

“The body” in question: expert performance-making in the university and the problem of spectatorship’

© Susan Melrose

Abstract

Certain of my observations, about what I have called “the body turn”, or “the turn of ‘the body’”, are specific to a quite particular historical and political situation. On that basis I am happy to acknowledge that some of the implications of my presentation will not readily transfer to other situations of enquiry. The situation that continues to excite my interest is that of the very recent entry of professional or expert performance-makers into the higher degree programme of the British university, and on the basis of that entry, the issue of the “research training” programme which we make available to performance-makers, along with the issue of what might be called the “knowledge status” of expert performance-making practices (where those practices are included in a mixed-mode doctoral submission). The timing of the entry of expert or professional performance-makers into the higher degree research programme in the university has tended to lag behind that of a range of visual artists into that same programme, although interestingly enough the move to admit artists in general, and the terms according to which their expert practices might be approached as advanced research, has tended to lump them together, under the heading of the “creative and performing arts”.

Given this background, and regardless of the continuing popularity of interdisciplinarity in the university, I am arguing *against* the assumption that transfer between disciplines is necessarily a positivity. My counter-suggestion is that widespread uses of the term “the body” are particularly problematic in the context of expert or professional performance-making in the research context of the university; second, that their proliferation blinds some of us to the specificity of the discipline concerned; and third, that where expert performance-making is brought into productive interface with “new technologies”, the apparent “liberation” of what might be called “performance material”, from disciplinary confines, further encourages some of us to overlook highly significant aspects of performance-making in the hands of expert practitioners.

I propose to argue, on this basis, that with regard to expert-performance-production contexts, use of the term “the body” is a nonsense, first because use of that term in such contexts tends to objectify, to generalise, essentialise, anonymise, and deprofessionalise the input of expert performers. Second because such uses tend to be made on the basis of, and from the perspective of, *spectator* theories of knowledge, rather than those specific to performance-expert practices. Third, that what those who use the term “the body” in the context of performing arts are actually dealing with is neither “the body”, nor “a body”, but rather “*some body observed*”, or, more specifically, “**somebody’s expert bodywork, expertly observed**”. As spectators, what we are watching, in other words, is (“always already”) *watched*: we are watching an event of expert observation.

How might “we” (those of us who are spectator-writers, in the academic context) theorise this shift from “body” to “somebody’s bodywork observed”; theorise the addition of the qualifier “expert” (and its implication of ownership); and theorise this shift from the definite or indefinite article to “some”, as in “*some body*”? Meanwhile, “*watching* the (already) expertly *observed*” supposes a vital relationality, as well as address, built-in to the making; it supposes further instances of disciplinary expertise and/or artistry (e.g. choreography; lighting design; set design); it also supposes action or process, rather than the stasis that nominalisation (“the body”) tends to suggest.

(An earlier draft of this paper was presented at ‘The Body in Transition’, School of Computing, Middlesex University, April 2006.)

“[T]o render a moment durable...”

Introduction

I want to start with a question as to definition: what might we understand here and now, in this explicitly ‘interdisciplinary’ context, by uses of the term ‘the body’? My sense has been, over recent years, that the more widely we use the term, in the supposed interests of interdisciplinary connectivity – especially in a site like this one – the less likely it is that we are dealing with shared understandings, in spite of the recent ubiquity of the term and of what it might seem to stand for. Katherine Hayles, using the term in the late 1990s in *How We Became Posthuman*¹, plunged us directly into the problem of naming by suggesting that ‘the body itself’ – as distinct from the term – ‘is a congealed metaphor’, ‘a physical structure whose constraints and possibilities have been formed by an evolutionary history that intelligent machines do not share’ (284).

The implications of Hayles’ brief observation are complex. For my purposes here I want simply to flag up the curious distinction she makes between ‘body’ as ‘a physical structure’, on the one hand, and ‘intelligent machines’, on the other. You may well already be aware, as far as ‘the body’ as a supposedly ‘physical structure’ is concerned, that the term ‘bodig’, from which ‘body’ derives, seems as far as written records are concerned, to have signalled a container, in the 13thC, a trunk or chest or cask². Since 1240, as far as written records are concerned, “body” has been separated from “soul”. “Body” meaning “corpse” dates from 1280, in written record, and brings with it the distinction between live body and dead body. “Heavenly body”, dates from around 1380, and “body politic” - “the nation, the state” - was recorded, in writing, around 1532.

As I indicate in the abstract above, my starting point is discipline-specific; it is historically and geographically specific, and it exposes a ‘knowledge political’ bias: what I have to say here relates to the place of an *expert and discipline-specific bodywork, expertly observed and staged* in the context of the recent entry of professional performance-makers into the research and research degree contexts of the British university. It relates, secondly, to the development of practice-as-research and practice-led research in performing arts in those contexts where expert performance practitioners make work drawing on the expertise of a range of collaborators. In that specific context - automatically challenging of certain traditions, I am interested in particular in the models of intelligibility not to mention the reading lists - which apply and should apply to research and writing in that context, and in terms of that particular bias. In brief, I am persuaded that widely-prevailing uses of the term ‘the body’, in the context of performance-professional expertise, in the research context of the university, actually derive from spectator-specific theories of knowledge, spectator-positioning and performance-product orientation, and that as such, they tend to be inappropriate to ways of wording expert practitioner processes and a practitioner-theoretical practice in that same research context.

1. Disciplinary specificity

By identifying the importance of disciplinary specificity in the precise context I have alluded to, I am going to proceed to argue that the term ‘the body’, used as common currency in interdisciplinary frameworks, *misrecognises* and encourages the ongoing misrecognition, of performance professional expertise - especially where the term ‘the body’ seems so easily to substitute for that other objectifying term ‘the performer’. I want to add, in the present context, that this misrecognition is potentially compounded wherever the apparatuses specific to what are still called ‘new technologies’ are drawn on in performance-making. In order to indicate what I mean here, I propose to show you short clip of choreographic work by Frederic Flammand, shown recently on the European TV channel ARTE³, and then to proceed to reflect on certain aspects of the work captured on film and through digital manipulation, by bringing to it reflections on a curious essay by the French philosopher, J-F Lyotard, entitled “Obedience”⁴, and presented in the mid-1980s at a conference on Music and Writing. My immediate objective, in bringing together the issue of disciplinary specificity, a brief clip of expert performance work, Lyotard’s essay, in the context of my opening observation about professional artists in the research context of the essay, is to raise the more complex question about expert art-making processes and outcomes, in the research context, and what happens to these when new media are brought into play - perhaps in order to bring them or certain aspects of them to different audiences.

