 1990s - to establish the academic credentials of a disciplinary field while sacrificing the formal and sensible, which are specific to mastery in the arts-discipline itself. I have observed elsewhere that there seems to be no discourse on virtuosity in Dance Studies in the university, which tends to mean that an aspect of the practice, and of the aspirations of many practitioners, is erased from academic discourse. Curious.

[19.](#) C. Wheeldon, *Tryst* , with dancers: Darcy Bussell and Jonathan Cope (Royal Opera House). Choreography by Christopher Wheeldon. Music © James Macmillan 1990, performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Video production copyright © ARTE 2002. Broadcast on BBC4, 2003

[20.](#) P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* , trans. R. Nice, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990. First published in French in 1980, by Editions de Minuit.

[21.](#) An edited account of rehearsals for Ariane Mnouchkine's *Tartuffe* forms part of the video entitled *Au Soleil même la nuit: Scènes d'accouchements* , Darmon, É. et Vilpoux, C., Théâtre du Soleil/Agat Films/La Sept Arte, 1997

[22.](#) See Arc Dance Company's website, at <http://www.arcdance.com> . Kim Brandstrup is an AHRB-funded Research Fellow at Middlesex University.

[23.](#) I owe the term "epistemic" - as in "knowledge-practices", in a "knowledge economy", to Karin Knorr Cetina's work on research practices - whose work I cite in some details in my "The Curiosity of Writing...", also on this site.

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