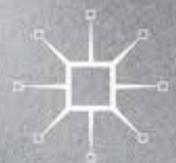


PALGRAVE STUDIES IN PERFORMANCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# INTIMACY ACROSS VISCERAL AND DIGITAL PERFORMANCE

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# 10

## Intimare

*Erin Manning*

The dancer barely moves. He stands, naked, his body strapped with cameras and a projector creating images on an adjacent screen, images of folds and surfaces, images made unintelligible and amorphous by the proximity and the angle of the cameras. 'At the same time exposed and illegible, the hyper-vigilant body converts itself into an uncontrollable body: amorphous, post-anatomical and pangeneric, undoing binarisms and categories of gender, sex and intimacy' (del Val, 2007). Dancing with the image of the body's amorphous dissolution, the dancer engages in a microchoreography – a microdance – of a body in dissolution (Figure 10.1).

In this play of surfacing and folding, what palpably moves is the image, the screen agile in its activation of the movements of the microdance, agile in its creation of a vision not of a body per se, but of a composition *that bodies*, that skins, that breathes, that sounds.

Our gaze as spectators is not immediately drawn to the strapped and naked body, as it often is in performance, but to the screen, and the way the screen begins to compose with movement, a vision of movement in its most intimate indistinguishability. This is not movement become form, but movement unforming. For what this work proposes is less a two-tiered system – performer/image – than the creation of a strange interval through which image and body begin to intertwine in the moving.

A rhythm emerges. This is not a cadence, but a contrapuntal variation with the incipient durations of a morphing movement, a movement not quite body, not quite image. We see not body as such, but quality of motion. In extreme close-up a body is not simply a representation of its parts. It is the excess of its parts.

We see this excess, an excess that refuses to take form. We see the unrecognizable. We don't know where the seeing begins and the body ends.



Figure 10.1 Jaime del Val and Olinto Rubio, *Microdances* performance, La casa



Encendida, Madrid, 2007. © Jaime del Val. Courtesy of the artist

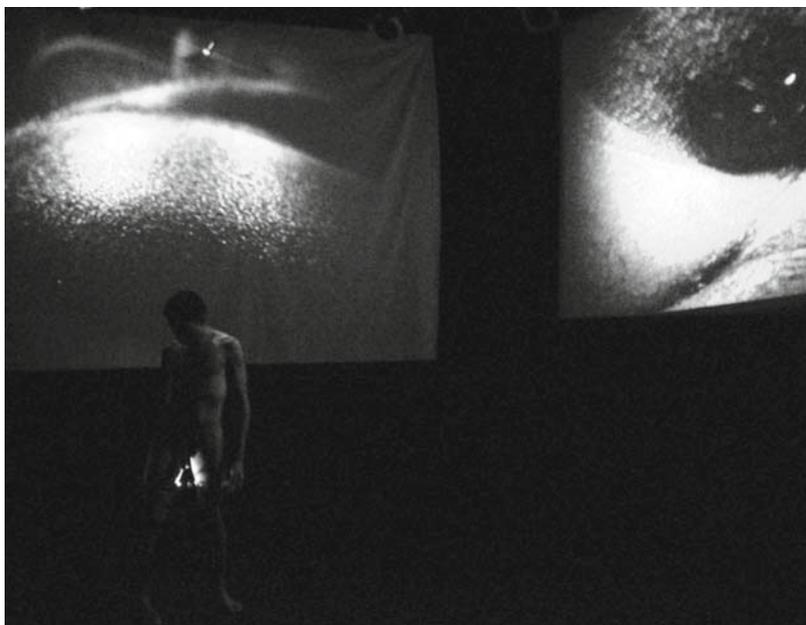


Figure 10.2 Jaime del Val and Olinto Rubio, *Microdances* performance, *Intimacy: Across Visceral and Digital Performance* Festival, The Albany, London, 2007. © Jaime del Val. Courtesy of the artist

If we give in to this contrapuntal dance, what we see is less a vision than a feeling, an affective tonality. This seeing in the feeling is a cross-modal experience – a hearing-seeing, a seeing-touching. We find ourselves dancing in place, our micromovements attuning to the strange interplay of form's unfolding. For what we are seeing is a feeling for vision's incapacity to catch form in its entirety (Figure 10.2). What we are seeing is how movement undoes representation.