The art work in question: I would observe firstly that the clip provides ample evidence that Flammand’s large-scale and interdisciplinary choreographic project (in collaboration with a team of dancers and the architect Thom Mayne)⁵ is dependent in the first instance, on the premise of performer expertise, and secondly, that its transfer from live performance event to a different medium has significantly reduced the impact of that performer-expertise. I want to suggest that we view the clip a second time, working from the premise that it has been produced through the co-operation of a number of ‘apparatuses’, specific to particular set-ups⁶, some of which are specific to contemporary dance; some of which are specific to the live performance event itself, and its relationality; and some of which are concerned with attempting to capture something of that work on film and in the edit suite. Each has its ‘technology’, if I might use that term to refer to each of these different set-ups. Each, to a lesser or greater extent, operates explicitly in terms of an orientation to an anticipated and/or real viewer. Each *supposes and pre-supposes expertise*. Although there is productive overlap between these set-ups and what is produced on that basis (catalysis tends to result from that overlap, with the application of a transformative ‘heat’), each gathers together, in any professional collaboration, a range of different types of expertise. Let’s say so, and name these.

Once we start from the perspective of heterogeneous professional expertise, I’d argue that we view the work differently, and we can then begin to identify a number of performance-making processes, and practitioners, which layer the work. If we don’t proceed in this manner, in my long experience of spectating, the work tends to be viewed in such a way as to anonymise the dancers, to generalise away the expert bodywork of the performers concerned in favour of notions of design; to reduce

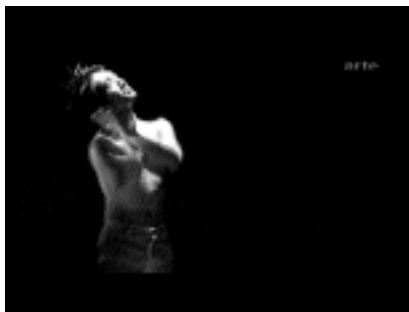
choreographic invention and process, while substituting for these a spectator-specific interest in representation and interpretation. What is diminished in particular through filming and editing, as well as digital *trucage* - and this is the case, it seems to me, even if it is still possible to get a sense of largescale co-ordination of movement in space and over time, and of how many camera angles are involved - is the sense that these are professional dancers, *literally at work*. It may also be the case that something of the artistry of the large-scale live is lost, where that artistry relates quite specifically to the particular logic that regulates compositional strategies in order to target multiple viewpoints in a similarly largescale audience. What I gain, as television spectator, is a sense of containment, of selective and selectively-combined view, and hence mastery over what was once that large scale.

I am arguing here that these sorts of processes of substitution tend to encourage a spectator to see 'the body or bodies', *topologically*, rather than seeing expert performers at work, and if I am right here, then the overlaying of the technological apparatuses that apply is such as to encourage an objectification, an anonymisation and a deprofessionalisation not simply of the work of the expert performers, but even of the choreographic undertaking - which is considerable. In the case of the televisual projection, the expert bodywork of *individual* performers, expertly-observed, and the choreographic processes regulating the large scale live in its 'eventness', are overtaken by the sort of analytic engagement promoted by digital technology and the edit suite. The 'live-eventness', however you might want to view that, is overtaken by a highly selective multi-perspectivity promoted by the film technological and the digital, and addressed quite specifically to the television spectator.



ARTE, Dance slot, Feb 2006

That the performance sequence produced for the television screening proceeds then to focus on an individual figure, on that figure's self-ostended performance, and on the duplication of that single figure in the single shot, changes nothing of that fact.



Mindful as I am of the aesthetic implications of professional performance work, it is important at this point to note that in this largescale choreographic work, it is unlikely that we'd conclude that the artistry of the expert performer, or the dance-signature of the performer involved, itself constitutes 'an art work'. What this suggests, in turn, that within the range of 'artisticities' at work in performance, some but not others can, in the terms established by Deleuze and Guattari in their *What is Philosophy?* (1991)⁷, 'stand up alone'.

2. Disciplinary Specificity, ‘emancipation’, and technical mastery

How might those of us who are interested in the processes of advanced choreographic composition from the expert-practitioner and live-spectator event-*relational* perspective, and in what might be called, in the research context, a practitioner performance theoretical engagement, draw usefully on theoretical insights emerging today via an engagement with ‘new media’? I was interested from this perspective to look briefly back in time at an essay by J-F Lyotard, first presented in 1986 – at a particular moment in the development of ‘new technologies’ in various fields of the arts. In this text, entitled “Obedience”, first presented at a conference at the Sorbonne entitled “On Musical Writing” and translated and published in English in 1991 (pp. 165-181), Lyotard cited Adorno on the subject of *The Philosophy of New Music*, and Adorno’s observation that, ‘with the liberation of the material’ from the confines of the discipline, through the advent of new technologies, ‘the possibility of mastering [that material] has increased’.

Lyotard noted, in the cybernetic phase specific to 1986, that Adorno did not indicate whether this ‘greater capacity’ was desirable. Nonetheless, Adorno, at least in Lyotard’s interpretation, seemed to be suggesting that a ‘musical material’ itself ‘had and has the right and the desire to emancipate itself from a number of guardians that were previously inflicted upon it’. That is, music might be detached from the hold of those who had traditionally claimed a disciplinary ownership of its composition and/or performance (165): ‘[O]nce this desire and right are declared and recognized’ (and its consequences, we might add, pursued), Lyotard goes on, the paradox that is revealed is that, as a result of this apparent emancipation, that same ‘musical material’ thereby actually comes more completely under the sway of those who have mastered technique. Adorno insisted, Lyotard pointed out in 1986, that ‘technique is a constitutive aspect of art’ (165), which ‘means [however] that *the work of art is more than an agglomerate of what exists in fact*’ (my emphasis), ‘and this *more* constitutes its content’. The work of art, Lyotard observed, ‘is and must remain an enigma, but it also offers a “determinable figure”, a figure that is “both rational and abstract”, and this figure is technique’. I want to retain both terms here: ‘enigma’, and ‘technique’, both constitutive to the art work. What follows upon the apparent liberation of the musical material, from the expertise specific to the discipline, Lyotard goes on, is that new technologies thereby enable the user of that technology to acquire ‘a greater hold of technique on it’. Lyotard interprets this situation to mean that whereas new technologies allowed a degree of emancipation from disciplinary expertise, this same freeing allowed an ‘increase in the capacity to determine that same material rationally’. I would ask you to hold on, similarly, to the notion of ‘rationality’, in what follows.

