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A Vocabulary of Doing

Sher Doruff, Amsterdam

Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall. (Foucault and Deleuze, 1972)

For politics precedes being. Practice does not come after the emplacement of the terms and their relations, but actively participates in the drawing of the lines; it confronts the same dangers and the same variations as the emplacement does (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 203).

The Vocabulaboratories Diagram

In February 2008 the Amsterdam School for the Arts sponsored the Vocabulaboratories workshop organized by Paz Rojo and Manuela Zechner was the final event of the group residency. The problematizing of vocabularies of practice as processes of subjectification, as reciprocal relations of knowledge and power, as transversal flows between the political, ethical and aesthetic, was an underlying theme among the facilitators and participants.[1] I was struck by the qualities of attention given the dynamic relations[2] between emerging terminologies and performative actions, between forms of content and forms of expression, between the visible and the articulable as Foucault might put it, between Light and Language as Deleuze might poetically imply. The workshop deployed these bifurcating vectors powered by the relation between choreographer and theorist as initial conditions, producing conceptual mappings as relays to performative instantiations.

One task, stipulated by Rojo and Zechner, was the daily practice of recording *entries* or *access points*, to a wiki designed as a permanent resource for the development and exchange of vocabularies emerging from the practice of the participating choreographers. Imagined as a site for transversal layering, Zechner has expressed a desire to facilitate this praxis: "to see the project and labs as a site where a language and mode of relating to concepts can be carried forth, across various divisions; social, class, disciplinary, geographical, etc" as a means to "actually learn from the way in which all of these contexts and discourses will undoubtedly clash or at least produce friction, and see it as a site where an honest negotiation of concerns and co-speaking can emerge..."[3] She further points out: "Language, discourse and writing play a central role in the post-fordist regime of production

[…] The use of discourse and writing are not irrelevant side-aspects of operating within the cultural field today, they are rather the condition for survival within it." (2007)

Yet any 'language' of 'co-speaking', of giving voice, to emerge from the propositions of the Vocabulaoratories must also encounter sensation: non-representational, a-syntactic, non-linear movements of thought. This kind of felt thought, charged by the chaotic force(s) of the unthought, can be called a diagrammatic process. It occurs in the lived interstice that separates and integrates forms of realization: what we see, what we say. Maps of vocabularies emerge within a 'cultural' social field. An informal diagram or cartography of the Vocabulaboratories project, by way of example, maps the unformed and unstable forces that affect mutations to the 'conceptual givens' of the project's design; the markings, erasings, and scramblings that intensify in a single point and leap to or fold into other points. How does such a diagram function?

> It is the presentation of the relations between forces unique to a particular formation; it is the distribution of the power to affect and the power to be affected; it is the mixing of non-formalized pure functions and unformed pure matter [...] a transmission or distribution of particular features. (Deleuze, 2000, 72-73)

This specific diagram envisions the provocation of both resistance ('friction') and resonance between the individua*ting* vocabularies of the participant practitioners and the effects of these mobile vocabularies in a social field (political, ethical, professional, etc.). Describing the pure, informal matter-function relations between diagrammatic forces, Deleuze has commented: "A relation between forces is a function of the type "to incite, to provoke, to combine..." (Ibid, 27). So in a *praxis* of the diagrammatic type, the functions "to incite, to provoke, to combine" converge with the "to do" that defines practice itself.

The Amsterdam Vocabulaboratories event provoked awareness, from the perspective of this participant, of the reciprocal relation between an *entry as practice* and *practice as entry*. Call an *entry as practice* the seductive force of movement through local-yet-mobile attractor points (events) of a diagram, continually emerging, fading and mutating, accessible to all in a social field. Call *practice as entry* the formalizing force of doing. Inter-acting, these forces, affected by and affecting other forces of the diagram, generate relations.[4] In this case, the diagram maps the interrelation of relations between *vocabularies* and *doing*. This reciprocal play of forces is doubled by the coding and decoding of the term "entry" itself, both as a noun-substance (an entryway, port, point and vibratory conduit) and the verb/gerund-function (to enter, entering). An *entry* as in the event-dimension of an archway. An *entering* as a vectorial force at play within the diagram. This modulating entry-entering marks both the movement of passage *and* the passageway as the topological space-time of relational relays. Points of entry becoming processes of passage.

