

**Learning to Derive. Financial Moves and Attentional Gestures in the Ecocidal Maelström »**,  
*Movement Research Performance Journal*, ed. Marten Spanberg, New York, n° 51, mai 2018, p. 54-68.

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## **Learning to Derive. Financial Moves and Attentional Gestures in the Ecocidal Maelström**

Movement research revolves around one basic question: in which measure can one say that bodies *move*, instead of saying that they *are moved*? This could be seen as a philosophical question, belonging to speculations about metaphysics and ontology, disqualified long ago. But it is indeed a very concrete question, which—even if generally unacknowledged as such—haunts virtually all of our discourses in social sciences. Although this is a question that Performance Studies are probably better placed to address than any other field of inquiry, I will approach it from a somewhat lateral perspective, provided by the recent upsurge in Attention Studies, revisited here through Randy Martin’s attempt to theorize a “social logic of the derivative” (2015).

### **The Saturnian Gaze**

All kinds of things move in the universe. Usually in circles or ellipses, but not always. Along the way, bodies form, coalesce, split, clash, collapse, merge, vaporize. Were we to visit Sun Ra and his joyful Arkhestra on planet Saturn, we would see all kinds of things moving on the surface of planet Earth, along a series of rhythms that would soon appear massively predictable. Four-wheeled devices display a daily movement of back and forth between city centers and suburbs. In the Northern Hemisphere, they tend to follow longer trajectories every seven days or so. In the summer, bodies flow towards beaches; in the winter, towards mountains. Stadiums and concert halls get filled and emptied according to fairly stable patterns throughout the years. Observed from Saturn, this collective dance of daily, weekly and yearly movements must seem remarkably harmonious.

Experienced from the inside of traffic jams, it seems less so, no doubt. And yet, watching from close-by a pedestrian while she crosses the relentless flow of bicycles and mopeds on a major Vietnamese boulevard, or following a walker make his way through the thick moving crowd of a major subway hub in Tokyo, Paris or New York, may give the same impression of a well-oiled and well-rehearsed choreography—where incredibly few participants end up breaking each other glasses and nose.

It would be ludicrous to decide in a strictly binary and exclusive fashion if such bodies *move* or *are moved*. Belying their names, “automobiles” do not move by themselves. Up until recently and maybe for a few more years, they needed a driver. This driver herself, if asked about where and why she was taking the road, would most of the time invoke some form of “obligation” (to go to work, to bring the kids to sport practice, to buy stuff to fill the fridge, etc.). The manner, as much as the purpose, of her movements would also involve much more than individual will and subjective desires. All Brits drive on the left, without even thinking about it; men gather and walk on the central boulevards of Algerian cities at the end of the day; millions of French families escape from the inner cities on the week-end; our going to beaches and concerts is largely gregarious. Seen from Saturn, we tend to move in (homogenized or distributed) herds. Our bodies *are moved* by such collective movements, which cannot be explained on a strictly individual basis. Social logics are at work from within our intentional motions.

## Over-Driven in a World of Super-Objects and Distributed Agents

Should we part from Sun Ra's company and land back into our incarnated earthly bodies, as neuroscientists analyze their attentional behavior, we would question even further the part our intentional agency plays in such movements. Yes, every one of us “decides” to drive a car, take a walk, plan a week-end outing or a summer vacation, but the way our body actually moves in order to actualize such decisions is remarkably different from our traditional conception of attentiveness. As Jean-Philippe Lachaux (2011) has explained, it is as reductive and misleading to identify intention with attention as it is to identify attention with concentration. When we drive our car in the evening traffic, we do not concentrate on the road. As a matter of fact, should we be truly “focused” drivers, we would constantly run into accidents. Neither the truck in the rear view mirror, nor the car in front of us, nor the motorcycle passing us from the left, nor the city bus two cars in front of us becomes the object of our focused attention. In Kolkata as in Cairo, in Rome as on Manhattan, accidents happen miraculously rarely because drivers let their vehicle and their attention be somewhat carried by the flow of which they are a part.