The new technologies, viewed in the mid-1980s, in the context of what was the discipline-defined artwork, would ‘allow a very refined, “rational [and] abstract” analysis’. They would also produce a certain

Key terms re the work of art and the digital (1986): enigma, ‘more than what exists in fact’; as contrasted with: technique; ‘determinable figure’; ‘both rational and abstract’; emancipation; mastery; ‘a greater hold of technique’; increased ‘capacity to determine...rationally’

euphoria, in that apparent emancipation from disciplinary expertise; but by the same token, they would fail as far as accessing the enigma of the work were concerned. Just as sound, then, might seem to be able to free itself, via a 'break of causality' specific to the work's making, what would result, from that break, is the isolation of the material from the context of its composition. In its isolation from that context, Lyotard observed, the work *loses one destination* (such as I have noted above of choreography produced for and in terms of a live event), but it acquires another. This second destination, reminding us of Lyotard's notorious theorisation of the postmodern, is that of 'listening to listening', where that 'listening to listening' (in place of 'listening to music') would in fact 'exceed... the scope of techno-scientific research envisaged technically'; nonetheless, it is that techno-scientific research that serves as the means through which 'this [listening to listening] is revealed'.

The 'scientist and engineer', in Lyotard's words, thereby takes over from the artist's disciplinary expertise, with the effect that just as music might have seemed in 1986 to have been enabled to free itself, through the application of new technologies, by precisely the same token its component of 'technique' 'can master it'.

What seems to me to be striking, viewed from 2006, is the fact that Lyotard's text of 1986 seems to have assumed a clear distinction between two aspects: an originary music, traditionally composed and performed by via disciplinary expertise, on the one hand, and on the other not just the technical operator, with access to the 'new technologies' of the 1980s, and the 'scientist and engineer', but the *techno-scientific imagination* of these three. Now, if we step back to 2006, my supposition is that some of you at least will respond that this distinction no longer necessarily applies, and that under the heading of 'digital creativity', there tends to be a more recent fusion between creative and techno-scientific imaginations and modes of operation. That more recent fusion may have come about with greater access to the new technologies - i.e. when the artist and 'operator' work collaboratively, as I suggest later in this presentation.

For my part, I have recently sought to approach an ongoing question which is that of the expert practitioner's signature or identifying mark or singular impress, 'in the work', and I have found myself, in turn, making a distinction between singular impress, or artistic signature, on the one hand, and style, on the other. And I have supposed, on the basis of that same distinction, that whereas style can be replicated, by others, within the same or a different medium, the qualities specific to signature cannot. Artistic signature, I would argue, emerges at the fragile but productive interface between a highly particular, and discipline-specific struggle with resistant materialities (Hayles 1999), performed more often than not, if we are looking at ongoing creative activity, from the perspective of expertise (and its highly particular 'setups' and apparatuses). I am tempted to suggest that this fusion emerges more surely where two expert practitioners bring their different expertise to bear through collaboration - but I return to this issue below. Whatever interim response one might arrive at to that ongoing question, what I find interesting in my own attempt to distinguish the singularity and individual ownership of signature from the replicability of style, is the fact that I too seem to continue to want to separate something 'in the work', into two or more different entities.

3. Expert collaborations and ‘the body’

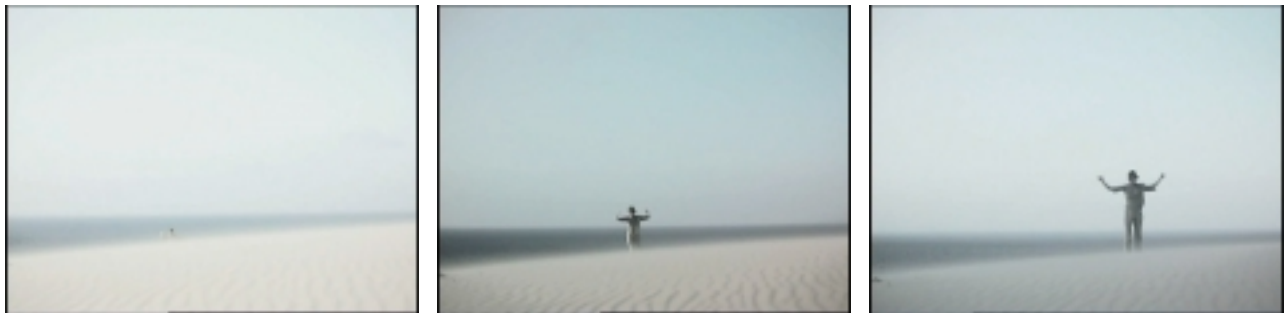
What might need to be said, at this point, is that one constitutive aspect of *performance-making* as discipline is that it is collaborative, in its most simple manifestation; second it tends to work through the synthesis of a number of technological apparatuses, as well as the synthesis of perception of the expert practitioners involved. What this further means is that it tends, unusually perhaps in this, to depend at its very core on expert communication between heterogeneous types of practitioner input. Third, its mode of production tends to work through catalysis, by which I mean that the work produced, by collaborating expert practitioners, will tend to be greater than the sum of its parts. At the same time, curiously enough, the emergent work of collaboration tends conventionally in the Performing Arts ‘marketplaces’, at least, to bear the signature of one only of those practitioners, to be seen as his or her work, and to have been funded and applauded on that basis. In the clip I have shown you, the work is identified as that of Frederic Flammand (choreographer) and Thom Mayne (architect). At no point is it identified as a signature work as far as the expertise and collaborative skills of the dancers are concerned.

