

Reversing Virtuality

Incipient Movement and The Virtual Matter of Embodiment

Jaime del Val - www.reverso.org

Paper of the conference presented at the Virtual Venues Symposium in Berkeley University, November 2012

The presentation will seek to introduce a new ontology of movement founded on two principles: incipency (virtuality) and relationality (affects). It will seek to reposition the term virtuality in its philosophical background as equivalent of potentiality, and connect it to an account of reality as field of forces in motion, in which movement is always potential, never fully actualised: therefore virtual.

The virtuality of movement, its incipency, is the Real, whereby actualisations are never complete, since movement has always degrees of virtuality and incipency, movement is always exceeding its actualisations. This inverts the traditional accounts of real vs. artificial, of physical vs. non physical.

The digital is not equivalent to the virtual. The virtual understood as the potential is present in both the analogue and digital realms. Understood from a perspective of movement and not from a mind/matter dualism, there is no essential difference between the digital and analogue realms. Yet one could argue that, the digital being currently linked to a tradition of control and replication-simulation, the digital is currently *less virtual* than the analogue world, less open to potentials, more actualised and foreclosed within given trajectories of control.

Matter is an ongoing process of materialisation that relies on its actualisation in form. This foundational ontological premise traverses western metaphysics since Plato, where the theory of being is grounded on the binary construction of sex: being is associated to form, the soul and masculinity, whereas non-being is associated to non-form, the formless matter of femininity, which serves as mere vehicle for the selfreplication of masculine form-being. In Aristotle it is the soul which accounts for materialisation as morphogenetic process: where matter can only become intelligible as such through form, and it is the soul which gives form to matter.

Nowadays we would say that it is emergent cognition, that projects certain formal properties and patterns onto the formless continuum of the world. So, form is not an intrinsic essence of reality, but of certain cognitive processes that tend to formalisation within collective regimes of distributed thinking, as reiterated effect of choreographies of perception.

However the non-actualised incipency of movement challenges actualisation and accounts for the fact that matter never fully materialises. This is not to be confused with disembodiment, since the body in this account is understood as field of relational forces in motion, therefore in terms of the relationality (affects) and incipency (degree of actualisation, pre-acceleration towards the not-yet-actualized, not-yet-thinkable, not-yet-

possible, virtual, potential), as extensively proposed in the work of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi.

In this ontology bodies appear irreducible to identities or information patterns, and new modes of amorphous presence need to be taken into account, where form is the effect of technologies of fixation of perception that generate an illusion of fixity in the motion of the forces that constitute reality.

Challenging the informational paradigm and its presumptions about disembodied information patterns is a crucial task to undertake from the transdisciplinary field of dance and technology, with regard to the increasing standardisation of global corporealities induced by the informational regime within Capitalism of Affects.

Movement is always corporeal and affective, and this applies both to the movement of thinking, of physical bodies, of images and digitality, or of algorithmics and informatics. The focus is therefore in exploring the affective qualities and the incipient intensities of movement, whereby a greater degree of incipency is equivalent with the move towards a non actualised differentiation, while a lesser degree of incipency accounts for a larger degree of actualisation, fixation and replication. This will account for an ethics of new media in which simulation, as reiterative, tends to the foreclosure of fields of possibility and to a negation of multiplicity (nihilism), whereas non-simulative environments have the potential for a larger degree of incipience and differentiation of bodies understood as processes of becoming.

Movement cannot be reducible to coordinates of displacement in an extensive space, we need an understanding of felt movement and its multiple non linear potentials. Indeed the very conception of space-time as linear extension is perhaps the greatest fiction and technology of control that has been articulated since the Renaissance, through techniques as the perspectival window, and the emergence of perspectival design, thinking and seeing, that still defines most of the control technologies today: a rationalised, algorithmic seeing, that places the viewer in a fictitious external position to reality: looking onto everywhere from nowhere.

But we are never outside of reality, we are always embedded in it. Our perspectives are always partial, embedded, therefore multiple, blurred and in motion, if at all we can say that we have a perspective. What is needed is to recover a sense of our being part of the world in a relational, reciprocal and constitutive process. Linearity, form and definition of focus are illusions of certain standardised forms of perception.

We have acquired a fixed position with regard to perceptual frameworks, where the perspectival window of the Renaissance multiplies itself to infinity in the ubiquitous screens and cameras of media culture and information society, structuring our seeing.

This is what the posthuman teaches us: how technologies are constitutive of what we are, of how we think, not in a deterministic manner, but in a problematic one in so far as the constitutive power of technologies is more and more concealed behind façades of fake liberation: an unprecedented regime of violence and control which is so effective precisely because it is able to disguise itself so well, where its apparatuses of affective and desire production become invisible behind the great fiction of humanism: the free will of the subject.

But affects and desires are choreographic contagions, where certain standardised affects are reproduced in the bodies through reiterated choreographies.