As Lachaux (2015) puts it, the driver constructs a “superobject” constituted by the ceaselessly evolving assemblage formed by the surrounding bodies in motion (the truck behind, the car in front, the moto on the side, the bus ahead). The traffic flows as long as we feel ourselves being a moving part in this complex moving configuration. And in order to remain intuitively attentive to this collective configuration as such, we must refrain from getting absorbed by a concentration focusing on any one in particular among its components. While it seems that we *drive* our car, we are in fact *driven* by, in and over the flow—much like a surfer is borne by and over the wave. As Bruno Latour stressed on many occasion (1999, 2013), we are constantly overdriven (and surprised) by our own actions, insofar as they are part of larger assemblages which carry us well beyond the narrow purpose and limited control of our individual intentions.

But this regime of attentional overdrive is not only characteristic of gregarious behaviors immersed in collective superobjects. It is also a prominent feature of our most demanding individual performances, whether they belong to athletics, acrobatics, theatrics, dance or music. The notion of “flow”—as popularized by Czech psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1996) and as applied, for instance, by Guerino Mazzola (2014) to the area of free jazz improvisation—invites us to understand our most successful performances, less as a form of movement initiated by our individual will and sustained by our personal strength, than as a process borne by a transindividual wave of agency we precariously manage to ride upon. “I” can be credited as performing amazing gestures (as a speaker, an artist, an athlete) only insofar as “a power stronger than itself” (Lewis 2012; see also Pierrepont 2015)—usually a “we”—sets in place a configuration of movements of which I find myself in position to benefit. British anthropologist Alfred Gell (1999) has described in very general and convincing terms this “distributed agency” (1999) which manifests itself in our encounters with shamans, sorcerers, gurus, sacred rituals (in so-called “traditional” societies), as well as during art performances and through objects of art (in “modern” societies). Independently of the “author” who produced it, a painting, a photograph, a tale, a film, a song or a dance have an agency of their own, by which we are carried when we act upon them. All forms of ritualistic and aesthetic encounters rely on complex entanglements of such agencies, distributed among the various “actants” (human and non-human) involved in them—including, of course, that of their “spectators” who count among their most necessary participants.

## Attentional Movements

The more specific question I would like to discuss is the following: how are we to understand the role played by attention in such entanglements of agencies that allow a performer to override her pre-existing individual limitations? In other words: how does attention overdetermine the ways our bodies move/are moved?

A first response, at the individual level, can be constructed following Aurélien Gamboni and Sandrine Teixido's inspiring assemblage entitled *A Tale as a Tool* (2017), which invites its participants to read Edgar Allan Poe's tale *A Descent into the Maelström* as a highly suggestive and accurate modelization of our attentional behavior in times of stress. The tale narrates the horror experienced by three brothers, three fishermen who took excessive risks in order to maximize their profit by increasing their catch, making it “a regular business”—“a matter of desperate speculation, the risk of life standing instead of labor and courage answering for capital” (Poe 1846, 400)—to fish in threatening proximity to the mother of all whirlwinds, the Norwegian “Moskoe-Ström” which gave its name to the phenomenon of the maelström. Partly because of carelessness, partly because their watch broke down, failing to warn them of the perilous hour of the day, their fishing boat fails to cross the bay before the maelström forms its deadly trap, and sucks them into it.

The first brother is swept out of the boat by the first terrible wave that breaks and carries away the mast. The second brother loses all feeling of brotherly love, as he violently pushes the narrator away from the ring he was holding on to, apparently the safest remaining place on the wreck. Taken by surprise, the narrator is pressured by the centrifugal force of the whirlwind against a barrel that was attached to the side of the boat. In this hopeless position, terrified, discouraged and disheartened, he can only wait for the monstrous maelström to slowly swallow him down to his death.

At this point of the most total passivity and resignation, though, having fully accepted to *be moved* against his will towards his destruction by the whirl, the narrator writes that his moving body “could not help observing” certain physical features in the movements of the surrounding bodies. A “strange interest”, an “unnatural curiosity” pushes him from the inside, against his well understandable (and pretty reasonable) desperation itself, to pay attention and to find “*amusement* in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descent towards the foam below” (406). Attention does not result from an intention to identify, focus, analyze the trajectory of certain objects, but from an inner drive one cannot help obeying to, even against one's best judgement. This drive will soon fuel a lifesaving “art of noticing”, a condition of survival in the ruins of capitalist fishing for profit (Tsing 2015). But it starts as an uncontrollable and irrational urge to observe.