In the three examples of already-made ‘choreographic’ work that I am showing today, typical collaborators have nonetheless included a choreographer, a dancer or dancers, and film-maker or makers. The work, in the next two instances we are going to look at, is oriented in time and space to an imagined spectator, where that imagined spectator, in terms of positioning and perspective, has been and is relationally-bound-in to the way the work is imagined and actually put together. Each example establishes itself in terms of an event of spectating. Not enough tends to be written about this orientation itself, or about the fact that this sort of constitutively-*relational* work is composed, and internally modulated in terms of, an anticipated spectator’s viewpoint; but this is far from saying that a spectator grasp of representation, or spectator interpretations of product have much to tell us about artistic process or artistic signature. Others have noted, quite rightly in my view, that the attempt to identify process on the basis of product involves the mistaking of (spectator) effects for (practitioner) causes.

A few moments back and with the interdisciplinary in mind I briefly but, with ‘the body’ in question, rather perversely, visited the writing of the Lyotard in order to take up a point he made in 1986 about the capacity of the ‘new technology’ of the day to seem to emancipate musical material from the traditional confines of the music disciplines, while by the same token submitting that musical material - his term - it to the mastery of the technical. The theoretical discourses of music have rarely, to date, included an engagement with ‘the body of the performer’.⁸ At this stage, now that we have seen one instance of choreographic artistry of a kind, I propose to show you a second instance of expert-choreographic work on film, *Vanishing Point*, made in the late 1990s by Rosemary Butcher. Immediately after that I want to step in a second ‘interdisciplinary’ direction in order to look briefly at certain issues raised by the writing of another French philosopher who similarly had, some observations to make, in the early 1980s, and on the basis of his engagement with their outcome, about compositional forces at work in works of art. He

explicitly asks of the painting in question, not what it might mean, but ‘How does it function?’. For my own part, I am less concerned with how the work of art might *function*, than with the question of how artistic composition might be practised in performance-making, where heterogeneous expert collaborations are constitutive to the discipline, in such a way as to have a particular impact on spectators.

Plainly the double step of drawing on the philosophical *writing* of Gilles Deleuze, where that writing takes as its focus the *paintings* of Francis Bacon, might once again smack of perversity, given the sorts of concern - with practitioner process rather than product; with a practitioner-theoretical rather than a spectator-theoretical orientation, and with a challenge to academically-popular notions of disciplinarity - that I have begun to set out. I am taking this opportunity, however, in order to make certain observations about academic writing itself, in philosophical registers, and about the extent of writing - that is, writing in terms of a particular apparatus, caught up in dominant modes of productivity - to seem to happily transcend disciplinary specificity. Unlike ‘the body’, academic writing, one might want to argue, has long established itself, rightly or wrongly, and even if it has done so implicitly, as able to transcend disciplinary difference. I want to set that contentious issue aside in the short term, however, while we look at Rosemary Butcher’s collaborative piece entitled *Vanishing Point*, made with the expert collaboration of the trained dancer, Elena Giannotti, and the independent filmmaker, Martin Otter, but ‘signed’, as far as the wider marketplaces are concerned (both commercial and academic), in terms of choreographic signature.



4. Painting, disciplinary specificity, and ‘rhythmicity’

I want to consider a number of issues raised in Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (first published in French in 1981 as a 2-volume set comprising the essay in vol.1 and and in vol.2 full-page reproductions of Bacon’s paintings), in order to return to the notion of the specificity of the artistic signature, to style, and to technique or the technical and technological. While I am interested in Deleuze’s widely established notions⁹ of concept, percept and affect, as these might apply in works of art, I am more concerned here with his notion of the rhythmic in painting, not least in the work of a painter who consistently worked on the *apprehension*, the *reproduction* of certain qualities of the *recognisably* human figure¹⁰ - and not, in my terms, ‘the body’ - caught in a quite particular space or spaces. You might agree that this same issue of apprehension, reproduction and recognition is visually thematised in Butcher’s *Vanishing Point*. It might be worth noting at this point, on the other hand, that rhythm, in

Deleuze's use of the term, has nothing whatsoever to do with a commonsensical notion of rhythm in dance. Rhythm in Deleuze on Bacon's painting would seem to be a force that can transcend the static medium of painting, and in Bacon introduces a blurring of the composite figure, within its grounding in the paintings concerned. In Brian Massumi's terms, in his *Parables for the Virtual*¹¹, rhythm is understood in terms of a retrospective ordering, in a circumstance where the ground itself 'is not a static support' but rather, 'full of movement [but] at a different rhythm from most perceptible movements occurring [in relation to it]'(10). In Massumi's 'post-deleuzianism', published in 2002, under the heading of *Parables for the Virtual*, 'ground' is



understood as 'a dynamic unity of continual folding, uplift and subsidence'.

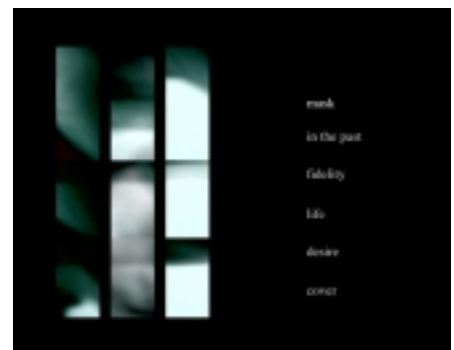
On that basis, 'measure' and 'measurement', intervene, to 'stop[...] the movement in thought [itself]', in the onlooker, '...yielding space understood as a grid of determinate positions'. This 'grid of determinate positions' should be readily graspable as far as 'dance' and 'choreography', as disciplines, are identified. If we were to ask, then, on this basis, not what *Vanishing Point* means, but how it functions, and for whom; and secondly how it was composed, by Butcher, in professional collaboration with the heterogeneous expertise of the dancer, the film-maker and indeed the sound designer, then - because of the knowledge I have of Butcher's creative processes¹² - I should want to argue that material progressively produced, in the different stages of this collaboration, with a future work in mind and eye, and literally 'at hand', is retrospectively measured and thus ordered, in both material and conceptual terms; its progressively emerging 'flow' is 'stopped', such that it 'yield[s] space, [in time], under stood as a grid of determinate positions'.