And so we become participants in the web of a dancer's slow mobility, a dancer's intimate conversation with an image always deforming; we become participants in an activity too intensive to fully comprehend. And so we find ourselves lost in a between. This between, a relational gulf between the seeing-feeling of the dancer's dance with the image, and the image itself in its non-communication with us, leaves us stranded in a dance of intimacy for which we have no bearings.

This strange dance is what we experience when we take part in Jaime del Val/Reverso's performance *Antibodies of Surveillance and*

*Control – Microdances* (2007–; see Figures 10.1 and 10.2). Del Val's practice involves conceiving what he calls a 'radical choreography of experience' that is capable of 'inducing a transformation of sensory anatomies' and setting into motion an experience not of pre-established cartographies for encounter, but of immanent mappings of a body-becoming (2009, p. 1). Immanence here refers to the quality of experience felt in the processual emergence of ecologies in transformation – a moving in the midst. What del Val tries to instantiate with his work is an ontogenetic event of bodying, this bodying less a form in itself than a field of relations that microdances into becoming.

What is at stake here, it bears emphasizing, is the instantiation of a field of difference that refuses to take the body as a pre-formed entity that performs according to the exigencies – externalized and internalized – of a scopic regime of performance. More to the point, what del Val is trying to dance himself out of is the way capitalism – in the form of affective politics – banks affect to manipulate bodies in its midst, the way capitalism (re)produces the body through its techniques of specularly and surveillance.

As an artist who is invested in the moving image as it reappears for a practice of performance that troubles at once the edges of dance and of the cinematic, del Val must continuously bear in mind the role of vision in his work. And yet he quickly moves beyond the narrative that vision operates only as an externalized tool that specularizes the body. The body is not seen as separate from its activity, its movement. Indeed, what del Val's work seeks to do is to shift this mode of coming to the body from the outside. Instead, he privileges the notion of immanent ecologies of co-constitution. This emphasis in his work quickly leads him toward an engagement with bodying that seeks to move beyond the externalizing of vision, activating a different affective field, one that works with a sensing body in movement in ways that push surveillance beyond the model of the disciplinary such that it is no longer explicitly tied to the visual. The central concern in the work thus becomes less the disavowal of ocular-centrism per se than the disavowal of a certain role the body plays in a regime that is built on the re-presentation of a body. Del Val's work seeks to challenge the subject-object instantiation of a body pre-formed (and pre-seen) to bring to the fore a field of sensation that can in turn challenge the ubiquitous notion that there exists a clear divide between bodies, and between bodies and worlds. This engagement with the limits of what a body can do is political in its register and can be aligned to a wider ethico-aesthetic tradition including political thinkers like Félix Guattari, William Connolly, Bruno Latour and

Isabelle Stengers,<sup>1</sup> for whom, each in their singular way, a rethinking of bodying as event is a radically political undertaking. Bodying is here not simply a neologism: it is a modality for thinking the in-act of experience in-forming such that the complex and divergent ecologies that make up the event are not sidelined. Attending to bodying as a constitutive force in experience means becoming attuned to an ecology of practices that sees all aspects of experience as emergent in the attunement we call 'a body'. This mode of thought asks how a body is co-constitutive of a field of experience which is itself ontogenetic, emergent at the level of its bare agitations as much as at the level of its incipient formations.

Del Val asks: 'How do gestures and sounds, proximities and proprioceptions converge and disseminate in particular circumstances, over longer periods, in the ways bodies interact, so that dialects, accents or completely new languages emerge?' (2009, p. 6). This question gets to the heart of what is at stake here: how can a performative event such as del Val's *Antibodies* activate modes of engagement through which new forces of relation – new languages for the telling – emerge? How can it take the modus operandi of a control society – the internalized and externalized surveillance cameras – and make them into a modality of with-seeing *in the event* of a body de-forming? 'Over the past two years in the framework of the Institute Reverso', writes del Val, 'we have developed a number of media performance projects in which surveillance cameras are placed on the skin, pointing to the skin, anywhere on the body for the performance of microdances, movements performed through looking at the image in such a way that the image of the abstract amorphous body fragments "moves" the body, rather than [the body] moving through usual proprioceptive awareness. The Nietzschean idea that there is no doer behind the deed, no dancer behind the dance, no subject behind the action, takes over' (2009, p. 8).

