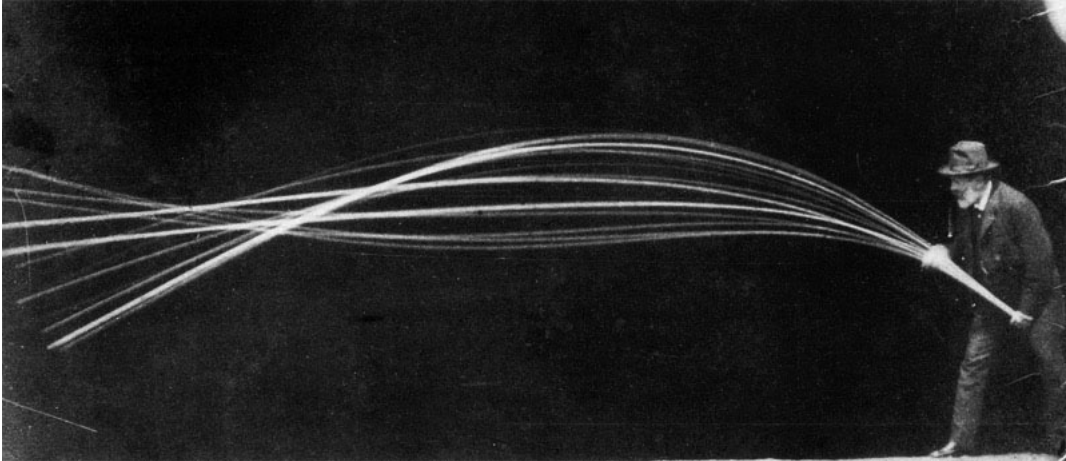


BEING MOTION

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You are moving while reading this text, I am moving while writing it. My cat is moving while sitting on my papers, that is, his body is moving, or something in his body is moving. Blood is running through our veins, electricity shooting through our nerves. Even at moments you think you are standing still, you are in fact still in motion: something in you is going somewhere.

Motion is cells multiplying, hearts beating, organisms growing, planets turning. All is in motion and motion is in all parts of us. This sounds pretty dynamic, but this process has a break: reflection, and especially self-reflection. We are constantly making our own reality and are not only observing things in our own way but also reflecting on the way we are observing. We live in a duality of being an object that moves in many different ways and being a subject that reflects on his or her actions: how we are in the space, how we are with others, how we deal with situations. And reflecting involves our inventive side.

I made photographs of people looking at themselves in the mirror. All the photographs had something in common: all the people were looking a bit bewildered at themselves in the mirror. As if they saw themselves for the first time, as if they could not really recognize the other (the mirror face) as their own.

Sartre, a French twentieth century philosopher, wrote about mirrors as the tool to see your own corporeal existence and the meaninglessness of it;[1] gazing in the mirror for a long time, you can start to see yourself as a body made out of flesh and blood, awaking your awareness to the fact that you are going to die some day. Besides, it makes you realize that you are not only yourself but also just another; by looking in the mirror you become aware that you are a subject to others (a human with behaviours and thoughts) – and to some maybe only an object.

As a 'subject' you feel yourself as a self who is made of thoughts and associations. The self thinks from its center point. The object part of us refers to our body as a 'thing' that occupies a volume in the space – the part of us that feels the resistance of objects and the resistance of our own body. We cannot walk through a closed door, because it is closed. The subject-body, the self, allows us to imagine what could be happening, to be present behind the door; we can even imagine we are standing in the space behind the door.

The bewildered looks of the people in the photographs showed this confusion and the awareness of this dual thing of us, the material part of us, and the psychological part of us.

There are several ways of looking at the object-side of us: one is the experience of seeing the body as flesh and blood through, for example, acting out a repetitive movement, or a mechanical repetition, the self of the body, the expression, disappears. Another way is to see the body as a static still image, as if looking at a sculpture. Yet another way is to lose the self, through feeling your own material side, like bumping against a door.

