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MUSIC AND BODY AS RITUAL-PERFORMANCE

In this paper I want to connect different kinds of knowledge: some ideas of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, phenomenology, interactive technology, performance, music and ritual. The central idea is the concept of difference as a generative tool of thinking, doing, performing and understanding technology. This is realized through a constant exchange, a movement between these different activities: this communication is the practice of generating difference.

Connector of this idea of movement is the concept of body, considered in his variety of meanings: a physical body, flesh, an object or a concept – important is to be open to interaction. The resulting exchange can be deeply understood just with practice: for this reason this written work has to be accompanied and intertwined by a practical work and a first-person approach research. The process of learning something becomes then one opportunity to show the importance of practice and the role of the body as a decoder of technology: the moments of instability while we learn a new technology are actually the opportunity to feel the technology.

To better analyse this experience I will use a phenomenological approach to decode interactive systems in real cases and use them in my research. This exercise of closeness is realized in the act and the process of performing: there it is to find an opportunity to create this connection – the technology comes then closer to the body too, for examples with sensors attached to our skin. As a practical example I will briefly tell about my experience with the team of MotionComposer.

Interactive technology shows also the connection of body and music, something that is actually not new at all but exists since ever.

1 Gilles Deleuze, becoming performance

The act of thinking is for Gilles Deleuze a dynamic action that can be better described through movement rather than a static image of an idea. This philosophical breakdown is summarized by the word difference, understood as a generative and independent concept that makes itself. The theory of difference supports movement in the process of though and has his roots in theater and dance; for this reason I consider it a good tool for creating performance arts too – thought becomes performance.

1.1 A philosophy in movement

An idea is for Deleuze not a static image, but a generative tool, that supports the activity of thinking. So he wishes a new philosophy:

> Philosophy is no longer synthetic judgment; it is like a thought synthesizer functioning to make thought travel, make it mobile, make it a force of the Cosmos. (Deleuze and Guattari 343)

The definition of synthetic judgment includes a connection to other philosophers like Kant (Judgment), Hegel (synthetic) and more in general the whole philosophy from Aristotle until Hegel: the classical philosophy, that distinguishes the west culture.

Deleuze defines it the philosophy of Representation and Identity and provides as an alternative a Philosophy of Difference and Repetition. These ideas cannot be described in a static definition: they are concepts that have to be understood in movement. Therefore they can be combined with the

subject performance: theory and practice can influence each other. This movement of thought influences also the idea of movement in music, in dance and in technology – becoming rather than being.

1.2 *Difference and Repetition*

The work of Deleuze Difference and Repetition is a critic of the concept of representation, i.e. a history of representation in the western philosophy. He describes how the idea of representation limits our possibilities of thinking and doing. Since Aristotle difference and repetition are subordinated to the concepts of identity and representation. Difference should be thought in itself, independently from the philosophy of representation.

> *In the concept of reflection, mediating and mediated difference is in effect fully subject to the identity of the concept, the opposition of predicates, the analogy of judgement and the resemblance of perception. (Deleuze 34)*

These four characteristics of representation are the effects of difference, because they are produced by itself.

> *Opposition, resemblance, identity and even analogy are only effects produced by these presentations of difference, rather than being conditions which subordinate difference and make it something represented . (Deleuze 145)*

In the world of representation, difference is understood as the difference between objects. Thereby the identity of objects is taken for granted.

Deleuze thinks that difference has to make and explain itself and does not have to refer to something else: so it has to get free from the four properties of representation. Aristotle, Leibniz and Hegel are criticized for the same reason: the understanding of difference is limited because it has been adapted to the context of representation. For Deleuze, difference is an independent and positive concept of thinking and doing: this will be the starting point of my work.

1.3 *Body of Learning*

A body is for Deleuze a milieu of pure intensity (Deleuze and Guattari 185), an open grouping that is in continuous movement and exchange. The body can be a physical body, an object oder a concept:

> *Body for Deleuze is defined as any whole composed of parts, where these parts stand in some definite relation to one another, and has a capacity for being affected by other bodies. (Parr 44)*

This definition is very wide and can be better understood through the practice of learning. (Deleuze 46) Anna Cutler and Iain MacKenzie extend this example in order to better show the importance of this concept.

When someone wants to learn to swim, has to engage him/herself in a process, i.e. between his/her body and the body of water. For Deleuze every body has a peculiar aspect:

> *Each body has a universal aspect to the extent that it is constituted by a system of differential relations such that we can talk of how a human body embodies these relations as opposed to the manner in which these relations*

as opposed to the manner in which relations are embodied within a body of water. […] None the less, every body is composed of particular variations within the system of relations that constitute the objective idea. To learn to swim is to bring the singularities of one's own body into contact with particular depths, waves and eddies of the body of water that one enters. (Cutler and MacKenzie 53)

A third body acts in this exchange: the body of knowledge, in this case embodied by the body of the teacher. Deleuze understands the act of learning as an active practice: the knowledge is not a goal to reach or something that we receive in a one way direction, but a process, a creation of new relationships within our biologic body, that influences the interaction with the body of water.