The field of relation never pre-exists the event of performance. Emergent in the event, relation can here be thought as an ecology of intensive movement out of which, or through which, certain tendencies for bodying are put into act. These tendencies for bodying could be thought as intimacies in the making – intimacies in germ. Intimacies in germ correspond perhaps to what Jaime del Val refers to as the post-intimate – intimacies that resist and challenge the pre-imposed constitution of self and other, intimacies that are activated not outside the event, as a surplus or add-on to existing constituencies, but are active *in* the event. Such a notion of intimacy would seek to open up the question of the external referentiality usually associated to the notion of 'familiarity' the concept of intimacy evokes. 'Intimacy: the state of being

intimate – familiarity; marked by a very close association, contact or familiarity.’ (Merriam Webster’s *Collegiate Dictionary*, 1993). In the event, there can as yet be no familiarity as there is as yet no actualized constellation. Everything is open to connectivity and disjunction. There is no body yet, no inside or outside. There is only activity, agitation, unrest and intensity.

It is no doubt challenging to conceive of experience at this micro-level where all is active and agitating, and nothing is yet form. Most of the time, experience at this level is not directly felt, leaving us with the unwavering sense that experience is made at the macrolevel we use to communicate everyday – the level of bodies pre-formed, gendered, sexed, raced. A practice such as that of del Val does not necessarily seek to deny this. What it asks is how we might create the conditions for what is not readily experienced in the everyday, how we might come to un-see the body as pre-constituted. And, in opening this question up to political thought, how might this experience alter the constitutive experience of what it means to participate in the world, to the world.

The human body is monumental in human experience, as is the assumption that the world is constituted in the first-person singular. *I am this body, and this body is me*. Reasons for this me-body constellation are many – the fact that the body seems to be an envelope, that the world seems to lie outside it, that the senses (the locus of experience) seem to be physiologically connected primarily to this body form we call ‘me’. All of this is no doubt to some extent true, but only so as part of a much more complex tale.

The more complex tale goes something like this: The ‘me-ness’ of body is a macro-category that stands in to create a measurable and palpable difference between here and there, me and you, me and the world. This difference can only be securely measured if both ‘here’ and ‘there’ are pre-contained. This requires taking both extremes – both limits, me and you – as general categories. When we do so, what we have posited is the beginning for a notion of subject-object oriented ‘interaction’. The closer, the more familiar the me-you constellation, the more likely the setting into place of a certain traditional notion of intimacy, one based on a series of assumptions such as our capacity to share things in common, our cultural or class similarity, our implicit recognition of one another, etcetera. ‘I feel intimate with you’ too often means ‘I recognize the me-ness in you.’ This macro-categorization further reinforces our understanding of the familiar, a ‘familiarity’ that was never based on the subtleties of an emergent bodying – emergent always in its originary difference – but instead based on general assumptions.

In the spirit of del Val's work, what I want to do is to suggest a thought-experiment in three phases that might trouble and open up this notion of intimacy as familiarity. The first phase in the thought experiment is to worry the term: what if we took intimacy and brought to it the action already present in the concept 'to intimate', bringing to intimacy the notion of a certain uncertainty, a 'hinting'? 'To intimate': to be(come) in the process of not quite knowing, as an activity that occurs not between existing constellations of matter-form but as the force of the interstice through which relational webs – ecological matrices – come into being? And then, as a second phase, what if we were to take intimacy as it has been re-defined and bring it toward its etymological cousin, *intimare*, which means 'to tell about, to relate'?