La Ribot, a contemporary Spanish/French performing artist, is using the object part of her body to tell a story. She is not trying to be an object, like a chair, but rather to create a contrast between an object and a subject. For instance, she performs just one movement, repeatedly, continuously, bringing the object body to the surface, or hiding her subject body.

She always uses other objects (a chair, a radio, clothes) for her performances and the relation between them makes you wonder about the objective side of her own body. Thus a play arises between the self and the material body.

In one performance act she stood there, against the wall, facing ahead, a cardboard piece hanging around her neck saying 'SE VENDE' (for sale) and a folding chair hanging around her wrist. (figure 1) She started to open and close the folding chair, from a slow movement to a very fast one. Little by little she was going towards the floor, until she was laying down. The climax came when she stopped suddenly, while moving the folding chair up and down at a high speed. During the act, the repetitive movement, her face was expressionless, acting like a mechanical device.

She had moved the chair but it looked like the chair was moving her, as though the chair was assaulting her as an object and that she let it happen – as if she was being assaulted so often that she had started to accept that she was an object.

Paulien van Oltheten, a contemporary Dutch artist who photographs people's gestures in public space, shows people's objective-body in a static way. She photographs people in a harmonious position (figure 2, 3). She notices details in the presence of the people, like the hands of two strangers in the subway almost touching each other. The photograph doesn't show the hands of two people, but rather the space in between the hands – which creates tension, like the effect of color fields in paintings, or the empty spaces in a sculpture. Those two people might not have noticed this intense moment of their bodies undergoing a relation, for it might have been a very short moment, but Van Oltheten captured it and showed it in a photograph. She portrays people as if they were abstract sculptures within their environment. But you can also look at the photographs as if they are anthropological studies: not telling something about individuals, but about society.

The assault association that rose from the performance of La Ribot (the chair that was raping her) showed the subjective side of the body, a story about a woman. But at the same time it presented the static and material side of the body, a choreography that made the act abstract and beautiful, This contradiction of lightness and intensity gave the performance its strength.

The abstract side of bodies in the photographs of Paulien van Oltheten, becomes manifest in the composition of postures the bodies made, or were put into. Those bodies carry no more identity than that they were part of their surrounding, the city. Still the compositions of the bodies showed a great deal of sensitivity, as in a ballet, where the ballerinas dance exactly in the same way, thus not expressing personal character but a composite work of art.

Standing in front of one of the blue monochromes of Yves Klein, at the Louvre in Paris, I became aware of the interplay between the object and subject side of my own body. The painting was such an intense blue and it was so big compared to my body that it became a space on its own. I was standing in front of that space and it pulled me in. I felt my skin tingle all over and I realized what an effect the painting had on my body. My body was more present than my mind, which became blurry by the intensity of the sensation triggered by the painting – like the sensation of standing at the edge of an abyss, feeling an urge to jump off the edge, not because you want to die, but rather to feel the material aspect of your body. You might dream about flying, and longing to go far into the sky but the actual reaction your body will have when you really jump, is a reaction based on the laws of objects (like gravity, increasing speed, and crushing).

Apart from perceiving your image as a reflection in the mirror, there is also an image through self-reflection: we see ourselves through other people's reactions to our behaviour, our presence. For example, facial expressions or bodily expressions like the exaggerated hand expressions that can accompany intense speech. We live around each other and take in the reactions of others, adapting our own actions all the time. The Looking Glass Self is a term from Charles Horton Cooley, an American sociologist of the 19th century. Its concept is that the growth of a person's self comes from interpersonal interactions with society, and that it comes from the perceptions of others. The views of other people build, change, and maintain our self-image. There is an interaction between how we see ourselves and how others see us[2].

Self-reflection is not only caused by looking at others, but also through the relativity to objects or the space around us. Standing in a big space makes us feel very small, a soft chair makes our body feel like a jelly pudding, and a hard chair makes us feel our bones. We get an impression of who we are by looking in a mirror, at others, at objects, or at our position in a space. Looking is not only just watching, but perceiving you, your position, other people, all things in relation to each other.