Because his body had kept a memory of the type of objects seen on the beach unbroken by the maelström, and because his irrepressible (and inexplicably joyful) curiosity pushed him to interpret the relative velocities of descent as “the natural consequence of the forms of the floating fragments”, the narrator observed “that a cylinder, swimming in a vortex, offered more resistance to its suction” (407). He thus decided to “lash [him]self securely to the water cask upon which [he] now held, to cut it loose from the counter, and [...] to precipitate [him]self with it into the sea, without another moment's hesitation” (407-408).

What we see in this tale, more clearly than anywhere else, is the intimate connection between, on the one hand, the physical movements of the objects and flows that structure and populate our surroundings and, on the other hand, the attentional movements that govern our conditions of survival within such surroundings. My attention is in large part what governs my movements, but my attention itself is governed by the surrounding movements “on which we [are] borne”. More than deciding whether we move or are moved, the crucial question consists in understanding the deeper nature and properties—the socio-natural logic—of the movements in which our body and agency is but one participant.

## **Learning to Fall**

One of the amazing features of Poe's tale is the inversion it forces us to operate between horizontality and verticality: the centrifugal force experienced in the maelström exerts a horizontal pressure that comes to challenge the downward attraction of gravity (even if the latter remains, of course, the main source of anxiety, and cause of doom). Swimmers, surfers or fishermen, we usually approach the sea as a surface on which we attempt to move horizontally, seeing the vertical movement of sinking as an equivalent of death. The tale's narrator must learn to reconfigure his senses and intellect in order to surf on the vertical wall formed by the maelström. His attention must observe and compute how the various shapes of falling objects manage to maintain a course as close as possible to horizontal circles. His choreographic challenge is to attend to a horizontal fall.

A similar challenge is at the core of the work developed by French choreographer Yoann Bourgeois (2010; Givors 2018). The dancer-acrobat proposes warm-up exercises where one person sits on a precariously balanced chair, prevented from falling only by the attention of another person pushing as lightly and imperceptibly as possible on the former person's knees; he stages trampolines in Alpine landscapes where bodies fly and fall against the background of vertical slopes; he places dancers on a suspended stage floor spinning in mid-air, with endless variations going from a horizontal to a quasi-vertical plane, challenging each participant to invent new ways to balance centrifugal force with gravity. All of such attentional experiments provide breathtaking lessons in the high art of falling. Rather than a metaphor of our slow but steady (and accelerating) collective demise in the maelström of climate change, radioactive contamination and shrinking biodiversity, Yoann Bourgeois' work can be read as an opportunity to learn how to move (towards life, love and beauty) within what moves us (towards collapse, competition and death). Here too, as in Poe's tale, we should not so much attempt to hold on to what appears as the most solid and most reassuring rock of stability (the ring anchored in the body of the boat): survival looks more likely for those who will have learned to attempt lateral moves, to observe unnoticed phenomena, to attach themselves to improbable light barrels whose shape (rather than weight or roots) promises a more hopeful gradient of horizontal fall.

## **Learning to Derive**

Before his untimely death, philosopher and dancer Randy Martin (1957-2015) has strongly helped movement research by sketching transdisciplinary theses that are likely to inspire many artists and scholars to come. In his last book—which synthesizes previous efforts ranging from the financialization of daily life to analyses of hip-hop as an inextricably physical and socio-political movement—he has suggested for instance that, following the financial crisis, the series of environmental disasters and the media whirlwinds triggered by the obsession with “terrorism”, “the financial and movement practices responded to a collapsed verticality with an emphasis on lateral mobility” (2015, 10). Such a broad and highly abstract thesis is fleshed out by a fascinating analysis of the structure and function of the (financial) derivative as an emerging form of social logic. From their original narrow definition as “contracts to exchange a certain amount of something at a determinate future time at a agreed-on price” (51), derivatives, insofar as they allow speculators to bet on anything for any duration of time, embody a much wider social logic characterized by the articulation of three types of movement.