Intimare as activity immediately does two things: it moves the intimate into action, and it suggests that intimacy is always relational, always embedded in a field. Intimacy has now become the activity of creating relational fields. These relational fields are more-than human. They are, as del Val writes, 'interactions of forces [...], intensities in motion [...] multiple sexes and sex-events in a becoming that never sediments into actual sexes: a metamorphogenesis' (2009, pp. 12–14) Think of *intimare* as an intimacy that brings into felt experience a field of non-constituted becomings that tend toward ecologies, but are not yet fully-fledged bodies. Intimacy as distinct, always, from a self-other interaction, understood instead as the *act of relating* through which a certain kind of bodying is induced, but not yet formed as such. Think of *intimare* in the context of the absolute difference encountered through the presence in your life of a newborn, your child, a presence that carries with itself an unquestionable intimacy and yet whose intimacy is achieved not through any notion of the familiar. The child is wholly other from the very beginning and will remain so, despite the fact that millions of connections will be created in the living. In fact, the wonder the child evokes in its arrival into your life comes in large part from this absolute difference, a difference through which a commitment to the absolutely other is enacted and repeated – there are few contexts in which we similarly welcome and tend fundamental difference. The care for a child is a care for relation, a care for the field of relation. For once, the field is immediately understood as differential – any convergence will be created, but cannot be taken for granted. The field must do its work. Any constellation of knowability between parent and child will emerge through the activity of tendings-toward, the hesitant activity of an infinite process of getting-to-know. The assumption of familiarity will

never serve this relation – the imposition of the familiar on to a child will only impose a rift, for the child must and will remain foreign – a foreign body. The intimacy of the relation with a child has to do less with what is known than with the ultimate unknowability of the relation in its unfolding. An intimacy in the germination of a coming-to-form not simply of the child or of the parent, but of and in the relation.

The third phase has a lot of work to do. Firstly, it must successfully conceive of intimacy as the force of the in-act – a certain setting into motion – instead of an end-point of an already constituted process. Intimacy, it bears repeating, is here not an add-on to an existing set of bodies, but the very force through which certain bodying-tendencies come to meet to create an ecology of relation. Call the body that emerges from such a process – the human, animal, organic or inorganic body – an intimacy, but only if by intimacy you mean a singular field of relations in a complex ecology.

For William James, relation is not the passive *entre-deux* of the pre-constituted set, but the activity of the between through which bodyings are created. Relation is too often understood in line with the macro-event of interactivity: as that which brings together bodies pre-constituted. For James, relation never precedes the event – it is the force or the intensity through which the event composes itself. What is at stake, James argues, is the field itself, not the terms ‘outside’ it.

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system. Elements may indeed be redistributed, the original placing of things getting corrected, but a real place must be found for every kind of thing experienced, whether term or relation, in the final philosophic arrangement (James, 1996, p. 42).

Relation is the compositional force of the event, and through relation, the terms of the event take form. The subject does not pre-exist relation, it culminates from the relational field as what Whitehead calls ‘the superject’ of the event (1978). This superject is the ‘how’ of an event in-forming rather than the impetus for it.

This makes James’s statement that ‘[r]elations are of different degrees of intimacy’ of particular interest (1996, p. 44). The relation is the active interval through which different modalities of coming into contact are created. Think relation here, as James suggests, as including a with-ness of experience, the experience of ‘simultaneity and

time-interval, [...] space-adjacency and distance, [...] simultaneity and difference, [...] activity – change, tendency, resistance' (1996, p. 44).

The challenge of relation – and of intimacy as relation – is to posit relation not as secondary to experience with the human as the central locus of activity, but rather to begin to understand relation as the force through which the very notion of with-ness can be thought. Relation – intimare – is the force through which the shift is made between the quasi-chaotic and the singularity of this or that taking-form, that which intimately binds the all-there-is with the this-now – from virtual plenitude to actual form.

Relation is not union. It is no 'thing' in itself. Relations are always relations of non-relation, as Deleuze would say. Relations are relational in emergence, not relational as an *entre-deux* of the already existent. They are the binding agents of the not yet. They will never be known as such, but everything that *is* known will have been constituted through the singularity of a field of relation. Relations intimate, they hint, but they do not exist as such. This is why a given relational field can never be abstracted from the event – it never 'was'. Relations do not tell the story – they activate it, pulse it into its telling. This is not a question of either connection or disconnection per se. Relations are certainly sticky, but their stickiness is not about the *what* of connection as much as the *how* of a bringing into constellation that may in turn activate a troubling in the connective tissue of the event at stake. Relations activate, they tune, they direct a process always immanently underway. How this process achieves itself is not the problem relation poses. Relation can just as well activate a coming apart at the seams as it can weave itself into a continuity.