Many times I am overly conscious about my presence towards a space and people, seemingly self-possessed and having little attention for others. Maybe thoughts about the 'I' are making my perception to other things blurry. Sartre stated that having a strong notion of an 'I' makes consciousness opaque. For Sartre, consciousness is something spontaneous and transparent. By defining consciousness as 'I', we are making it opaque, giving it a substance, in order to see it. But consciousness is not something to comprehend[3].

As Henry Bergson, a French philosopher from the 19th and 20th century, said we are constantly changing from one state into another[4]:

I find, first of all, that I pass from state to state. I am warm or cold, I am merry or sad, I work or I do nothing, I look at what is around me or I think of something else. Sensations, feelings, volitions, ideas – such are the changes into which my existence is divided and which color it in turns. I change, then, without ceasing.

Marcus du Sautoy, a contemporary English mathematician, made a documentary about the nature of our identity. In one experiment, a scientist placed a cap on his head with mild electrical shocks being sent to different parts of the brain. Since all nerve cells are connected, each shock triggered a whole series of responses. Different parts in the brain started to 'communicate' with each other and this network-like communication appeared to be the process of consciousness. As Marcus du Sautoy said[5]: The whole is more important than some of the parts. The consciousness, the I, is diversity and unity at the same time.

So each one of us is not a one but a interplay of different parts. And I can imagine that through time this diversity is changing because of experiences and new things we learn.

The first time I saw the work of the South African artist William Kentridge I stayed in that room for one hour. It gave a great excitement, sitting there on the floor, turning around to watch the projections taking up the whole surface of all four walls. Subtle animations in charcoal and paper, inviting me into his world. On one wall there was a projection of stars moving like ants; a black image with white spots. On another wall there was a movie with Kentridge in his studio, looking at the universe through his teacup and a coffeepot shooting to the moon. It was all put together in a very delicate way.

I was captured inside the story. No words are spoken in his films and the images are open for different interpretations. Layer over layer of charcoal, each shot telling a different story, each one intense and triggering your imagination. The sea, through strokes of charcoal, is moving even more powerfully than in reality.

Kentridge likes to think of where the imagination comes in, for him as maker but also for the viewer. In his lecture/performance 'I Am Not Me, The Horse Is Not Mine' he created an animated horse with roughly torn pieces of paper.[6] The pieces of paper do not look like the parts of a horse, but their composition is moving like a horse and perceived as a horse.

Kentridge talked in his lecture about how we see movement while watching a sequence of still images (film). And even when we know that the moving horse is made out of stills we cannot stop ourselves from seeing the stills as a motion (figure 3). Kentridge said we do not only see, we invent.[7] As viewers, pasting the different paper parts together, we have created ourselves a horse. Even when the paper pieces in the animation are slowly dispersing from each other, we keep seeing a horse. The association with the compilation of the paper pieces and a horse is so strong that we cannot let it go. As William Kentridge says[8]:

Our way of being in the world is very much about predicting what's going to happen, taking tiny fragments and putting them together.

In the same lecture, Kentridge gave an example of us always wanting to finish each others' sentences. We make associations while listening to a story and then when the person stops talking we finish the story in our head or aloud with the associations we have made.

We are making associations and stories from what we are perceiving. Take film: film cuts and pastes different images together, or places different times back to back, thus giving us the sensation of experiencing a time-past and a time-present in a way our minds are experiencing memories. In your mind you can have a memory of something you thought of ten years ago followed by one of something that just happened.

7

Arriving at the hospital I was well prepared for the waiting process. I had brought my book in which I was captured for the last few days so I didn't need the word games that were handed out in the waiting room. The first four hours were in fact very pleasant because finally I got very far in the story of the book. In total peace I was sitting there among my fellow sufferers.