The place of learning will only be 'found' if we go in search of the nonobjectifiable brain by creating new relationships between the three bodies involved in the learning process: organic bodies, physical bodies and bodies of knowledge. (Cutler and MacKenzie 59)

The relationship between body and mind has been already discussed by Merleau-Ponty, considering the body as the source of thinking. Although this theory is very important and revolutionary, the body of knowledge remains uninvolved in the process of learning. These three bodies have to interact while avoiding that one of them is privileged. Cutler and MacKenzie take advantage of the theory of the neuroscientists O'Shea and Singer to find a possible explanation: the brain is understood as an extended corporeal system, that interacts with its ambience.

In proposing the differentiated nature of each 'brain' that communicates with others, Singer is arguing that any knowledge of ourselves is conditioned by the prior emergence of differentiated brains that have the capacity of communicating with each other. (Cutler and MacKenzie 65)

What Singer calls communication, is for us the process of learning: the three bodies learn while they exchange their differences. As this interaction is a continuous exchange, the emerging knowledge is not a state to reach but is something produced by the process of learning.

2 Technology of movement, perception and ritual

The concepts in movement of Gilles Deleuze are going to be used together with a few interactive technologies that allow the human movement to generate or influence music. A phenomenological approach will also be very useful in order to analyse the technological extension of the human body and put it in relation with the ritual.

2.1 Phenomenology: body as a unstable source of knowledge

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of subjective experience and consciousness. In my work, phenomenology is a very useful way of understanding what technology offers: often a great way to expand human perception, though lacks sometimes of an easy way to access to this information. The phenomenological approach can render

some complex concepts easier and some events more readable: the body can be understood at this level as a source of intelligence. Another advantage of phenomenology is that gives voice to deeper perception and personal experience, that otherwise would be not involved in this process or just seen as not or less relevant.

Instability, a typical quality of the body, is the starting point of this process because just in this way we can appreciate the limits and the possibility of technology in its very use. The corporeal level becomes then very central because it is the opportunity for a transformation of how we use and understand technology. Susan Kozel appreciates this unstable quality, this formlessness that Merleau-Ponty already investigated:

> *This describes digital media, particularly imagery and sound, which often follow a dissolution and a redevelopment of form when they are rendered interactive. Since they exist in a constant state of transgression and restoration of shape, they cannot hold onto a fixed notion of form, or to a fixed point in space. The same is true of the body when it is represented in media, but also when it exists in entirely physical space: bodily shape gives way to bodily shape in our lives, and despite our materiality, physical states are fleeting and unsustainable. The human body simultaneously belongs to us and escapes us to the point that it becomes an ever-shifting thing at the same time as it is one's body.(Kozel 47)*

This implies a connection of philosophy and body work, that smooth down the boundaries between technology and body: a way to integrate two apparently separated concepts like mind and body, to give value to subjective experience but at the same time

consider the cultural and social role of the body.

2.2 Rituality

The drifting away from a unitary religious common context that is symbolic of the 20th Century's new approach to art is epitomised in Nietzsche's well known statement God is dead. Yet only God is dead; spirituality is not and contemporary art thrives in this Godless void – taking on the task of a new form of spiritualism. Susan Sontag proclaims

> *Though no longer a confession, art is more than ever a deliverance, an exercise in asceticism. (Sontag)*

The practice of performance during the Avant Garde period at the beginning of the 20th Century and then later in the 60s and 70s became more and more ritualized (Jappe). Artists such as Marina Abramovič and Joseph Beuys played with the re-use of traditional symbology; taking inspiration from old social rites they juxtaposed these against the context of the modern society. Furthermore the influence of both oriental philosophy and religion helped contemporary art developing ways of communicating through not saying – this is exemplified in works such as John Cage's 4'33".

The connection between rituals and performances have been studied by humanists such as Richard Schechner who analysed traditional ceremonies in order to find new ways of expression for the theatre. Conversely anthropologists have analysed ceremonies and rituals as though they were performance: the book The Performance of Healing edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman clearly shows this connection, presenting different kind of healing

ceremonies and evaluating their performative potential.

Being body perception a basic element of every ritual, I want to connect and discover the augmented knowledge given by technology in a ritual context. The rituality of interactive technology resides in the understanding this expanded body, this cyborg (Haraway): getting closer (Kozel) to our flesh, body and also technology. This can be done taking advantage of the theories that I described in the previous chapters together with a practical situation.

