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Signalling – at the molecular level

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Abstract

This text accompanies my performance piece at the exhibition, Hyphen – between art and research, in March 2019 at the Ambika P3 gallery. As with any other space, when entered, Ambika P3 becomes tangible in its relation and affectivity to both time and mattering. During the performance, the visible and audible specifics of the site become experiential through the diffraction of words and movement, intellect and sense, into contiguity. Throughout and beyond this text, movement practitioners engage with each other and the room, each from their perspective. Wearing e-textiles by the interface designer Gabriela Guasti Rocha, the performers will bring forward a normally imperceptible acoustic layer when moving through the space. Fitted with wireless transmitters, these costumes pick up buzzing sounds that are elicited by the interference of motion. The combination of these noises sparked by movement, together with speech, aims to underscore that thought and action emerge in their interference with the layers and diffractions of their surroundings. The unanticipated, simultaneous surfacing of various forms of knowing (in moving, speaking, listening) addresses motion as multi-layered. It levels this processual interweaving of what is commonly understood as antagonistic—theory and practice, body and mind, self and other—towards an interpretation of complementarity.

Keywords: intra-action; knowledge; matter; molecular; movement; non-human; performativity

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'signalling - at the molecular level', performance featuring the INTUERI e-textiles by Gabriela Guasti Rocha

The text you read here is intended to be listened to while many other processes interfere. As such, it is based on an associative, performative way of thinking. In fact, the playful transgression of borders, as they are considered between theory and practice, or mind and body, is intentional. These borderlines between seemingly distinct fields can be thought of as being much more permeable, rather than allocatable in the sense of strict separations. It may thus be helpful to take up a different point of view, and for this I suggest a perspective at the molecular level.

Molecules are the smallest particles from which identifiable bodies are made. By themselves, molecules are important elements for the establishment of all living systems, but as they are so small, their movement is hard to track. As such, despite the effectivity by which incited molecular affects successfully inscribe their effects, their movements can often only be speculated upon. A pathway this essay nevertheless attempts to follow by using the metaphorical meaning of molecular movements. My intention is to accentuate the unforeseeable affects and interferences that either the particle combinations of physical movement, or the molecular fractions of noise and sound, may elicit. The ludic mode of this text further allows it to jump from micro to macro, as well as vice versa.

Each reader takes a different position, literally and metaphorically. Understanding emerges from slightly

different connotations that form specific memories, so that each person has a distinctive perspective. I would like to ask you to integrate all the obstructing circumstances, all these unforeseen and unpredictable molecular (ex)changes that happen while you read, with some awareness. They orient the unique way this text gets integrated into your experience, forming your empirical knowledge of this reading. In a way, I argue against method, as there is no clear methodology, but rather something like a *meshod*. In this world things are meshing up. Interfering, like when singing whilst walking … aaaahahaahh. You might get up and try to make a sound like that – aaaaahahahaa ……. aaaahahahaa. Then walk and let the diffraction between the movement of air and the motion of steps happen. Most likely you will have done this in your childhood—just for fun.

And yet, despite this meshing up emerging from 'interference' and diffraction, things still appear as singular. Considering the self as unique does not mean we are one. Any method of becoming singular is based on, and only possible through, a sensing established by an inherent multitude. It is within cells, microbes, and bacteria where movement is much less perceptible, that multitudes have their foundation. These are the molecular bodies of knowledge, which then may be acknowledged as forerunners proofing the knowledge of bodies.

The Human however, as a much bigger assemblage, barely thinks of the body. Physical functionality is taken for granted and movement abilities assumed as given. Once an adult, at least in this version of mammals, the human scarcely tests out her possibilities anymore. Forgotten are the infant's endless efforts of trial and error until one step leads to another. Yet it is the toddler's relentless desire to move that builds the foundation of an adult's movement through walking.

My cat is quite familiar with human limitations. Usually she enjoys showing me her pathways through the neighbourhood. But she has given up the idea that I will ever follow her to assess the scents in the neighbouring gardens, or to climb up that pole to explore some fleeting sparks of light reflected by a piece of metal underneath the roof of the house. Lately, after becoming hurt she hid herself. Pain very obviously marked her body, limited her motility.