Until at one point the turbulence started. I couldn't read any further because I had gotten tired of reading and the story became too horrible. I needed a break, I had to do something else, I had to move. But there wasn't really anything else to do than keep sitting in the waiting room. I had no idea when I would be called in. I looked around at the other people. Everybody was there in the same situation: all had to stay and give themselves to the waiting process. Nobody looked happy nor angry because everybody knew that there was nothing else to do. But even after having taken in the waiting process there came suddenly this turbulence in my body.

I started to twist on my chair because I simply couldn't sit still any more. Time felt like treacle. And in little time I had developed a treacle-allergy. My body reacted very directly on this slow pour in time. I tried to re-find the devotion to the waiting, but with no luck. I stayed moving. I had become incredibly restless.

I was in fact free to stand up and walk away. But as I was already waiting for such a long time I could still argue that it would all be for nothing if I would now leave and that there had to be an end. My body had given up but the mind stayed, believing in an end. This caused a battle. I couldn't think of anything anymore, the only thing occurring in my mind was that I didn't want to be there. Time no longer felt like something that passed by but instead as something I was in.

It was a big relief but also a big frustration when I finally left the hospital. I noticed

that outside the time did pass by. It had become dark and some shops were closed. Time outside had passed by while I was in a capsule of time. I had no awareness of the outside time, but standing outside again I saw how it had changed. Then it suddenly felt as if time had passed very quickly. Inside the hospital I had tied myself to the waiting, while at the same time the rest had moved on.

Different time-lengths are happening simultaneously. Maybe it looks as if there is only one timeline, one point where time has started and one system of measurement for dividing time (in seconds and minutes). But that is what we accept as time, while actually we experience time in many different ways. A farmer may experience time in days rather than in seconds, and a banker in seconds rather than days. Every person experiences time differently.

8

Henri Bergson noted that when perceiving motion with our eyes, we want to cut the movement into different sequences. We are endlessly cutting the space where the motion is happening into parts between two different points, but, as Bergson states, movement itself is not made of different parts, but of an undivided whole. Yet, our brain divides it into sequences, and then pastes these together again as a new whole[9].

Motion itself is not a 'thing that you can cut into parts', nor is it just a 'whole'. Rather, it is a force that changes the position of things in a place, like the rolling of a ball over the pavement. But I see movement also as the transforming of things, like the growing of a plant. The seed changed into a plant; the ball has changed position in space. The space is changing too, even with the slightest movement that happens inside of it.

9

Watching people on a square from above, gives a different view than when standing on the square itself watching the same people. Both perspectives tell completely different stories.

Take for example the way cityplanners look at a city compared to the way its inhabitants respond to it. Steven Holl is a contemporary American architect who says that perception and the senses are intertwined with the material, space, and light of urban form[10]:

Within the experimental continuum of enmeshed space, we understand distinct objects, distinct fields, as a 'whole'. Our experience of a city can only be, however, perspectival, fragmented, incomplete. This experience – unlike a static image – consists of partial views through urban settings, which offer a different kind of involvement or investigation than the bird's eye view, which is typically used by architects and planners.

The one who makes a plan for building a city, might think it is beautiful from above. However, for the ones that will live there, their way of looking at the neighborhood will be completely different because they stand in it instead of above it. They stand in the model instead of standing above it. They cannot see the other streets but the one they stand in. They feel the length of the houses having an effect on them, just like the colors around them do too. These things cityplanners don't have a perspective on while building models and trying to rationalize a new living area. Steven Holl suggest that architects should study cities subjectively as the experiential power of cities cannot be completely rationalized[11].

I walked under it. It felt as if I was walking inside a ship, a big steel ship. Its size pressed down on me, as if I was underwater with no way out. After walking for quite some time I arrived at the end of its length where there was the backside of a slope that lead to the inside.

As I entered, I was immediately surrounded by darkness. I could not estimate the distance to the floor, and for a second I thought there was no floor at all in this space.

