

# Remarking the here over now

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article critically explores how a particular figure—a cipher and model for recording movement and physicality—endeavors to make the ‘new’ palpable within experiences of its figuration, or becoming. Informing this investigation is a critical assessment of an artwork developed under research led through the fine art practices of drawing and live-art presentations. This artwork tests uses of video to record and capture processes of becoming, namely through physicality and figures of the line as interval. This article also employs debates about liveness and presence in order to reconsider how video can play a direct role in live-art genres concerned with mark-making and reflections of gesture. Questions arise in how the ‘new’ is structured around reduction and problems with measuring line and interval through separation and division. Underlying this investigation is a critical commentary upon the philosophical foundation of the virtual.

## **KEY WORDS**

video, the virtual, drawing, body, thought, time

*The relation of the new is modeled on a child at the piano searching for a chord never previously heard. This chord, however, was always there; the possible combinations are limited and actually everything that can be played on it is implicitly given in the keyboard. The new is the longing for the new, not the new itself: That is what everything suffers from.*

(Adorno 1999: 32)

## CONSIDERING HOW TO OPEN

‘Newness’ can be considered as a point of emergence; it can be the sense of where a combination of elements are localised to invoke an advent of some new possibility. Rather than anticipate a new subject or object, one would encounter here, or there, the sense that makes possible some figure, or thought. The purpose of this article is to evaluate whether this point can be further perceived as a moment, or as a sheer condition and sense of opening. What newness confronts, otherwise, is a frustration with how the opening and locus is profoundly conditioned by a temporal order, located either inside or outside of history.

Certain theorists, such as Henri Bergson and Brian Massumi, seek a sense of the new by regarding the present as it perpetually recurs.<sup>1</sup> Situating the new in terms of a ‘now’ poises duration within an immanent presence, an affect that transcends history by becoming a point of emergence and transformation. As Bergson summarises: ‘to be in the present and in a present which is always beginning – this is the fundamental law of matter: herein consists *necessity*’ (Bergson 1999: 210, emphasis original). What challenges a critical approach to seeking any other combination of the new is that the now-as-duration is conditioned by absolute, irreversible necessity. For Bergson, duration is new; it is now and ever, a perpetual present. But how might we understand the ‘new’ as no longer ‘now’ and reconsider this localising

element, a 'here' that would be also 'there', from a certain point predicated by temporal disconnection?

The 'new' projects the present 'as the identity of duration and eternity: that 'now' which is not so much a gap 'in' time as a gap 'of' time' (Osborne 1995: 14). If we set aside the question of history, and look closer at the mechanics intrinsic to duration and action, we can attempt to present a critical examination of this gap via movement, matter and the body. We can do this by focusing on the gap as an interval situated in the perception of movement, both through video and the recording of a body moving through space. Massumi elaborates the theoretical position that perceives the gap as the new, in terms of a dynamic locus of thought located between a flow of images.<sup>2</sup> For him, thinking occurs as a form of invention, beginning anew, both immanent and manifest *in* the stream of images as a passage of movement.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, thinking, here (now) is a virtual action; by expressing itself perception affects an image of thought, a virtual affective form of perceiving and thinking. The virtual is not merely something thought about so much as it is the experience of what is more actual than real, affecting a cerebral engagement through vibrations and rhythmic forces intrinsic to the physics of streaming images, or 'the *interval* of transmission'.<sup>4</sup> Within this passage of images the interval unfolds the sense of a perpetual present, but the body operates as an extension of forces through images. The body functions to multiply these strains of image by moving and embodying their continuous streams, invoking a 'circus of the body' (Massumi 2002: 203), thus providing a visceral experience of the new (a virtual-thought).<sup>5</sup>

Hence, the foundation of my investigations here will be based upon an example derived from an artwork, which presents the passage and movement of the virtual as a kind of indexical mark: the moving body embodied and encapsulated by the digital moving-image stream. I will focus on the way moving-image apparatuses, such as digital video, capture and document movement and the body. Moreover,

what I endeavor to articulate is a notion of a body, and the possible place which it can determine, that is not an extension of duration and virtual movement. Recording a body through video can enable one to breakdown the actions, not merely to allow for the perception of movement as such, but to situate the body in a strategy aside from the virtual 'now'. In turn, one would then try to formulate a notion of opening a position—a body and figure that can be thought. Seeing a body arrested *from* movement opens the condition of thinking anew either in the place of here, or even there.