The greatest success of the system is in making appear control and imitation as desirable: as in Dance Central, where the competition is won by whom best imitates a standardised avatar reproducing commercial choreographies of pop music, reduced to positions recognised by the kinect system: a true military system of control that expands now to the militarisation of our affects, of our leisure, of our communications, till all of our movements are assimilated in niches of capitalization and control.

In the vision here proposed imitation-simulation is part of a longstanding 2.500 years old tradition of control that has articulated western power regimes and generated the technologies of information and globalisation, of global homogenisation, and more recently, of preemption of novelty and the capture of emergence.

But homogenisation and preemption are in radical and violent contradiction with a reality in permanent motion whose becoming cannot be anticipated: we only need to see the unprecedented planetary devastation of natural, animal and human ecosystems that results from this model of "progress".

Homogenisation, simulation and replication are nihilistic in so far as they negate the changing multiplicity of the forces that constitute life and reality. Prediction and preemption are nihilistic in so far as they attempt to capture the moving forces in networks of capitalization that both transform and devoid the movement of its openness of potential.

Some would say that structuring and predicting the world is necessary for a livable life. I would say that it makes life unlivable, except for those who benefit in the short term. But certain regimes have been able to establish it as a condition: not for a livable life, but for survival within that system.

We need a new ethics of media that radically points out the ways in which the very architecture of information technologies conceals an implicit totalitarianism of perception.

We need to develop radically new technological, technoethic paradigms that fosters multiplicity and change, rather than fixity, replication and homogenisation.

Multiplicity can never be only of the already given, the possible and thinkable, but it must incorporate in its logic the virtuality of that which is in becoming, which is not yet actualised nor thinkable, which is permanently exceeding actualisations. Multiplicity as the movement of differentiation towards the unthinkable and impossible.

Politics of irreducibility

Contemporary dominant technocultural paradigms (computational and mechanical, digital and analogue), based on the presumption of a disembodied subject, a universal standardised information flow, and a politics of global control, (affective and cognitive capitalism), are inducing unprecedented erasure of embodied and affective specificity,

for the sake of a utilitarian paradigm at the service of capitalist flows, while at the same time preemptively appropriating emergence of novelty and effectively concealing its violence behind the façades of technopositivist progress and individuality.

People across the world reproduce more and more the standardised gestures, ways of speaking and moving induced by mass media, publicity, interfaces, ubiquitous moving images, commercial music or video games; while in domains such as Robotics, Biometrics, HCI, Ergonomics, Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence there is an increasing and problematic attempt to simulate and repeat reduced repertoires of human emotions.

We therefore need a new paradigm, or a plurality of paradigms, that take into account:

- that all reality is changing, in motion, embodied and specific, irreducible to universalist standardised paradigms of fixity, identity, form, representation, meaning, function, quantification or value.
- that consciousness and affects are fields open to constant redefinition according to the technologies in which they are embodied.

It is a common assumption in communication studies that any interpersonal relation non verbal communication constitutes 93% of what's being transmitted, and only 7% relates to verbal acts of meaning production. How does the remaining 93% relate to the supposed fixity of meaning structures? Is it merely supporting them, is it adding resonances and dimensions irreducible to meaning and function?

I want to suggest that the 93% of non-verbal elements are not reducible to meaning structures, nor functional to them, but that they create irreducible resonances that constitute the very foundations of cultural diversity and multiplicity as process of differentiation, a changing matrix of undefined potentials from which the apparently fixed structures of meaning emerge as partial and provisional regulatory frameworks, where it's ongoing transformation appears to be the key for sustainability. To understand this change and diversity is thus crucial for an ethics of media, democracy, citizenship and planetary ecology.

Yet the bodily spectrum of communication is minimized in Information Technologies, where functionality, textuality, identity and fixity of meaning production tend to leave aside or radically reduce the open resonances that give their openness and flexibility to communication and relations.

What happens if we invert the habitual process undertaken in information technologies, so that instead of foregrounding meaning and function, we foreground the embodied expressive elements of non-verbal communication, and the ways in which they *exceed meaning structures*? What new relational, cognitive and affective frameworks could be generated in this process through radically highlighting the openness of expressive qualities? How could this bring forward improvement for the lives of people who don't match the dominant structures of functionality and meaning, from "disabled" people to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, gender, or age groups?

The technology resulting from this will not be strictly speaking an Information technology, since its focus is not in attempting to produce fixed disembodied patterns of

meaning, but an Aformation or In-formation Technology, that foregrounds the corporeal, affective and open character of relations and movements irreducible to meaning, always in-formation or aforming, never quite actualising into a fixed form.

We may deepen on this notion through an approach to cognitive sciences, by stating that consciousness, form recognition, and understanding, far from being universal processes, are effect of movements of the bodies, that, through reiterated relations with an environment generate an intelligible context of interaction. The forms that we recognise in the world are therefore not preexisting our interactions, they are conformed in the interactions, and can radically change through new forms of movement and relation. What constitutes our intelligible context, and therefore ourselves, are movement relations.