In the third phase of thinking intimacy is understood as a force for the bodying; what must come into focus is that the relational force of intimare – its injunction *to relate* – is less about what intimacy is as it is about *the how of its doing*. Intimare is the hint for a webbing through which an event can take form, it is the binding agent for this or that tuning toward a singularity. Intimare is not a moral category (it does not promise a better relation, a more continuous coming-together). Intimare simply sets up the conditions for degrees of intimacy.

Lest intimare begin to seem like an agent of cosmic harmonization, let's remind ourselves of Whitehead's theory of contemporary independence. An event in its actualization, for Whitehead, is always conceived as the this-ness of its contemporary iteration. And this event is always causally independent of all other events. 'It is the definition of contemporary events that they happen in causal independence of each other. Thus two

contemporary occasions are such that neither belongs to the past of the other. The two occasions are not in any direct relation to efficient causation' (Whitehead, 1967, p. 195). Insisting on the need for 'elbow-room within the universe', Whitehead underscores the necessity to see the culmination into actualization of the event as a singularity that is in no way *directly* relational to any other event. The relational matrix of events does not lie in their coming together at the constituted level, but in the intensity of their constitutive infra-forming across non-metric space-time. The webbing takes place in the microdance of the event's coming into being at the level of its infra-forming tendencies.

Whitehead has a key term for the force of relation that binds events across iterations. He calls this the 'eternal object' and by the term means the haecceity or 'this-ness' – the quality that both singularizes this event and by which the event can be understood as operating along the nexus of all events of its kind.<sup>2</sup> Colour is a prime example: the green of a specific event is singular, and yet a certain sense of greenness can be activated across events. In the context of a singularization of a microdance, the eternal object might have to do with a certain constellation of felt sensation that is ubiquitous to the genre but singular in this or that iteration – 'just this way' – and yet iterable across series. Whitehead calls this 'a certain immanence of contemporary occasions in each other' (1967, pp. 195–6).

When Jaime del Val speaks of creating a field of immanence, this is perhaps what he means: that microdances are capable of creating a relational field that attunes to certain tendings in and across sensation that can be activated across different event formations. About *Antibodies* as performance project he writes, for instance, that its continuation must always include a regard for how the event shapes its own future – how the performance's capacity to create bodyings challenges its modalities for future performances. This includes, he suggests, a shift from audience-based work to performances that take place in environments that do not so clearly draw the line between artist and spectator: 'I am moving now towards increasingly post-intimate formats that avoid an audience altogether for the sake of immanence; one-to-one encounters, durational experiences, online encounters, home interventions...'<sup>3</sup> From a critique of intimacy, to a post-intimate rethinking of what constitutes intimacy, perhaps... . From a one-plus-one interactivity, to relation as that which fields the doing and the telling... . From intimacy to intimare... .

If relation is taken as that which is constitutive rather than constituted, a notion of linear connection must be abandoned. 'No one single

type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose [the universe]', writes James (1996, p. 46). Connectability (and disconnectability) are what is at stake, not connection per se: contemporary independence. We fall out of a cause and event scenario. Experience dangles, interweaving and yet out of sync: 'Even so my experiences and yours float and dangle, terminating, it is true, in a nucleus of common perception, but for the most part out of sight and irrelevant and unimaginable to one another' (James, 1996, p. 47). Unimaginable because in-formation, allied and discontinuous in a million different 'imperfect intimacies', as James would say (1996, p. 47). For 'with-ness' never relates to the fullness of an event actualized. With-ness is at the cusp, in the doing-undoing of what must always be situated as not-yet in the realm of the actual. On this edge, on the plane of immanence del Val seeks to make felt, there is an abundance of webs, an abundance of with-nesses, but these with-nesses are not symmetries – they are imperfect intimacies that cross and combine not part to part, but tendency to tendency, hint to hint. Imperfect intimacies touch but do not necessarily actualize in co-combination. They are relational fields that activate but do not necessarily constitute assemblages.