Plainly what is centred, in visual terms, is the developing, visual relationship between an eventually-recognisable human figure moving across a shifting ground - as though toward our position of spectating. On this basis, however, I must insist, however, that it is not 'the body' that we see, in any useful sense whatever, even if the work might be readily discursivised as such in spectator-specific writing. Instead, what I see is a complex figure (human and site) progressively delineating, and merging, those identifiable aspects of the complex figure, and driven, I am prepared to argue, by a choreographic command, and by the manifestation of an obedience to that command that recalls Lyotard's essay: 'Dancer approach (the onlooker)!'. Just how the various instances of expertise involved were negotiated would provide a number of different stories; what I can say here, on the basis of the evidence, is that the self-mastery of the expert performer is further mastered a number of times over, through the

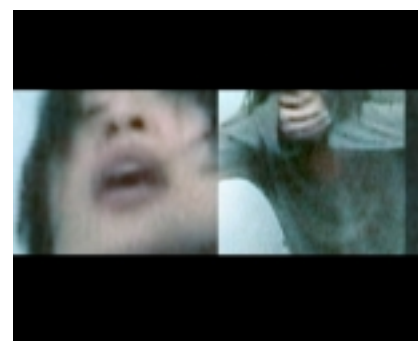
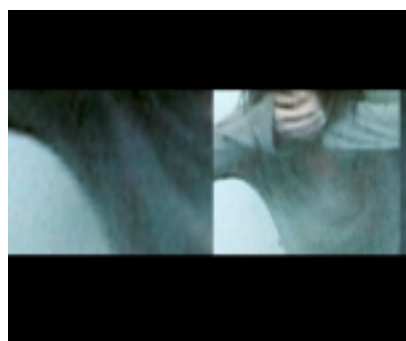
intervention of a range of different apparatuses, that I am prepared to identify as conceptual as well as perceptual and aesthetic. What I see thematised in ‘the work’, by the choreographer, *albeit retrospectively on her own part*, is - to invoke Lyotard again - a temporally-extended expert *looking at looking at the looked at* (dance apparatus, looked at through a choreographic apparatus, looked at through a filmic apparatus) with an address to an eventual spectator as destination.

In Deleuzian terms, Butcher et al would seem to have collaborated to identify, capture and hold a sensation in time, either ‘by moving toward *abstraction*, or by moving toward what Lyotard has termed the *figural*’¹³. I am going to argue that something consistent and signature-specific in Butcher’s choreographic work over the past three decades continues then to be expert-dancer-centred, where the term ‘dancer’ itself brings with it not simply expertise in a general sense, but a quite specific range of possibilities and qualities, and a taste for and disposition to display expertise for a positioned onlooker, and a taste for and disposition to participate in the production of intensities. At the same time, and I might need to repeat this, it should also be clear that while the piece we have just seen takes an expert human bodywork in a defined space as its central visual focus, the work is centred on movement in and of a landscape with figure. It is not, in that sense, body-centred, or body-representing, or body-analytic, and nor does it thematise ‘the body’ as such, any more, perhaps, than Bacon’s own work *works* by thematising ‘the body’. Instead, both thematise the fragility and complexity of looking (expertly), and expertly figuring *for an other looking*.

My argument here is that the expert bodywork in *Vanishing Point* is centred in the shot precisely in order to draw attention to what holds it, that is, to the patterns of rhythmic movement, that show, in turn, relation, movement, interruption, and the momentary coalescence that means that an onlooker seems to perceive, ‘in th[e] sensible complex of time and space, ... a form of a recognisable object’. Now, I am going to proceed to argue, with reference to earlier observations about the enigma and the technical, that the filmic apparatus, brought through expert collaboration with Martin Otter, the independent filmmaker, has actually better enabled Butcher, as professional choreographic artist, to sharpened and render more complex her ongoing fascination with the movement of the human figure contained. The collaboration, indeed, has technically expanded her imagination as artist.



The third piece I want to show you, in part at least, is the outcome of a research project carried out by Rosemary Butcher under the terms of her Research Fellowship here at Middlesex. My argument is that *The Return* is openly driven by the productive



intertwining of creative, professional and research imperatives.

Its recourse to the digital seems to me to mean that through expert collaboration, it thereby meets the Lyotardian challenge of 1986 with regard both to the work of art's enigma and its mastery through technique: the work's ability to communicate 'rhythm in the face of chaos' - a Deleuzian notion - seems to me to be dependent upon digital creativity, which has enabled Butcher to render her ongoing preoccupations, and her work with the expert performer, more intense, on the basis of the mastery allowed by digital technology in the hands of an expert film-maker working in collaboration in post-production with the choreographer. The particular qualities of the techno-digital and not least its capacity to seem to hold different (choreographic) speeds and rates of movement and stillness, its capacity to fragment, to reproduce, and to hold, within a dynamic embrace, are fundamental to, and thematised by, *The Return*. Equally fundamental is expert observation, and expertise with regard to focused movement, orientated and *addressed* somewhere, to an eventual, and unknown, onlooker.



The *figuring* of human *being*, of human experience (of an enigmatic some *thing* experienced) remains true: what the digital capture would seem to have increased is the choreographer's grasp of image stuff, in terms of its successive parts, which succession can then itself be investigated. But '[t]o determine what constitutes a part', writes Daniel Smith, Deleuze's translator for *Francis Bacon*, 'the imagination must have at its disposal a constant, or at least common, unit of measure'. If the most ancient and widely accessed unit of measure has tended to be the human body, and if Butcher's work consistently uses that measure in her positioning of the dancer in space and time, and in relation to spectating, it remains the case that her work does not examine, and nor does it thematise

'the body'. Rather it might be said to examine human measure - and sensation and perception - themselves.



5. Conceptualising *sensing*: toward a logic of expert practice

Whereas Lyotard was reconciled in 1986, then, to the necessary enigma of the work of art, and noted that that work of art nonetheless took technique as constitutive, Gilles Deleuze on the paintings of Francis Bacon was rather more concerned with what has been called a 'logic of sensation'. You may or may not be familiar with Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which has had a key impact on the work of Gilles Deleuze, who is notorious, in turn, for borrowing the notion of becoming, from Bergson, and from Spinoza his 17thC focus on what the latter identified as 'the body', not in terms of its objectness, rather in terms of its capacity to enter into relations of movement and rest.