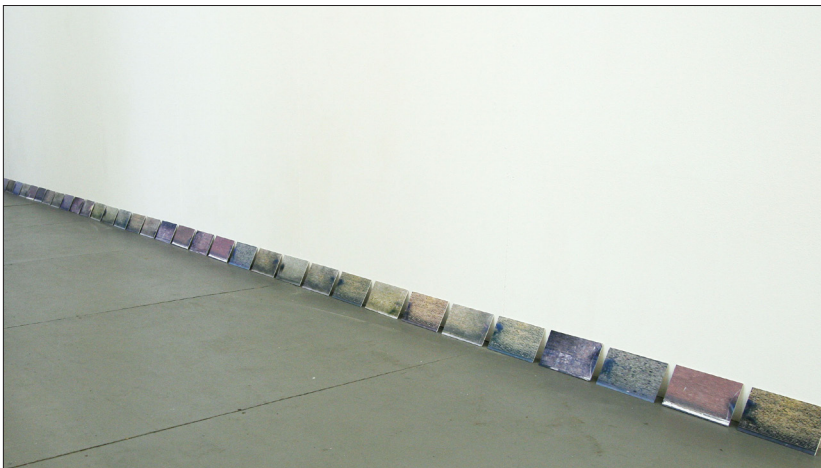
## A PASSAGE OF IMAGE AND MOVEMENT

In this section, I would like to consider the digital stream of images as an index, a medium composed of light and rhythmic feedback, which, in turn, can enable one to perceive a virtual movement. To see how this could occur, but also to bring closer attention to this mark-like quality of the virtual as a hyper-material medium and image, we can try to explore how this arises in practice.

A fundamental mode of my investigation is exercised through a form of practical research, which is based in fine art. I discover much of my subject matter during the process of experimenting with movements and positions of my body in conjunction with mark-making. Mark-making is derived from drawing practices which act by initiating first-thoughts, or *primi pensieri*.<sup>6</sup> One can draw to express either the process of generating ideas or one can give a presence to the act of generation without continuing it as a process. My approach to the mark has evolved to emphasise the latter. A process is at points discontinuous, where the body and mark no longer coincide to render an imperceptible relation (between the two), nor further a conceptual basis of a continuum.

So, I will begin by employing one example of an artwork, through which I have directly employed my body in a meditation on the virtual

nature of the mark. *Passages* (2009-10) describes a video transmission which records a body shifting around a space and image, while it expresses a movement intrinsic to the video medium. What adds to the complex form of *Passages* is that it examines the video stream as an extension of the mark, whereby I recreate the sequence in a sculptural installation. A selection of frames extracted from a series of videos—each documenting my body rapidly moving along brick walls, flanked by paved concrete floors—are re-presented in printed form. Measuring twenty by fourteen centimeters, each printed image rests mounted on a panel and sits at an angle against the base of the wall. As three centimeters separates each image panel a shadow peers behind the serial formation of panels. The concrete spaces appearing in the photo prints are now supported and complimented by the density of the wall and the floor. This linear installation appears constructed as a conduit and spatial cavity, the exterior panels faced by images of a nearly barren wall. Barely any object appears in the image. The row of panels appear to run endlessly in either direction, without beginning or end. Here, now,



Installation details of *Passages* (2009-10). From Harrington Mills Exhibition Space (Nottingham, UK, 2010). Photograph courtesy of David Manley.

runs a dynamically composed physical expression of the virtual passage, displacing the live presentation of the video.