Inciting, provoking, cutting-up, combining

Brion Gysin: How do you get in… get into these paintings?

*William Burroughs: Usually I get in by a **port of entry**, as I call it. It is often a face through whose eyes the picture opens into a landscape and I go literally right through that eye into that landscape. Sometimes it is rather like an archway […] a number of little details or a special spot of colours makes the **port of entry** and then the entire picture will suddenly become a three-dimensional frieze in plaster or jade or some other precious material.* - Wilson

An entry is an access point that someone uses in order to map its current ideas, and possible modes of operation in a certain context. Definition may be part of the investigation that one goes through but not the goal. An entry is a conceptual tool that   one uses in order to engage in a practice. – Zechner

Process Snapshot #1, 27 April 2008: diagram fragment for thinking through entry as practice. Cut up text = "The blackboard and chalk of the mathematician, the notebook of the artist (the **drawing** of, and drawing off) and the artaffect (realized thing) are topologically immanent. This imagines **the** sketch of the architect, the inked napkin from the brainstorm lunch, as all exhibiting the diagrammatic **practice** of writing." (**bold ital** are ports of entry).

The word diagram – *diagramma* in the original Greek -- refers to the wax tablet philosophers once used to compose ideas before committing them to papyrus with a stylus (Knoespel, 2001). The blackboard and chalk of the mathematician, the notebook of the artist, the sketch

of the architect, the inked napkin from the brainstorm lunch, all exhibit diagrammatic tendencies, the matter-movement of not-yet-formalized thought and sensation. Praxis, is the in-itself of doing. There are coexistent registers of relation present between diagramming as an informal abstract machine[5] (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987) and as a formal realization of that abstraction - those sketches, drawings and mappings making their way to form, to a concrete assemblage. The movement of thought between these registers provides a way a thinking thru the relational qualities of content and expression encounters and the production of subjectivity or individuation (after Simondon). The dynamically variable tendencies that a diagram *diagrams*, provides a literally 're-markable'[6] concept for mapping intensities that echo and relay between and through vocabularies of practice. The dance of relational movement that *between(s)* integration and differentiation, *between(s)* folding and unfolding. The relays mapping the unstable forces and points of entry in a social field, situates *vocabularies of doing*. The affective intensities of the diagrammatic, modulate the filtering and forming of the content of our expression and the expression of our content. Importantly, the formalizing process - the capturing of the entry as 'knowledge', as substance, as form - feedsback to redraw the diagram (abstract machine). The looping between virtual and actual functions like a möbius strip.

The diagram distributes the affective intensities within the context it maps. Deleuze elasticizes Foucault's reach by translating his early, middle and late works within a *folding* knowledge-power-subjectivity continuum. He maps Foucault's relays between content and expression, leap-frogging, saturating and emptying the 'zone of subjectification,' (central differentiation) dissolving the dualisms in the fold. All this (inter)action of knowledge becoming-captured takes place while straddling the entryway between abstract machine and concrete assemblage. Between relational dust and reflective crystal. This is a topological terrain mapped by the diagram.

> Between the visible and the articulable a gap or a disjunction opens up, but this disjunction of forms is the place, or the 'non-place', as Foucault puts it, - where the informal diagram is swallowed up and becomes embodied instead in two different directions that are necessarily divergent and irreducible. The concrete assemblages are therefore opened up by a crack that determines how the abstract machine performs. (Ibid, 38)

Foucault's diagram projects a presentation of resistance and power in relation to the particular features of a social field that situates it. He imagined a cartographic container of forces affecting other forces. These attractions and resistances modulate the diagram, excite the disjunction that separates forms of realization that Foucault distinguished as irreducible: the discursive and the non-discursive. A diagram maps the variable dynamics of encounter between unformed matter and non-formalized functions; maps the points and features that cut across and through a social field, a thought, a body. Deleuze and Guattari reconsidered this

unstable, informal diagram as an *abstract machine*: an evolution of forces, the immanent cause to the effects of the encounter between forms of realization. The informal diagram actualizes its virtual potentials as it dusts the stratified layers of knowledge.