As various Deleuzian commentators have observed, the Spinozan 'the body', taken up again with a passion in the 1970-1980s in Performance Studies, was not an object as such, but a matter of transition: the body's being lies in transition, and '[e]ach transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected' (Massumi 15). In this sense, and on the basis of the need for this sort of qualification, the term 'the body' itself seems to me to be infelicitous: the noun or nominalised term plus the definite article has nothing arbitrary about it whatsoever.

Others have written about an historically-specific shift, in Ancient Greek, from a process-centred language to a noun-centred language, suggesting that scientific writing, of the period, preferred the synoptic power of nouns, naming and designation, to the dynamic power of verbs or process words; the use of the definite article 'the', encourages generalisation, universalisation, physicalisation, as well as abstraction. Together nominalised terms encourage an objectification of what they name, and it is in so doing that they map out a world of politely distanced and effectively mid-shot spectating, as distinct from a world of practitioner participation. Brian Massumi has suggested a shift from 'the body' to 'a body', yet the point I have sought to make, thus far, is that the expert practitioner's bodywork is that of a named and expert *some* body, observed by a second somebody; and that far from objectifying her, what the engagement practised by Butcher and Otter, working in tight collaboration, produces is something akin to recognisable 'traces of life observed.'

I wondered earlier what the difference might be between signature in the work of the expert practitioner, and style, and something touching on this issue may lie in my urge to challenge the Deleuzian dictum that '[g]reat artists are also great thinkers, but they think in percepts and affects rather than concepts'. I have always been anxious about this writerly dogmatism, for the simplest of reasons which is that while I am happy to agree that artists produce, especially through expert collaboration, in those works that they make public, something that might be identified in terms of 'aggregates of sensation', overseen by a logic of sensation, this is far from meaning that they are incapable of 'thinking in concepts'. One might in addition wonder as to the connection, in Deleuze in the early 1980s, between his term 'thinking', and an expert practitioner's *doing*, in making work, and the work that is the outcome of that doing. It might well be the case that Deleuze as expert writer-philosopher has persisted in

mistaking the production of writing in a limited range of registers for conceptual thought - or has taken the writing as evidence that thinking has occurred.

Certainly where the making of the work depends on collaborative process, and it is worked through a number of progressive stages, it would seem to me to be curious to argue that the collaborators were not able to 'think [and speak] conceptually'. In my experience the conceptual, in that situation, is articulated notionally, as far as speech is concerned, in relation to the expert task at hand. The Kantian formula for the object-form, glossed by Smith in his introduction to Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*, operates in these terms: 'I think myself and in thinking myself I think the object in general to which I relate a represented diversity' - i.e. the predicates that are attributed to the object 'or the pure a priori concepts of the understanding'. My own argument is that this formulation might need to be rethought and repositioned, in the context and situations of expert practice, from that moment when practice-theoreticians begin to take expert practices, rather than thought 'itself', as central to their preoccupations.

My own impression is that artistic signature, 'in the work', has something to do, in fact, with an ability not merely to 'think in percepts and affects', not merely to identify and intrude visual or other predicative (as in 'predicates') qualities 'in the work'¹⁴; nor merely to produce material realisations which can be viewed as aggregates of sensation, but assemblages that are themselves likely to trigger an extended temporal - perceptual and affective - engagement in an onlooker-addressed, while also operating as a complex trigger to a conceptual elaboration in a targeted onlooker that the work, in so triggering it, has no need



itself to elaborate.

6. Between expert 'sensing', and 'measure' (both quantitative and qualitative)

What I want to borrow from Gilles Deleuze on Kant's *Critique of Judgement*,¹⁵ not least when Deleuze was writing about the painting of Francis Bacon from the perspective of what he termed three fundamental rhythms found in Bacon's paintings, are the notions of *measure*, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, and judgement. Deleuze raises the notion of 'combinatorial variability', in an artist's work, which combinatorial variability tends to seem, after the event of their production and exposure to

an other, to run ‘across’ the works, in which one can also identify a recurring engagement with certain stable components, some of which might be identified as enigmatic, and some of which might be identified in terms of mastered technique. In Bacon’s work, rather than focus on a hackneyed notion of the painterly representation of the [human] body, Deleuze identifies three basic components: ‘the Figure, the surrounding fields of colour, and the contour that separates the two - which taken together form [what he identifies as a] “highly precise system”’. But the Figure, in the surrounding fields of colour in the paintings, is not accounted for in Deleuze’s writing in terms of its bodyness; instead, it is accounted for as ‘the form that is connected to a sensation’.

If then in Bacon’s paintings it tends to be ‘the human body that plays this role of Figure’, it does so ‘as the material support or framework that sustains a precise sensation’ (xiii), and not in terms of its capacity to represent. How the Figure in the fields of colour can also be perceived to function is as a measure of rhythms - ‘active, rising, or diastolic [or decontractive] rhythm and a passive, descending, or systolic [or contractive] rhythm’. It might also be worth noting Deleuze’s interest in Kant’s observation that “[a]ll estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature’, including the human body, ‘is in the last resort aesthetic (i.e. subjectively and not objectively determined)’, on which basis that estimation is open to considerable variation.

Because that measure is subjectively determined, it is subject to constant evaluation and re-evaluation, and is therefore ‘in *constant variation*’, as much in the apparently static and ‘objectual’ artwork of painting, as it is in the dynamic choreographic work of Butcher. ‘The unit of measure varies in each case depending on the thing to be perceived, just as the thing to be perceived depends on the chosen unit.’ ‘From the viewpoint of aesthetic comprehension’, Smith notes, with implications for the issue of composition in the art work, ‘I am continually in the process of changing my unit of measure according to my perceptions’. Deleuze, then, ‘describes this aesthetic comprehension of units of measure’, from which I would myself add that it operates in similar manner in aesthetic *composition*, where once again it uses units of measure, as ‘the grasping’ not so much of a being or an object, but rather as ‘the grasping of a rhythm’. If, in Deleuze’s understanding, this grasping seems to ‘takes place [in painting at least] *without a concept*’, it may turn out to be the case that the notion of ‘concept’ for Deleuze as (professional) philosopher-writer, is too narrowly defined in grammatical terms - that is, in terms of subjects named and variously predicated. As a consequence I have added the words ‘in painting at least’ to the last sentence quoted from Deleuze and the disciplinary expertise and way of seeing and production that are his own. My perception is that a number of different logics operate, in the collaborative processes in the work of Butcher, and that wherever they operate between different modes and types of expertise, between different expert practitioners, the conceptual is not left to chance, but is necessarily negotiated.