An assemblage could be another word for the multi-sexing micro-dancing bodying which is at stake here. Assemblage as the with-ness of a relational field that has now actualized as this or that contemporary event. This or that *contemporarily independent* event. The trick is to not forget that this contemporaneity is short-lived – Whitehead speaks of the half-second as the measure of duration. What the event will do, will always have done, is to fold again, to assemble again, differently, to create new and different degrees of intimacy with the binding tendencies of connectability and disjunction. That an event comes to being is absolutely necessary for the actualization of experience, but for experience to continue to actualize, it is equally important that the event be in continuous phasings of decomposition and reconstellation. Of course this 'event' in composition is never One. One field of relation, one tangle of intimacy, produces many singularities, many assemblages, each of which complicates the notion of what it might mean to body.

Intimare is a radically empirical concept. It never exists on its own and can never be identified as such. It is contributory to the how of experience unfolding. Against the concept of intimacy as it is usually understood – a concept that depends on a matrix of interactivity for which a subject is preconceived – intimare emphasizes what Deleuze calls the non-local linkages that bring the potential field of eventness into a generative constellation. Intimare is not about interaction, but

about the folds and forces across strata that co-combine to create event-compositions. The weakness of the traditional concept of intimacy is precisely that it seeks to make local linkages – that it depends on an interactivity of the discrete that situates the actual as continuous. Since no experience is continuous across occasions (given the contemporary independence of events), the traditional notion of intimacy understood as the familiar must rest on an imaginary continuity, an imposed commonality. As James writes, ‘My experiences and your experiences are “with” each other in various external ways, but mine pass into mine, and yours pass into yours in a way in which yours and mine never pass into one another’ (1996, p. 48). Like Bergson’s notion of duration, the implication here is that ‘[p]ersonal histories are processes of change in time, and the change itself is one of the things immediately experienced’ (James, 1996, p. 48).

Intimare crafts across difference. As a binding agent it transforms the field of relation such that each change causes a recomposition of the field. Think intimare in del Val’s work as the intensive field created by a co-composing of gestural attitudes across technologies, sensing bodies in movement and incipient images. Intimare is how the field generates a certain intimacy between tendencies, tendencies which in turn affect the environment itself co-composing. A crafting across difference that propels a recomposition or a change in nature is another way of defining creativity, a definition that requires a notion of relation that never depends on a familiarity at the level of the actualized. We must speak, as Whitehead says, not of the continuity of becoming, but of the becoming of continuity (1978).<sup>4</sup> A body-becoming always requires a field of difference.

Intimare, then, as the relating-into-movement of conjunctive-disjunctive constellations through which bodyings take form that exceed the organic-inorganic divide. Intimare as the force that activates this taking-form, recasting the multiplicity of potential – the quasi-chaos – into the this-ness of a choreographic event. The screen-dance of the *Antibodies* performance is an instance of intimare – a bringing-into-sensation of the not-quite-seen of a body-becoming, a welling into relation of a timely spatialization that transposes itself into the field of what it might mean to constitute a dancing fold – an intimation of what the field may still propose.

Intimare as that which is felt-seen in the moment where the limit, the limit of vision, the limit of the skin envelope, briefly touches on the unlimited, the beyond-limit of the plane of immanence, and for that half-second, brings them into relation.

## Notes

1. See, for instance, Félix Guattari's concept of 'ecology' in *Three Ecologies* (1995); William Connolly's concept of 'techniques of thought and micropolitics' in *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (2002); Bruno Latour's notion of 'atmospheres of democracy' and his emphasis on 'non-human agency' in *Making Things Public* (2005); and Isabelle Stengers's concept of an 'ecology of practices' in *Cosmopolitics 1* (2010).
2. On 'haecceity', see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; on 'eternal object', see Whitehead, 1978. See also Erin Manning, *Always More than One: Individuation's Dance* (Duke University Press, forthcoming 2012), particularly in relation to Bracha Ettinger's artwork.
3. Email exchange with Jaime del Val, 23 April 2011.
4. I have written about this at more length in 'Propositions for the Verge', *Inflexions*, 2009.