First, derivatives “disassemble and bundle attributes of commodities, thereby removing the presumption of functionality on which the machine-like metaphor of system is based”: the most distant and apparently independent aspects of our social lives can be recombined and re-bundled in derivatives,

“without first or ultimately needing to appear as a single whole or unity of practice or perspective” (52, 62). In other words: through derivatives, any body in motion can be put in connection and proximity to any other body in motion. Second, “derivatives articulate what is made in motion, how production is inside circulation, and, as such, how to notice the value of our work in the midst of volatility” (52). In other words: derivatives embody value insofar as it constantly moves ahead of itself. Third, “derivatives work through the agency of arbitrage, of small interventions that make significant difference, of a generative risk in the face of generalized failure but on behalf of desired ends” (52). In other words: derivatives operate at the level of the micro-movements by which value flows through us, carrying us on its try-and-error iterative and circular path.

It is no coincidence if Randy Martin’s modelization of the social logic of derivatives summarizes a lot of what has been seen in the previous pages, from Lachaux’s neurosciences to Bourgeois’ choreographies. “Derivatives perform a dispossession of self and ownership. They re-sort individual entities into bundles of shared attributes and render the present pregnant with the collection of wealth needed to make the world otherwise” (78). The superobjects, whose moves are identified from Saturn as human flows, are much better explained by a micro-sociopolitical approach which computes them as resulting from an intra-action (Barad 2007) within a multifarious entanglement of distributed agencies. What is to be understood is precisely how this distributed agency is constantly altered, reconfigured, re-bundled, and along which lines of force—financial logics being of course a prime suspect when considered at the global level. We tend to move (as individuals) along the lines of force which push and pull various faces of our profiles in various (and sometimes incompatible) directions at the same time. And from an attentional perspective, global and digital capitalism can be characterized by the increasing alignment of all our human attentions on the sole finality of financial profit.

Under the increasing pressure of this global alignment, our distributed agency relies on a constantly shifting distribution of knowledge—which is fore-fronted as the prime topic of Randy Martin’s book. He summarized perfectly the attentional experience staged in Poe’s tale when he observed that “knowledge is borne not simply by agents, but among the objects in their environment” (2015, 40; see also Weinberger 2011). Our selves are borne by the information carried through us (now via the circulation of electricity through our networks of servers, PCs, smartphones, TV screens and other connected objects)—and, much more still, by the affects generated in our bodies by this circulation of information. Unfortunately for us, the way information—i.e. electricity—currently circulates within our mediarchies (Citton 2018) tends to precipitate us into the ecocidal maelström of man-induced climate change, biodiversity collapse and nuclear contamination. The industrially produced objects populating our mostly (sub)urban environments, as reflected and promoted through the lens of the currently dominating media (financed mostly by commercial advertisement), dramatically fail to “bear” the knowledge necessary for us to reorganize our individual and collective lives into more sustainable forms. Surviving this descent into the maelström requires not only other types of consumption, other types of production (i.e., other types of moves), but also other types of knowledge and, first of all, other forms of (medialized) attention.

### **D(e)iving the Drives?**

Randy Martin often reminds us of the etymology of the “derivative”, which originally expresses a form of movement: *dérivé*, in French, not only refers to “drifting” on a liquid surface that bears us aimlessly but, more originally still, to “the redirection of a flow of water, as in the bank of a river (*rive* in French)—a redirection that results in some kind of accumulation, surplus, or excess” (121). *Dérivé* refers to an overflow, a flood which literally “de-banks” a river from the natural limits that used to contain it.

It is hard, however, to resist the urge to project the social logic of the derivative onto another verbal proximity bound to contaminate it fruitfully in the mind of English speakers. A great deal of the reflections sketched in the previous sections, about the many ways in which we are moved by our (supposedly intentional) moves, is condensed in the endlessly suggestive inner resonances of the *drive*. As a translation of the German word *Trieb*—used by Sigmund Freud to name the inner (mostly unconscious) impulse that leads us to make (mostly non-intentional) statements or gestures—the drive expresses the way we are moved by affections and affects largely out of our control. But, in the civilization of the automobile developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *driving* also refers—highly paradoxically—to our capacity to direct, to lead, to command, to control our movements. Our initial question, asking in which measure one can say that bodies *move*, instead of saying that they *are moved*, can thus be elegantly rephrased as: how can one drive one’s drives?