I have already indicated that in the work of Butcher as artist-researcher, at least, Butcher’s compositional process occurs in stages, and engages collaboratively with different types of expertise in other practitioners, at those different stages; it is also the case, where she is working at the productive interface between dance, choreographic and digital technologies, where the latter are

in the hands of another expert, the fact of transfer itself between media signals a need, in the practitioners themselves, to thematise their material, as well as to feel and anticipate its affects and effects. In the case of Butcher's expert dancer, Eun-Hi-Kim or Elena Giannotti, the starting point is an ongoing shared enquiry into other works, often literary or photographic, or exhibition-based, in which Butcher recognises what I would describe as a schematic equivalence between something she wants to produce in the future, and may well have a commission to produce, which involves an other's experience of something observed expertly over a period of time. Butcher thematises and begins to re-schematise what has been sensed in this engagement, but she does so through expert practice, multi-dimensionally and through multi-schematisations, and not at all then in the sorts of elaborations preferred by the philosopher-writer. In the work, Butcher tends to draw on the work of a dancer, in a landscape, to choreograph an experience, which might be argued, to some extent, to match - schematically, I'd suggest - an experience in another onlooker.

7. 'Measure' and Rhythmicity

Smith observes (in 2003), then, of Deleuze's enquiry into Bacon's painting, that '[b]eneath both the measure and the units' which the measure marks out, 'there is rhythm'. In this sense, 'concepts are *metrical*': concepts include measure; and inasmuch as concepts are metrical, 'they give one the beat', they allow something to be marked out; 'but beneath the concept', Smith writes, 'there is the rhythm'. 'Rhythms are always heterogeneous, we plunge into them in a sort of exploration'. '[E]ven if [the choreographer has] a concept', then, he or she does 'not yet have the rhythmicity of the things which are subordinated to it. ... Beneath [the choreographic] concept[ual]' – in my adjustment to this text, in my attempt to test how it works in terms of the collaborative composition that interests me here – 'one always finds rhythmic blocks or complexes of space-time,... ways of being in space and time. The foundation of perceptual synthesis is aesthetic comprehension' and composition, 'but the ground on which this foundation rests is the evaluation of rhythm' (xv-xix). On this sort of basis, the choreographic measure, in performance-making, is not 'the body', but rather the expert and dynamic interface work, always to be forged anew, between the concept, the expert input of the other collaborators, the foregrounded bodywork of the dancers, and the 'evaluation of rhythm'.

On the basis of this sort of instance of expert collaborations, any analogy to be made between emancipated 'musical material', observed by Lyotard in 1986, and a 'performance material' similarly emancipated in 2006 through the intervention of filming and digital manipulation, would be overly reductive precisely because of those differences first in the time and state of technological access, and second, in terms of disciplinary specificities within the collaborative compositional processes. Deleuze attempts, in his work on Francis Bacon, to unpick the enigma of signature, and in order to do so he envisages, in the work, accretions and layering, where the one layer has a rhythmic relation to the others. 'Measure' is both quantitative and qualitative, and takes into account both concept and unit of materiality. The choreographer-film-maker measures, consistently and repeatedly, with emerging material in view, and on this basis, selects, combines, and signs the work. That measure, in the case of expert

performance-making, takes into account the positioning and perspectives of an eventual spectating, and makes decisions on the basis of that destination, and that address.

8. The technical and the human-enigmatic: towards interim conclusions

I propose to move toward a conclusion here by quoting further not just from Deleuze but from Manuel Delanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002). Smith has noted, via Kant that concepts are *metrical*' and thus 'they give one the beat'. Working simultaneously with that measure 'there is the rhythm'. As I have indicated, '[r]hythms are always heterogeneous, we plunge into them in a sort of exploration' a necessary exploration because 'even if [the choreographer were to start the work on the basis of] a concept' it would remain the case that she does 'not yet have the rhythmicity of the things which are subordinated to it'. If at this point I attempt to take a practitioner process, rather than an expert spectator-writer perception, into account, then I get something like this: 'Beneath [choreographic] concepts one always finds rhythmic blocks or complexes of space-time', linked to ways of being in space and time. The foundation of perceptual synthesis is aesthetic comprehension' – or collaborative composition, if we start with the expert practitioner - 'but the ground on which this foundation rests is the evaluation of rhythm' (xv-xix).

I want to return briefly to the notion of the knowledge status of processes in expert artmaking: when Rosemary Butcher as choreographer, Eun-Hi-Kim as trained dancer, and Martin Otter as film-maker bring their different expertise to the compositional task here, I am prepared to argue that the disciplinary specificity is such that what is productive, and future work-orientated in this expert collaboration between heterogeneous input, tends in the first instance to be *sensed*. It is on the basis of this expert sensing, that operates through the expert knowledge of apparatuses at work, that what emerges felicitously, is then explicitly thematised, but it is thematised, in the practitioner-context, from the perspectives of (heterogeneous) hands-on mastery. Its thematisation, in that context, is likely to remain production-pragmatic; and the practitioners are likely to communicate between themselves in terms that can be imprecise ('...a bit more like that'), precisely because they go hand-in-hand with, and to the extent that they go hand-in-hand with, hands-on procedures.

Interestingly, from the point of view of my own research, I have noted in these sorts of terms that the decisions made tend to be responsive not just to a logic of sensation, but to the operations of to what I have called *expert or professional intuition*¹⁶ - quite different in its parameters and professional focus and logic of production, from everyday intuition. These expert intuitions emerge rapidly in the context of expert practitioner processes, operating within and between the logics of production that apply, hence at the dynamic and shifting interface between the different disciplinary apparatuses. They involve expert practitioners' learning from each other's competence, expertise, and existential investment in their arts. The decision-making here, then, are neither 'other-than-rational', nor 'merely technical', nor predominantly empirical.