Something similar happened to me when I recently broke the middle toe in an excessive training movement. The workout was an exploration into 'what a body can do'. Often, the body only gains actuality when it becomes a problem. And if paralysed by illness or accident, it turns into a hindrance, or ultimately a corpse. Yes, humans will end in this way, as other mammals do, but it is not the end of motion. Motion seems to be all around.

The way in which a body can move is also always culturally informed. Living in what is regarded as enlightened socialisation defines the body's possibilities through constraints. Yet this cultural conditioning often demarcates nature as outsider and declares shape and skin as strict border. A physical form providing an outline that discerns the body from the environment and segregates the human from her impact on nature. In that specific cultural definition, certain differential abilities and looks have been rated as other and not belonging. Further non-human beings and matter, as well as some humans even, are regarded at least in some sense as being of a 'different nature'. This bifurcated thinking about different types of nature does, in fact, not allow any living organism to strive. In referencing Alfred N. Whitehead, Bruno Latour concludes that 'being an organism means being the sort of thing whose primary and secondary qualities—if they did exist—are endlessly blurred. Since we are organisms surrounded by many other organisms, nature has not

bifurcated' (Latour 2005: 227).

Skin is not a sealing cover. It is permeable and in frequent exchange with its environment. Humans, as other animals, rather may be regarded as hosts. The playwright Heiner Müller has suggested that the human animal rather should be considered as a microbial 'pub', as a place that fosters nurture and exchange for up to a thousand or more different microbes. Considered from this perspective, the central position through which the humans locate their own unique self is not a sustainable one. Bacterial microbes influence our bodies and thus how we feel and behave towards our immediate surroundings. In recent research it has emerged that these bacteria even influence our thoughts by way of human habits—for example through the way meals are combined.

So what can a body do if it is not delimited and seen as a container? If it is not regarded as something that just takes in, but rather has inside-out reversing abilities? This is how the researcher Annemarie Mol writes about the gut and its relation to food intake. From Mol's perspective the gut turns into an internal outside, directly in touch with the surroundings. The nut or grape, still whole whilst outside, once swallowed becomes a mush within seconds. And with the help of bacterial hosts, our ignored friends, nutrients are made available.

Corpo-reality is barely considered as a possibility of knowledge foundation. But what if we leave Descartes' 'seer in the box' behind and forget about Kantian correlationalism? The latter, and perhaps also the former, assumes that we only think or gain knowledge through appearances. That we are never moved or touched by things in themselves. Yet wouldn't that mean that we never really can know anything—especially anything new? As things only come into existence within this circle of representations, the brain then is considered that box that makes up the mind.

The digestive system, due to its neuronal sensitivity, is sometimes called the second brain. So, what if the 'first brain' has outside-in-taking qualities comparable to those of the gut? If it is also, in a much more direct way, extended to the external, and can indeed get in touch with non-represented and unknown things? What if the brain's affectivity further reflects and adds current sensual input, yet is constrained or bolstered by its current climate? A climate that impacts in a similar latent way as that of the gut's bacterial scenario of multitude. This hints towards a certain importance for how the brain is nurtured or ruptured by prior in-takes of affectivity. In this regard thoughts appear dependent on the brain's climate, and the sensations which transport them as comparable to the bacteria that produce the ambience within the gut. Does that mean that thoughts can be influenced through their impact on synaptic connectivity when nourished the right way? Is movement sustaining and nurturing this? Can a sensation ignited by the experience of movement change thought? Would physical experience of yet unthought possibilities therefore change the limits of what we regard as thinkable? In short, are thoughts—like bacteria—dependent on the palpable climate? This would speak for the quality of motion, rather than its extent or spectacularity.

The idea of correlation between movement and what a body can do or think is not one that resides on the assumption of competition or ableness. On the contrary it is built on the diversity of possibilities, of bodies, environments, on the effect of experience. Movement is manifold, it is different each time, and for each body. Rather decisive, thus appears to be the support of multitude. Inclusion as well as exclusion here really matter and affectively reverberate on many levels. Looking at it from a molecular level, the meshing, the interfering of diversity that fosters immunity is already there, manifesting co-constitution as foundational.

There is
no planetary time.
There is
only rhythm and phases.
There is
a silence in motion.

A constant moving:
Circular,
yet not closed.
Spiral,
yet not leading somewhere up or down.

There is motion
in still-stand.
Motion is the only constant.
Around it – is
silence, nothing else, as
a different less perceptible motion.

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