2.3 Technology: Motion Capture, Xth Sense, Electromyography

Motion Capture is the process of recording the movement of objects or people. I have used this technology with the software Eyecon that allows a great spectrum of possibility of interaction. One can creates fields of different sizes and different kind of sounds that for a dancer/performer can be a limit or an extension, reshaping their bodies in order to perform and create music.

Another kind of Motion Capture technology, that has been lately quite famous is the Kinect camera. Kinect is the hardware of the Gameconsole Xbox 360 that allows to use the body as a control interface. The peculiarity of this camera is the possibility to track objects and humans in three dimensions and to recognize human shapes.

Both systems have been in used in my work "A Performance without Organs". The ideas of Deleuze already influenced this work, using difference as a generative tool for movement, music and technology. Though the focus of that performance was about the Body without Organs, used as a practice of interaction of different kinds of arts.

In the current case I want to concentrate on the concept of difference and how it can be realized in practice, how difference can explain and generate itself and how to show this process. Difference wants to become the recurring pattern of this work.

In order to do that it is essential to use a phenomenological methodology, that can take into account direct experience and deep perception. The broad and cryptic concept of flesh of Merleau-Ponty will be then central, offering the needed connection with technology:

Flesh is my body, is others' bodies, and is the space between bodies; it comprises things, organic and nonorganic. (Kozel 34)

For this reason I consider important to use also different technology that allows a deeper relationship with the body, creating a more direct connection with flesh – a closer (Kozel) relationship of human beings and technology. Two sensors will be particularly relevant in this context:

• *Xth Sense a biophysical interactive that can record the sound of muscles and use them as a source of interaction*

• *Electromyography (EMG), that involves the study of the electrical signals associated with the activation of muscle.*

2.4 The example of Motioncomposer

Since one year I am collaborating with MotionComposer, a project that aims to turn movement into music using the technology of motion-tracking for people with disabilities. The creators of MotionComposer are the dancer and choreographer Robert Wechsler and the general manager Josepha Dietz.

Robert has been working with interactive technologies since more than 20 years. I am a musician and programmer for the company.

In November 2011 I prepared some music for an interactive installation of the festival Cynetart in Dresden. The team of MotionComposer was also there, doing a workshop with people with different disabilities. So I had the possibility to get in touch with them and I was fascinated by their work: people who could never do music in their life were now able to interact with this art, the smile on their faces was very touching. After the workshop I got to know Robert Wechsler and Josepha Dietz, hoping for a future collaboration. For me was interesting to work with the co-creator of Eyecon, Robert Wechsler and understand the motion tracking technology from a very practical point of view. I also liked the idea of using this technology not just for performances, but also for more tangible purposes.

What I find very interesting of this project is that the approach to interaction is very intuitive. Usually a musical instrument is shaped on the capabilities of a normal person. Motioncomposer turns the tide and rewrites this pattern radically: every body is able to make music and to make it special thanks to her individual valuable features. Instead of using specific gestures – that are usually based on some corporal requirements – to control the music, Robert has preferred an intuitive way of using the movement as a sound experience.

On one hand it can sound a bit outdated: nowadays technology can offer low-cost but quite precise gesture recognition. The explanation is that the body does not work as the mind: movement involves shifting of weight, rotation, making big or little movement, basically feeling and experiencing the body; the goal is not to find a formal language between body and music. What really matters is to find a way to connect the feeling of the body

moving, together with the act of hearing music. This way of understanding interaction fits very well with Susan Kozel's theory of closeness: we have to learn to feel the closeness of our body and technology, in our case passing also through music.

The disability becomes then an opportunity and not a limitation. It opens space for a different understanding of the body: both the physical body but also the body that is created through the interaction. This allow a synesthetic experience that extends the boundaries of our movements into the space that we live and enrich the understanding ourselves. This is something that we have to learn, using the body as a source of intuitive knowledge: this is what the Body of Learning explained in Paragraph 1.3 means.

2.5 The Body-Music connection: back to the ritual

The connection that is created by body movement and music allows a new experience, both for the performer and the spectator. On the other hand dance and music have been always present in every cultures and often understood as one thing: some languages have even just one word for both activities.

The closeness of this two practices makes clear how technology deserves also a new understanding, based on feeling and not just on intellect. My aim is then to create a special, ritual connection between body, technology and the process of learning: a way to create difference, to feel and not just to understand.

My work aims to show the importance of this relationship and find new way to feel the body, technology and music. That means also a reciprocal learning that develops every ability without focusing on just one practice but interacting with the relative knowledge. This process of learning is a movement of

the thought, a practice of the body that the mind can learn.

Does interactive technology bring us back to our body-mind connection?

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