The (somewhat drifting) considerations explored in the previous sections suggest that this (old) question may be better addressed with the help of an additional letter: the most urgent stakes raised by the performing arts within the context of our ecocidal maelström may well be to devise *in which measure one can derive one’s drives*. If the civilization of the car promoted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century led us to envision human agency in general—and politics, along with ethics, in particular—as an art of driving, our 21<sup>st</sup> century rapidly moving towards an era of driverless cars (i.e., *real* “auto-mobiles”) may push us to reconsider human agency as an art of deriving. As the regime of overdrive synonymous with mediarchic capitalism sinks us, more obviously every day, into the ecocidal maelström, we too “cannot help but observing” how the very mechanisms supposed to prevent our descent (open markets of ideas, democratic elections, parliamentary debates) dramatically fail to do so. If (ever more disquieting) fools occupy the driver’s seat, we may be foolish ourselves in concentrating our denunciation, frustration and anger on the persons of the buffoons who pretend to hold the wheel. We may be better inspired to revise the very conception of movement which commonly underwrites our treatment of politics: in the age of the driverless car, we must face the challenge of driverless government.

Here too, a detour through etymology may help: “governing” refers to the art of directing a ship by commanding its rudder, its tiller, its helm (*le gouvernail*, in French). Our economic and political systems, as overdriven by our mediarchies—which operate as “heterarchies” much more than as hierarchies or oligarchies (McCulloch 1945)—no longer respond to the central command of a central helm. The government itself, traditionally seen as the Big Mover, is increasingly moved out of its control by the meshwork of drives that animate our increasingly entangled social lives and attentions.

We may feel despair in watching our ship drift aimlessly as it initiates its mortal descent into the maelström. We certainly feel rage when watching buffoons trumpet their impotent arrogance in the driver’s seat. We could feel empowered, however, by a better understanding of the social logic of the derivative, insofar as it can help us elaborate strategies of derivation that redirect the overflow of information and affects produced by the capitalist overdrive towards more sustainable forms of life. Deriving our drives does not necessarily need individually to master them through the governing power of our personal will. More than a cult of our intentional will, it requires a culture of attentional habits. And if the performing arts have a crucial role to play in helping us deriving our drives, it is mostly insofar as they foster and sharpen a certain art of attention.

### **The Arts of Attention**

The arts of attention can be envisaged as arts of care. As a matter of survival, we obviously need to pay attention to our environments much more than we currently do. Developing an art of thoughtful action necessary to prevent our sinking into the maelström of ecocidal self-destruction requires an

effort of reflection, whose general purpose should be to redirect our local (personal) moves in light of certain general (collective) orientations, determined by the material conditions of our common survival on planet Earth. This first range of attentional arts consider our moves as seen from Saturn: collectively, we simply cannot continue burning increasing amounts of carbon dioxide, using increasing amount of pesticides and piling up increasing amounts of nuclear waste. Our local moves (turning on the switch of our air conditioner) need to be reconsidered in light of their aggregate implications, as our common circular choreography of boundless consumerism is digging the earth from under our feet. The analyses, reflections, argumentations developed for this attentional reorientation of our individual and collective moves belong to philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences (Citton 2016). Faced with the imminent (and, for us, catastrophic) “victory of the Carbon Liberation Front”, we need “an alternative realism”, not only “yet another philosophy, but a poetics and technics for the organization of knowledge” (Wark 2015, XXI). In other words: new arts of attention.

Apart from such efforts of abstraction, which attempt to reorient our behaviors by re-locating the local within its implications in more global entanglements, a second range of attentional arts focus on our sensibilization to otherwise unnoticed dimensions or nuances in our most concrete experience. These are intuitive—rather than reflexive—*arts of noticing* (Tsing 2015): they aim at refreshing our sensitivity to what is right under our nose, even if long-learned “disinhibitions” (Fressoz 2012) prevent us from being upset by the constant noise of urban traffic, or disturbed by the lingering foul smells generated by industrial production and waste. Such “receptive” arts of noticing provide a preliminary stage to more obviously “active” arts of intervening at crucial junctures of given situations—*arts of hacking* best illustrated by what Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker (2007) have theorized as “exploits”. These are punctual interventions exploiting the vulnerabilities of the various systems we live by and communicate through, in order to reorient them towards different purposes. In mediarchies, where what appears to wide audiences determines what drives individual and collective behaviors, the arts of noticing and the arts of hacking are closely linked to *arts of gesturing*, insofar as gestures (perceived) count as much, if not much more, than deeds (done).