For the moment, to investigate the now as a continuum, I will concentrate on the situation set here by this work. Once I evaluate how a discourse of the virtual discusses the interval, as either an unbridgeable gap or the continuum as such, I can return and elaborate elements, namely the appearance of marking within this virtual passage-mark.

A passage functions as a place of movement emerging through a multiplicity. According to Massumi, 'the multiplicity of constituents fuses into a unity of movement. The resulting patch is a self-varying monad of motion: a dynamic form figuring only vectors' (Massumi 2002: 183). Movement is a virtual multiplicity, a singular vector perpetually evolving a transient variability: 'A vector is *transpositional*: a moving-through points' (Massumi 2002: 185, emphasis original). At no point, however, do virtual mediums, particularly video, allow movement to be punctuated; the digital vector is a ceaseless and seamless stream of images, a continuous feedback of light and digital noise. Video is a way of articulating the problem posed by the virtual passage, for what returns is never the body, recorded and seen, but the embodied digital signal returning to itself, and circulating this feedback (Massumi 2002: 185). This is why video exercises a sense of incorporeal movement that permeates all spaces and elements outside of the video-frame; because it projects and concentrates, literally and psychologically—or 'virtually' forcing—an intensified place of purely passing emerges. Video can also force a way of looking closer, of penetrating the screen, and allow one to perceive the actions beyond the screen more critically.<sup>7</sup> One could, eventually, become aware of opening up the interval by locating the spectator as s/he moves in relation to the movements expressed 'through' the video, completely separate and distinct from the 'now' expressed on the screen.

## DISPLACEMENTS IN LINEAR TRANSMISSIONS

What the arguments supporting a virtual transmission of embodied feedback (movement) inhibit is not the possibility of entering the screen so much as being able to perceive a continuum, without being implicated in becoming perceived as a constituent of virtual multiplicity. I must perceive the arena of movement through a body-screen cum moving-image and put myself into the line of transmission, and never rest (repose) as a spectator, or voyeur (Nancy 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the virtual addresses the line as a form of thought transmission, a perception that affects other perceptions over a continuous interval. ‘Perceptions and thought are two poles of the same process,’ writes Massumi, ‘they lie along a continuum’ (2002: 91). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari specify the line as *rhizome*, an imperceptible movement of lines along an irreversible continuum, a multiple stream that affects the bifurcation of other multiple lines. In itself, the line maintains a primary function of moving itself unconditionally, and this occurs by its rhizomatic quality of disrupting its consistency and opening out more lines of movement. As Deleuze and Guattari state (2002: 281),

Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible. Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form. Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception.

What can we think of the line if it solely perpetuates a continuum, a movement? Where does the body become other to the imperceptible trace of displacement and bifurcation? What can be perceived here is that the interval stands—if it ever rests—as a complicated image of the imperceptible. To take Eric Alliez’s comment about virtual movement: ‘virtualization... hollows out a moving void’ (Alliez 2005: 87). Equally, Deleuze discusses the sense of the virtual as the bare instance of passing, what he translates into the Stoic notion of the Aion—an empty form of

time—and later elaborates, through his reading of Proust, as four forms of time: time wasted, time lost, time rediscovered, and time regained.<sup>8</sup> Time is a unique sign, a disjunctive synthesis, implicating more lines while embodying no total sense of the line; ‘*it is therefore on the lines of time that the signs intersect and multiply their combinations*’ (Deleuze 2008: 56, emphasis original). Its empty form is what has ‘freed itself of its present corporeal content and has thereby unwound its own circle, stretching itself out in a straight line’ (Deleuze 1990: 165). Whether the line expresses any other combination of its multiple sign asks a question of how movement operates, namely if it strictly encircles and encapsulates a ‘now’ outside of the present.