So, there is an ontological *and* epistemological breadth to the concept of diagrammatic praxis that resonates with the notion of Vocabulaboratories. Narrowly contextualized within art research practice that problematizes the relation between theory and practice, it can be considered the *doing* of research as it emerges through the strategic interplay of content and expression. Lived experience affecting its own emergence. Or, as Massumi suggests, when thinking through the diagram to the *biogram*[7]: "Practice becomes perception." (2002)
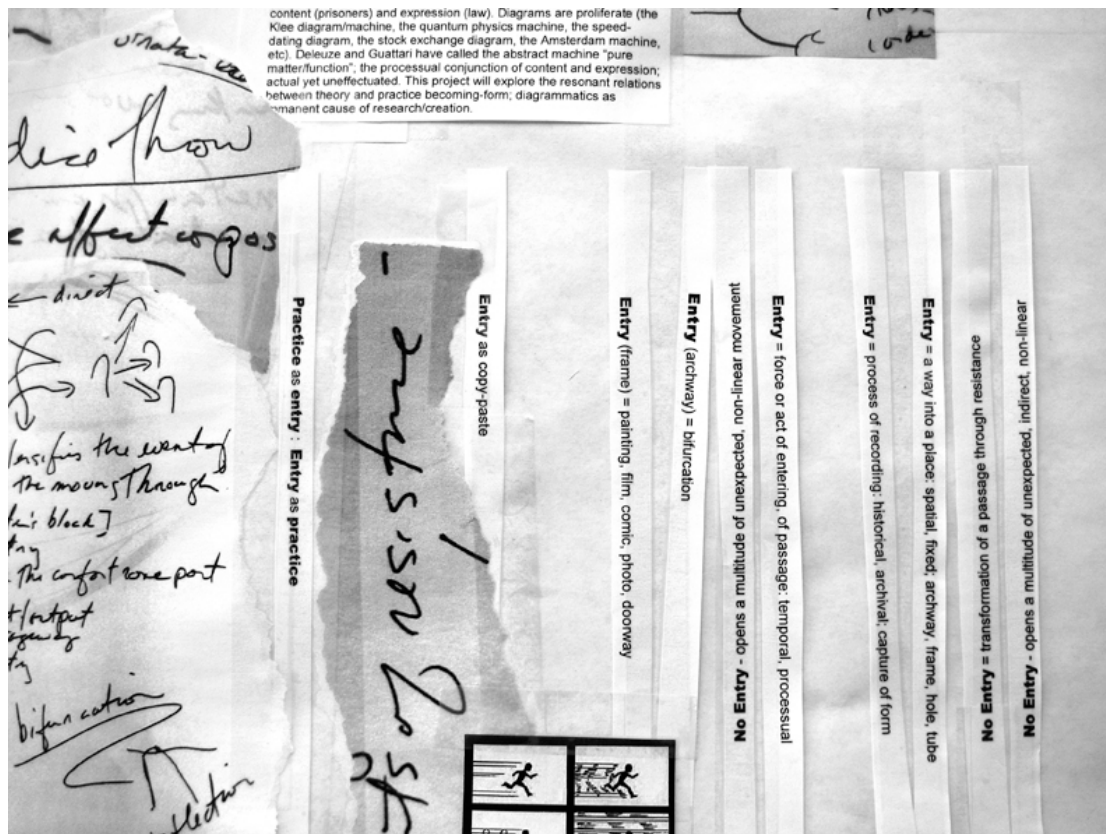
Process Snapshot #2, 5 May 2008: Entry as practice notes. Practice as problematization; **Entry** as diagrammatic; **Entry** = copy-paste; **Entry** = process of recording: historical, archival; capture of form; **Entry** = force or act of entering, of passage: temporal, processual; **Entry** = a way into a place: spatial, fixed; archway, frame, hole, tube; **Entry** = passage through a non-place; **Entry** = hinge between realities; **Entry** = distribution; **No Entry** = transformation of a passage through resistance; **Practice** as entry/passage through an archway (open); **Practice** as **entry** into the frame (closed) through a focal point; **No Entry** - opens a multitude of unexpected, non-linear movement; **No Entry** = intensifies the event of passage, the moving through; **Entry** (archway) = bifurcation; **Entry** (archway) = point of inflection; line of the outside; **Entry** (frame) = painting, film, comic, photo, doorway; [no entry = writer's block]; **Practice** as no entry through the comfort zone portal