### **Counter-Performing the Derivatives**

It is this coalescence between arts of noticing, arts of hacking and arts of gesturing that the performing arts not only “stage” but *practice*, not only “in front of” but *with* their audiences. And this is why Randy Martin’s audacious attempt to link forms of financial flows with forms of bodily moves paves the way for a better grasp of the social logic of derivatives. The level at which he situates his analysis in movement research—the level of the “kinestheme”, in parallel with the Foucauldian “episteme”—is at the same time more abstract and more concrete than what we are used to observe. He invites us (abstractly) to connect two types of movements that seem to have nothing in common, while he (concretely) reveals how—insofar as we envisage these movements as motions—they indeed display striking similarities. Like the risky investments made in financial derivatives, but also like the vital arts of attention illustrated in Poe’s tale,

the risky movements of postmodern dance, hip-hop, and boarding culture [...] all de-center bodies’ relation to their surroundings, reorienting what is up and down, prize flying low and moving laterally, shifting suddenly, in the midst of a dangerous situation in which one has placed oneself. A gap, a break, an opening allows the body to move otherwise, to seize a moment in which a minor difference prevails and accelerate through, cleaving what had once been safely apart. Releasing, dropping, verticality—moments of danger for each of these practices—suspend the mover as arbitrageur, between spaces of values, cutting into that space to leave it stitched anew with a residue of value behind. The value is both the accomplishment and the desire, the expanded sense of what is possible. (Martin 2015, 207)

The simultaneously abstract and concrete characterization of the derivative that emerges from considering what financial operations have in common with hip-hop, with contact improvisation, with ecological activism—or with the fortunate survival of a greedy and momentarily careless Norwegian fisherman—can be summarized in seven main features:

1. *Excedence by overflow*: the derivative results from a temporary superabundance of resources which pour over the banks of the present situation and explores new paths of survival or development.
2. *Speculation on the move*: the derivative operates within a moving environment, in order to adapt current moves to surrounding moves anticipated from the future.
3. *Creativity by recombination*: trading the pretense to originality for the practice of creolization, the derivative clears the way for a potentially different future, by disassembling and re-bundling attributes of the preexisting goods and situations.
4. *Perpendicularity to expectations*: the derivative generates value through de-centerings and inversions of the reference frames, fomenting lateral moves unexpected and unpredictable within centered and vertical structures.
5. *Arbitrage by iteration*: the derivative forges a path of wider recombinations through a series of iterated local arbitrages.
6. *Valuation by virality*: the derivative rearticulates future valuations only insofar as its perpendicular moves manage to contaminate other behaviors and to alter expectations.
7. *Dissolution of sovereignty*: beyond performing a dispossession of self and ownership, the derivative tends to erode and undermine most of the traditional pretenses to sovereign power constitutive of hierarchies.

Such a definition of the derivative puts it in clear continuity with the *dérive* promoted by the Situationists since the late 1950s, as well as with the social logic of difference-and-repetition analyzed by Gabriel Tarde in the 1890s and refreshed by Gilles Deleuze in the 1960s. The association may seem anti-natural and distasteful between revered anti-establishment philosophers and the reviled operations of financial sharks who caused a near-collapse of the world economy, along with lasting misery for millions of families, due to the post-2008 impoverishment and asphyxia of many social policies. And yet, the most interesting theoretical move performed by Randy Martin should be found in inviting us to investigate the (potentially positive) social implications of the (clearly calamitous) financial excesses of ecocidal capitalism.

Performance Studies can make a most vital contribution to our political debates by perforating from the inside the very notion of “performance”. While a “performing” asset is usually interpreted in the damagingly narrow sense of “profit-making” (profit for the capitalist class who invested in it), the social logic of the derivative opens up a wider field of investigation, wherein a “performing” move is evaluated by its capacity to derive a more sustainable and emancipatory future from the superabundance of the present.