What remains enigmatic, as far as I am concerned, is the fact that in the cases I am concerned with here, the expert collaboration produces a multiply-sensed and multiply-calculated 'looking at a looking at the already expertly observed' - which, although it seems, as did Bacon's painting, to focus on the apprehension and reproduction of the human observed on the edge of chaos, is not, for all that, a concern with nor an enquiry into 'the body'. What the expert composition effects, as far as I am concerned, is the double production entailed in the notion of traces of a life, expertly observed and observed again, and re-constituting, thereby, an ancient understanding of the theatrical (as framed and twice-watched). Within the artistic economy that prevails, Butcher's work with her expert collaborators consistently practices, in addition, the ancient art of hypotyposis, according to which spectators seem to see more than we can see, on the basis of a (performative) triggering effected by the vivid outline or trace or impress, 'in the work' - or rather, between the work as aggregate of percepts, affects and concepts, and a viewer or listener. Hypotyposis is at work whenever spectators attribute to the figure caught up in Butcher's performance work an array of invisible qualities - e.g. 'soul', 'mind', psyche, 'purpose', even 'dance expertise' - such as might be understood in terms of 'bodyness' as *containment*¹⁷.

Such traces are performative to the extent that they encourage an onlooker to connect; to produce something *complex* in its dimensions, multi-schematised (such as the human involving its different interiorities - mind, heart, soul, being). This highly economical triggering of the multi-dimensional, on that basis, *does not need to be figured* by the artist her or himself. In the terms set out by Manuel Delanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*,¹⁸ we are dealing, through the intervention of the digital economy, a set of topological connectivities, which I would argue work to trigger in onlookers their own reproduction of what is understood by the human.

Delanda's similarly post-Deleuzian writing is attractive to me, not so much because of the mathematics, but because of his interest in what I'd call composition. In his chapter concerned with the actualisation of the virtual in space, he contrasts an object put together in an assembly line, with the component parts which apply to biological assembly. In this second group the 'component parts [are] not *inert but adaptive*'. The digital processing, which operates with considerable subtlety, allows a fragmentation where 'simple diffusion [is exploited] through a fluid medium', in the more or less certain knowledge that a viewer addressed, who has some experience of choreography and/or portraiture - and who brings what Lyotard might call a *looking at looking* - will 'bring the different parts together', for the simplest of humanist reasons which is that s/he supposes that they have been together at their source. What is operating, on that basis, is a process of measuring, quantitative and qualitative, on the part of a spectator (in the face of chaos), who proceeds by using what Delanda identifies as 'a lock-and-key mechanism to find matching patterns without the need for exact positioning' (66).

Some of those patterns, it seems to me, in this particular instance, communicate the sense of ‘rhythmicity’, in Kantian-Deleuzian terms. Both *Vanishing Point* and *The Return*, but differently, draw on choreographic perceptions of biological assembly and, I’d argue, on affects accruing to different aspects of biological assembly and fragmentation or decomposition - to which expert spectators of dance are directed by established expectations. On the basis of those established expectations - and Butcher as disciplinary expert knows this perfectly well - ‘mutations do not have to be ...[narrowly] coordinated’; and on this basis, the ‘possibility for ...experimentation’ (67) is greatly enhanced.

I would argue, to conclude, that what remains vital to Butcher’s aesthetic is what might be called the perceptual measure of the human-enigma, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The ‘edifice of synthesis’ in her compositional work with Eun-Hi-Kim and Martin Otter ‘does not [to my eye] collapse’. Instead, once again in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, the art work *stands up by itself*, by which I mean that it retains my engagement with it, for a significant period of time, in terms that are more complex than the relatively simple compositional details would seem to suggest. My aesthetic comprehension, although it is to a lesser or greater degree *tested*, in my engagement with the work, is not actually threatened.

In much-cited Kantian terms¹⁹, then, the work’s compositional measure and rhythm take me somewhere short of chaos and collapse. I am aware, nonetheless, in viewing the work, of ‘a constant risk that something that will emerge...[to] break the synthesis [or the possibility of synthesis]’. It does seem to me to be clear, from the work, and from the way in which it is judged to be ‘difficult’, that Butcher’s way of seeing has a taste for formlessness and chaos, for a certain ‘suppression of perception’; but that it is on that precise basis that what I also find in the work is the measure of the human, the germ of order, and the quiet attention to attention itself, as the means to a particular and heightened experience. Deleuze, writing about painting, from a particular moment in the 1980s, revealed ‘an aspiration...[to identify] rhythm [as a common ground]’ as well as a ‘logic of the senses’. That logic of the senses ‘is a relation between sensation and rhythm, which places in each sensation the levels and domains through which it passes’. In my argument, Butcher’s choreographic work on film, enabled by the intervention of the digital economy, emerges as a mastery of the rhythmic sensed; of percept, of affect, of measure and hence of *concept*. In these terms, ‘the body’ is no more than a lazy distraction from that aesthetic and epistemic complexity.

Endnotes

¹ K.N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

² www.OED.com/

³ F. Flammand and Thom Mayne, “Collisions”, ARTE Feb 2006

⁴ J-F. Lyotard, ‘Obedience’, *The Inhuman*, trans. G. Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, California: Stanford University Press (1988), 1991.

⁵ *Collisions*, by F.Flammand and T. Mayne, shown on ARTE Television, March 2006.

⁶ I am using this term to translate J-F. Lyotard’s ‘*dispositifs*’. It is similarly used by Brian Massumi, in his *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002

⁷ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press (1991) 1994.

⁸ A rare exception is provided by the work of Anthony Gritten, see <http://www.rncm.ac.uk>

⁹ see for example G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, 1994.

¹⁰ these 3 terms are identified as key in G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. D Smith, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press ((1981) 2003

¹¹ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002

¹² R. Butcher and S. Melrose (eds) *Rosemary Butcher: Choreography, Collisions and Collaborations*, London: Middlesex University Press, 2005

¹³ Smith in G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 2003; the reference here is to J-F. Lyotard, *Discours, Figure*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971

¹⁴ one such practice-specific or discipline-specific predicate, in Butcher's work, can be identified in terms of 'the dancer' who *moves without recourse to dance conventions themselves*.

¹⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. Meredith, Oxford University Press, 1978, cited in G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, *ibid*.

¹⁶ www.sfmelrose.u-net.com

¹⁷ indicative, here, are the sorts of qualities attributed in etymological terms to 'bodig', which I referenced in my introduction.

¹⁸ M. Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, London & New York: Continuum, 2002.

¹⁹ Kant is systematically referenced in Smith's introduction to Deleuze's *Francis Bacon*.