In order to maintain a concept of the line which is not one universal totality, the line must move and pass into combinations of a multiple extra-temporal instant. It is a perpetual becoming, ‘the Instant which is endlessly displaced on this line and is always missing from its own place’ (*ibid.*: 166). A line could present nothing *but* the sense of lines through their velocities. Movement is multiplied by the thought it conjures and affects: a barely present line that opens itself as a passage, inside of which is sensed the perpetual vibration of velocities. Interval is a present and presence of the movement of sheer relating, line for line, a transmission that constantly and perpetually engulfs the body and every element into the imperceptible. Such a ‘thought’ is constitutive of movement as such, when the interval becomes bare and automatic: ‘It is only when movement becomes automatic that the artistic essence of the image is realized: *producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly*’ (Deleuze 2001: 156, emphasis original). Is it a shock to think that a thought based on the virtual line is barely a sense of something, a touch of sonic effects that conjure a barely visible wisp of speeds? Deleuze’s statement is situated within his investigation of cinema, particularly when he looks at the image as sign, that ‘forces thinking and what thinks under the shock’ (*ibid.*). Would the interval ever be able to be thought



and perceived, as any kind of image, without the force of shock and provocation of engaging with an imperceptible movement? By shifting our focus to Bergson's notion of duration we will see whether the line can have its sense of empty interval encountered and perceived outside of its integral movement.

Bergson's observation leaves us with an image where no entity or body is present other than the sonic effects transposed within a kaleidoscope of colour: 'If we could stretch out this duration, that is to say, live it at a slower rhythm, should we not, as the rhythm slowed down, see these colors pale and strengthen into successive impressions, still colored, no doubt, but nearer and nearer to coincidence with pure vibrations?' (Bergson 1999: 203). The question is now whether the image can be separated from the movement, and even suspended as a still photographic form of recording the body as a potential agent of movement.

Time, according to Bergson, is not *made* possible by constructing individual frames, and revolving through them in rapid succession; time is actual *when* it makes, when it is embodied, endured and no longer needs to be thought of and constructed in an abstract space. He writes, 'just as we pass through the immobile to go to the moving, so we make use of the void in order to think the full' (Bergson 1998: 270). In *Creative Evolution* (1907), in the section entitled 'The Cinematographic Mechanism of Thought and the Mechanistic Illusion', he discusses two theoretical illusions which put time and consciousness, or thought, into jeopardy. One intellectualises time as being full, or continuous, when in fact time is never experienced. Most of all the intellect tacitly maintains the void as a logical and necessary idea. A void is what enables one to perceive 'reality' as what 'reaches being only by passing through 'not-being,' and continue living by upholding a philosophical fallacy' (*ibid.*: 276). At best, one could attempt to represent the image around a void, by constantly substituting one image of a still figure over another; but one never presents the emptiness, because 'there is no absolute void

in nature' (*ibid.*: 281). Formulated under a logical judgment, writes Bergson, 'we shall affirm that such or such a thing is, we shall never affirm that a thing is not' (*ibid.*: 291).

Bergson finally comments upon the cinematic as a fabrication of reality by stating: 'it is true that if we had to do with photographs alone, however much we might look at them, we should never see them animated: with immobility beside immobility, even endlessly, we could never make movement' (*ibid.*). Here, the gap separating the photo images provides no possibility for developing a point, an opening in which to examine the intricacies of virtual movement. Rather,



Panels 4b19 and 5d7, from *Passages* (2009-10). Images courtesy of the artist.

perceiving an image of a blurry figure testifies to the vibratory essence of movement affecting an indivisible continuum as a whole. Bergson argues, 'let the interval between two consecutive states be infinitely small: before the intervening movement you will always experience the disappointment of the child who tries by clapping his hands together to crush the smoke. The movement slips through the interval...' (*ibid.*: 308). Hence, an interval, as a point devoid of movement, perceived under a literal mechanical cinematographic schema, never affirms a movement.

## BEING ALONG-SIDE HERE & THERE

To construct the moving image as a physical artefact seems to estrange the perspective which Bergson's arguments advance. Sculpting it, however, allows me to not merely parody the gap, to literally translate a division into an absolutely empty space; instead, it allows me to better situate a singular activity of visually recording the movement implicit in mark-making.