It may have been foolish (and dangerous) to pretend, as claimed by modernist politics during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to sovereignly *drive the drives*. It is clearly insufficient (and equally dangerous) to satisfy oneself, as claimed by the apologists of financial capitalism, with merely *riding the derivatives*, no matter where short-term individualized profits may lead us (more and more obviously to our common ecocidal collapse). The escape from this false alternative should be seen in multiplying the attempts to *counter-perform the derivatives*—i.e., to perform perpendicular moves leading to a counter-valuation of the performance itself, now reoriented towards collective ends.



## The Collective Dance of Attention

The place of the performing arts and of Performance Studies in this collective endeavor to counter-perform the derivatives is proportional to their capacity to foster our arts of noticing, of hacking and of gesturing. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi have eloquently described the knot that ties them together, by referring to the moments in our lives when we have experienced a certain “dance of attention”, during which we were led to “think with our movement”:

Your every movement was a performed analysis of the field’s composition from the angle of its affordance for getting-ahead. Entering the dance of attention, your perceiving converged with your moving activity, and your activity *was* your thinking. You entered a mode of environmental awareness in which to perceive is to enact thought, and thought is directly relational. This actively relational thinking is also an expression of the field, but in a different mode than storytelling, poetic or not, with no immediate need for language, satisfying itself at a level with the body’s movements: expression a-bodying. (Manning & Massumi 2014, 10)

Movement research can be approached simultaneously as a study and as a performance of our collective dance of attention. It is itself a form of attention—as well as, more importantly still, of *attending*—to what this collective dance does to us, as individuals, as a collectivity, and as dwellers of a certain environment. It belongs to the arts of dwelling (Ingold 2011; Schiller & Rubidge 2014), most necessary to oppose our current ecocide, insofar as they help developing habits and forms of life sustainable within a certain habitat.

While social critique and political activism remain almost exclusively focused on the (necessary) denunciation and (impotent) lament geared towards the predatory and vampirist colonization operated by financial capitalism over our daily life and globalized markets, another form of planetarization is at work under the shiny surface of financial flows. The kinestheme of the derivative, if not yet quantifiable from Saturn, can already be traced in countless locations North and South—from the French Alps revisited by Yoann Bourgeois’ trampolines, to Prosenjit Kundu’s teaching hip-hop dance to Indian street kids (Kundu 2016), and to Laurence Ligier’s therapeutic use of dance and circus with abused girls in the Philippines (Ligier 2007). Analyzed along the lines sketched by Randy Martin, the kinesthetic resonances that unite such diverse practices can be read both as a response to the colonizing grip of globalized finance, and as a moment of the decolonizing process that progressively erodes all pretensions of sovereignty.

Of course, the disproportion between financial markets and dance companies could not be more striking, in terms of power, organization, status and visibility. And yet, well beyond the singular case of Randy Martin, an increasing number of thinkers and analysts invite us to measure a groundbreaking change which, although largely unnoticed, is in the process of redefining on a global scale what the 20<sup>th</sup> century has taught us to consider as “politics” or as “the economy”. Whether they invite us to “change the world without taking power” (Holloway 2002), whether they challenge the very notion of “political action” to favor an approach articulated in terms of pressures and gestures (Citton 2011), whether they call for a “politics of dividualism” taking stock in a form of power located “at the end of the economy” (Massumi 2015), or whether they announce a possible upsetting of the power of finance by the very logic of finance (Feher 2017), such analyses converge in rejecting the false alternative forcing us to choose between a surrender to the current triumph of neoliberalism and a nostalgic return to the conditions and promises of the Fordist era.

Learning to counter-perform the social logic of the derivative will not be easy, nor does it in any way suffice to guarantee an escape from our current descent into the ecocidal maelström. At the meeting point between social analysis, political activism and performance studies, investigating and

experimenting with the kinestheme of the derivative may provide the most hopeful way to “think with our movements”, and to introduce a promising twist into our collective dance of attention. The value of a movement research attentive to the social logic of the derivative can only be experienced from the point of view of the future if, as Randy Martin suggested, “the value is both the accomplishment and the desire, the expanded sense of what is possible” (Martin 2015, 207).

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