We can thus explore the radical plasticity of consciousness, the possibility to generate new perceptions and awareness of the world through interacting in new ways and in new kinds of environments, environments where perception doesn't have recognisable objects (affordances) that determine the possible interactions, but amorphous environments, quasi-objects, quasi-spaces in formation that radically open up the potentials for relation, perception and awareness. What happens when we linger in the frontiers of the intelligible? What new forms of *potential* intelligibility emerge?

We need to take into account the problems inherent to current motion and emotion analysis systems and the ways in which they inevitably tend to reduce multiplicity, suppress particularity and standardise diversity. Thereby we may attempt to produce a novel technological paradigm that makes use and further expands the rich background of our embodied knowledge and expressive potentials.

Panchoreographic

The panchoreographic is the growing set of technologies that disseminates standardised choreographies of thinking, power, knowledge and affects through media, interfaces, software, film, pornography, videogames, social networks, etc.

We need to Decoreograph movement and thus Defeat choreography (as William Forsythe suggests) by producing irrepeatable movements, illegible affects that deform the choreographic alignments of power regimes.

We need to understand The Matter of time, its relation to space linearity, and produce new kinds of non-linear time space, of quantum architecture.

Amorphogenesis is the paradigm of permanent emergence of the amorphous, where diffuse affordances constitute an everchanging cognitive field of undefined possibilities.

We need to undo linear universalistic centralized perspective. We need a microperspectival machine that dissolves the fictions of universality into multiplicities in motion.

We need to devisualize and undo perception, liberate it from the tyranny of linear vision and control.

Metamedia is the condition in which media are never fully defined because perception isn't either. METAFORMANCE is the process of permanently redefining perception.

The field of "dance and new technologies" thus faces important challenges:

1. to become aware of the limitations of motion analysis systems and their reductionisms, through a creative and critical and subverted use,
2. to generate new kinds of movement and non-simulative environments,
3. to redefine technology through embodiment and viceversa.

REVERSING TELEMATICS - HAPTIC PRESENCE, ABSTRACT AVATARS AND ILLEGIBLE AFFECTS

In the project ETP we explored the notion of Abstract presence and telepresence.

<http://reverso.org/ETP-engl.htm>

In the project Microsexes we explored undoing anatomy and the production of Illegible affects that linger in the frontiers of near legibility.

<http://reverso.org/Antibodies-microdances.htm>

<http://reverso.org/Antibodies-DISSOLUTION.htm>

METABODY Project - A pragmatics of virtual matter

How to develop and set to motion a pragmatics of virtual matter?

METABODY is a European project coordinated by Reverso starting in July 2013. Metabody will be a laboratory and observatory of cultural diversity that will highlight the importance of non-verbal communication and embodied expressions as a primary substrate of cultural heritage. The project will generate an understanding of the threats posed by the homogenising processes of globalisation and Information Society. Furthermore the project will produce new cultural, communicational and technological paradigms through interdisciplinary developments in new media and the arts, which highlight embodied expressions and interactions.

This will be accomplished through interdisciplinary research and creation by continuous collaboration between the partners; involvement of local communities of artists, researchers, social groups and wider audiences through workshops and public presentations; and the final construction and touring of a mobile laboratory, an experimental architectural structure that will contain interactive multisensory environments.

The project will embrace a highly transdisciplinary field, from dance and music to experimental architecture, from visual and media-arts to cognitive sciences, from philosophy to alternative mathematics, from communication technologies to history of emotions, from the disabled to gender and cultural minorities. Over five years it will develop novel concepts of cultural diversity, embodiment, and technologies that will propose an alternative definition for traditional concepts such as space and social relations, based on movement and multisensorial interaction.

The result will be an experimental architectural structure touring the 9 cities involved in the project that will host the laboratory and observatory of diversity. This structure is conceived as a sensitive space that can modify its characteristics according to certain expressive movement parameters that will be provided by the bodies interacting with it, transforming both its physical structure and the digital sound, video, 3D and light projections happening inside it.

By expanding the awareness and potentials of embodied expression through interdisciplinary networks of artists, researchers and local communities it will generate unprecedented forms of transdisciplinary crossfertilization.

The Metabody structure will be both a living archive of minoritarian cultural and affective expressions, an instrument for raising awareness of this fragile and changing yet fundamental heritage. It will also be a laboratory for new forms of embodiment, perception and awareness that foreground embodied specificity, hosting performances and installations, residencies with local artists, workshops and educational projects, developing new networks and communities of bodies, places and institutions in interaction with the Metabody, that will continue evolving after the project.

Metabody will confront the problems inherent to the abstract and standardised design of space that dominates since the Renaissance and will seek to develop a radically different approach to space design, or metadesign, always starting from movement relations and their affective expressions, so that space is never a neutral, abstract, geometric extension, but an expression of the bodies in interaction and relation.

Foremostly Metabody will operate as a perceptual *tékhné*, a new bond of art and technology, analogue to the perspective window of the Renaissance, which instead of unifying and standardising perception into universal space-time linearity, as the perspective window did, will generate new kinds of non-linear perceptions, new kinds of embodied knowledge that foreground movement, multiplicity and change, rather than fixity and homogenisation.