In the position of the spectator, walking along and then standing in front of the image panels set at my feet, I noticed an irreducible proximity of my body to the movement expressed by the video-image, re-presented by the serial construction of image panels. When one crouches down and looks at the images s/he sees two white lines, flanking the edge of the video-image-frame. Running vertically and appearing like ticks, these bracket-like traces present marks reminiscent of writing, or what Carrie Noland identifies as *jambages*: 'the vertical lines of letters (the technical sense of 'jambages') and the rhythmic, measured stride of the digits as limbs ('jambages')' (Noland 2009: 207). Certainly, these marks inscribe but they also cite an act of separating a space not shared by the virtual mark of transmission.

These vertical ticks arrest the horizontal line of movement. The tick appears overlapped with parts of the semi-transparent body. Together they form a 'measured stride', indicating a space that divides and distinguishes the image from being encountered as a perpetual 'now' and a non-locatable presence.<sup>9</sup> Without addressing the gap as an empty void, we can instead stop and engage with this opening, a spot which remains a question, without perceiving it as derived from an order of movement and bifurcation. As a spectator, I see my body appearing on the still image, a figure half-drawn, semi-transparent, pulled into, leaping or falling over the vertical tick-jambages, and out of the horizontal frame—what could, otherwise, in the Bergsonian reading, be viewed as the puff of smoke that escapes perceiving intervalic-movement. In other

words, the interval based on a non-temporal presence emerges by being shared by the space in which the spectator stands.

Hence, the gap, as much as the wall and floor, initiates a perception of this presence-in-separation; a position of standing with and apart is incumbent upon the 'here', in which one stands alongside the sculpted passage, and the 'there' present in the image.

These marks help distinguish the image in space. They open a place that is here, and there, around the image, a kind of multiplicity separate from the virtual form expressed by the digital/virtual arena. To distinguish movement from the image, while retaining the sense of opening a place of the body conjures a relation to what Jean-Luc Nancy observes as the *pure image*. The pure image signifies what is seen as much as it does the unseen, i.e. the distinct: 'The Distinct is set apart: the distinct mark of sense, its *trait*. It is the stigma, that is, the incision that separates' (Nancy 2005: 3). There is a mark that the image carries, that separates and withdraws a sense from the absolute sensation of the flowing transmission of the virtual: 'A non-sensory trait that is not embodied in any sense' (Nancy 2005: 125). Situating a place of the body is made possible by pursuing a strategy of marking while *withdrawing* a movement within the medium of a virtual vector. Thus emerges a place of here *and* there; a separation that can establish an opening—a question of the place, what it is, what could be, a bare locus—*without* attaching a definitive schema to the locus. Distinctly, a phase of separation invites no identification of it, either as a transcendental, virtual time or as space. This was a significant observation that occurred to me, that the distinction of the interval can be re-marked as a pure separation and spacing (Nancy 2005).

## RE-MARKS UPON WHERE TO CONCLUDE

Using an unconventional approach to both video and a form of drawing I have taken this as the occasion to disclose some of the complexities of

marking and virtually recording movement. Because of the philosophical nature of drawing, a practice based on expressing operations of thought, the correlative of mark-making can uncritically extend the foundational elements of movement, embodiment and the line. When these elements are marked again—marking the unmarked, vibrational sense of a linear, bifurcating movement—an operation of displacement is enabled, separating the mark from the body, and the virtual vector from the spectator. Here, or there, on and off the screen occurs a measure of the body, thus shifting the interval from being virtually perceived.