Process Snapshot #3, 12 May 2008: Cut-ups (*bold ital* are ports of entry). "This writing, interleaves with the mapping processes with which it *proposes* a contractual (push, pull) approach - the *tendencies*, the matter-movement of not-yet-formalized thought and sensation. *Folds* and unfolds – the forming, deforming and reforming of both processes. The *separation-* between abstract machine, biogram (embodied, inflected diagram) and formal diagram (drawing of/off) are *coexistent* registers of relation between diagramming as abstract machine and its *pulsing* connections (non-relations) that power the resonating thought intensities; the *drawing off.* It imagines clarifying Deleuze's diagram as a *contraction* to variable states of presentation (sketches, drawings and doodles) *between* fragments, between content and expression, the seeable and the sayable. *The* practice of writing, of this writing. "

[Note: these images are snapshots from an eight meter scroll, an experimental technique for diagrammatic praxis that influenced the writing of this editorial and parallel, detailed texts on the politics of the diagram and the biogram in artistic research. SD]

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[1] Part of a three-week artist residency with Association LISA members Nicole Beutler, Ivana Muller and Paz Rojo and guest theorists Igor Dobricic, Bojana Kunst and Manuela Zechner respectively. Participants in these residency/workshops included students and faculty of the School for New Dance Development (SNDO/SNDD), the Dance Unlimited Masters programme and guests. The SNDO/SNDD and Dance Unlimited programees are maintained with the Amsterdam School for Arts (AHK)). The residency series is supported by the Art Practice and Development Research Group.

[2] "A relation does not spring up between two terms that are already separate individuals, rather it is the aspect of an internal resonance of a system of individuation. It forms part of a wider system." (Simondon, 1992, 306)

[3] http://www.vocabulaboratories.net/definitions/31

[4] For Deleuze, power is a relation between forces and a force as Foucault indicates, is a set of actions upon actions. Forces only act upon other forces, not upon objects.

[5] "An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is *diagrammatic* (it knows nothing of the distinctions between the artificial and the natural either). It operates by *matter*, not by substance; by *function*, not by form. Substances and forms are of expression "or" of content. But functions are not yet "semiotically" formed and 'matters" are not yet physically formed. The abstract machine is pure Matter-Function—a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987,141)

[6] Kenneth Knoespel notes that *diagramma* in the original Greek does "not simply mean something that is marked out by lines, a figure, a form or a plan, but also carries a second connotation of marking or crossing out," suggesting not only ephemerality but also an incompleteness that carries an expectation of potential. " In a sense, diagramma embodies a practice of figuring, defiguring, refiguring, and prefiguring. What is interesting is that the diagram participates in a geneology of figures that moves from the wax tablet to the computer screen. From a phenomenological vantage point, the Greek setting of diagram suggests that any figure that is drawn is accompanied by an expectancy that it will be redrawn [...] Here a diagram may be thought of as a relay. While a diagram may have been used visually to reinforce an idea one moment, the next it may provide a means of seeing something never seen before." (Knoespel, 2001. "Diagrams as Piloting Devices in the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze", 147)

[7] "The biogram is a perceptual reliving: a folding back of experience on itself. Each biogram then is a virtual topological superposition of a potentially infinite series of self-repetitions. A biogram doubles back

on itself in such a way as to hold all its potential variations on itself in itself: in its own cumulatively open, self-referential event." (Massumi, 2002, 194)