We can ask if the question of the new is to be regarded as a place of emergence in terms of a longing for another transcendental schema. To employ Jacques Rancière's critical comment, those endeavoring to identify a virtual multiplicity and its notion of radical temporality invoke a desire to *have* the non-representational, to experience a 'material presence, the spirit made flesh' (Rancière 2009: 8). Experiencing, making tangible the medium of a virtual-becoming, expresses the new in terms of an openness; but when the virtual interval is directly expressed as a kind of gap, it requires perceiving the line-movement as absolute and constantly present. Massumi confirms this when he states that the virtual is 'a purification of experience, thought-out (the only-thought)' (Massumi 2002: 92). And this attitude—itself a perception of a mode of thinking—embraces a transcending presence, a tangible resonance and movement of feedback to be uniquely outside of the possible combinations for re-presenting the new. This is the possible response of a virtual multiplicity to newness: 'Its not-an-object is the indeterminate excess of self-active, connective potential continuing through and renewing history' (Massumi 2002: 240). The virtual is, therefore, somehow outside of history whilst immanently affecting it, *absolutely*. Consequently, the virtual's predicament, by ousting the possibility of combinations, invokes a promise of its presence by continuously moving upon itself, affirming one option: 'let us save the 'heterogeneous sensible'' (Rancière 2010: 124).

Endeavoring to situate a dynamic relationship between the image, the body (as the subject that immediately appears in it) and the trace of a mark revolves around an effort to open a multiple discourse, which overrides one that can only be ‘thought-out’. There can occur, as I have attempted to show, a coordination of these factors, where neither one substantialises a legacy conditioned by a primordial duration. Nor does this establish another supra-empirical and transcendental mode of making sensuous a model of space. What can, however, be addressed is the act of opening up, which is captured in Nancy’s description of the opening as ‘a being-there of the beyond’ [un être-là de l’au delà]: ‘because the image, then, is above all the *there* of a *beyond*. It is not at all its ‘representation’: it is a thinking-there, thinking as the effectivity of a place opening itself to presence’ (Nancy 2005: 125, emphasis original). Certainly, my presentation of examples which support my arguments here are partially removed from an orthodoxy of the image, as marks inscribed on a surface. Nevertheless, seeing a body and the evidence of its passing through a space situates a condition of emergence and presence, or place. Moreover, the act of the body, and its displacement with the mark opens a space to a place of thought. This place, this sheer opening of a ‘here’, a kind of ‘beyond’ (there) is the spot in which an act of thought can occur anew, without longing for something other than what is here/there, namely presencing (becoming).

## NOTES

1. ‘Newness: what is comparable to itself [...] For the art of catalyzing a relational emergence is philosophy in action. The conceptual newness is there, in the event, enacted’ (Massumi 2002: 175-176).
2. ‘The virtual, as such, is inaccessible to the senses... Its fleeting is in the cracks between and the surfaces around the images’ (Massumi 2002: 133).

3. 'An event, a passage: 'force' is a verb. Its action is unobeyable because, across its unrefusable repetition, it commands creation. Its imperative is the new' (Massumi 2002: 160).
4. 'Media transmission is the becoming of the event' (Massumi 2002: 89-132).
5. See chapter 4, 'The Evolutionary Alchemy of Reason' in Massumi 2002.
6. For a historical survey of drawing, and its role in generating thought, see Petheridge 2010. In terms of methodology see Cain 2010.
7. I am alluding to Jean-Luc Nancy's description of the screen as a species of the pure image: 'In a sense, we must not even speak any longer of a screen: video is not of the order of the screen, but of penetration. One is not a spectator but a voyeur. Video means 'I see,' whereas theao means 'I look' (and kineo is 'I move')' (Nancy 2005: 74).
8. For a full description of the four forms of time, see Deleuze 2008: 54-6.
9. Henri Michaux makes a similar observation with regards to an experience of displacement, related to the graphic mark, when he writes, 'this emptiness, unlike any other emptiness, would deserve another name. August, encompassing as much as excluding, saturating, at times solemn, above all 'NON-TEMPORAL' (or so it seems), absolutely non-locatable (in that you don't know whether you encounter it inside yourself or also outside)' (Michaux 2002: 172).

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