I looked at the kids who were walking ahead of me. They were wearing white so I could still recognize them in the darkness. It looked as if they were floating in space, like in early science fiction films where they paste the picture of a standing person in cosmic space – thus giving an unnatural effect since the standing (based on gravity) remains evident and in space there is no gravity.

I thought I would also start floating just like the boys in front of me. I felt as if my body made itself ready to start to lose gravity.

Then I became used to the darkness and everything went back to normal. I started to see light spots on the black floor, and I saw more people in the space and could predict how far away they were standing.

As I turned around I saw the immense opening that I entered before. I saw very clear silhouettes of people standing in the light. Yet, the ceiling was so far, so high, that it remained an endless darkness.

I couldn't see the faces of the people I passed and the ones that passed me, and they probably couldn't see mine either. I felt an awkward relation between the other visitors and myself. If, for example, I would be walking in a dark street, I would be more suspicious about the pedestrians because I could not see their faces. This darkness was designed for many people, together, not to see anything. So now we were all in a situation where unknown people were sharing the same experience.

I walked in and out a few times. Each time I would walk in I would start to see more and more, like the walls, floor and people inside. I think this happened because I started to know the dimensions of the container, by having felt the distances, through walking to the end of the container and to the sides. My eyes got used to the lack of light and I started to easily distinguish different types of darkness inside the space.

In the above experience in Tate Modern, I created a notion of the space 'How It Is', by Miroslav Balka [12] by walking in it, looking around, and listening. My knowledge of the space could not come from viewing a model, it was created through my presence and motion. (Figure 4)

Everything is motion, even our consciousness as it is changing all the time. The motion of our consciousness is starting to slow down when we reflect, that makes us think towards a conclusion. We might become only busy with our heads, but we are also still substance, we must also still relate to everything around us. It's a play between reflection and action, where the roles of the object body and subject body play a role; where we invent our own stories of our position in the surrounding and the relation between other people. Our lives are going from one point to another. We're being motion.



1



3



2



4

Notes

1 Chapter 5: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the Search for a New Ontology of Sight, from the book *Downcast Eyes*, by Martin Jay, University of California Press, first paperback printing 1994, P.281

2 *The looking-glass self*, a term by Charles Horton Cooley, from wikipedia,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Looking_glass_self

3 Chapter 5: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the Search for a New Ontology of Sight, from the book *Downcast Eyes*, P.282.

4 Text from *Creative Evolution*, by Henri Bergson, authorized translation by Arthur Mitchell, Ph. D. Dover Publications, INC Mineola, New York, 1998. P.1

5 From the documentary *The Secret You*, from Horizon, made by Marcus du Sautoy

6 William Kentridge in his lecture: *I Am Not Me, The Horse Is Not Mine*, part: a “ world fixed in time”. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 18 maart 2009, from youtube,

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g0uCbMsrzI&feature=related

7 An interview with William Kentridge by Tom Hickey, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESR94H2Dgf4&feature=related>

8 Another part of William Kentridge's lecture on youtube, part: on constructing meaning

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlNMzeTL_aA&feature=related

9 From the book *Matter and Memory*, Henry Bergson, chapter 4: the delimiting and fixing of images. Perception and Matter. Soul and Body, P. 246

http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Bergson/Bergson_1911b/Bergson_1911_04.html

10 From the book, *Questions of Perception Phenomenology of Architecture*, written by Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, Albert Perez-Gomez. Williams Stout Publishers, San Francisco, Nobuyuki Yoshida Editor Toshio Nakamura, 2006 Chapter Perspectival Space: Incomplete Perception P.48

11 From the website www.stevenholl.com

12 *How It Is*, A work of the artist Miroslav Balka, in the Tate Modern, 13 oct 2009 – 5 apr 2010

Figures:

1. Performance of La Ribot. www.laribot.com

2. Photograph of Paulien van Oltheten. www.arcus-project.com/2008/Paulien_Oltheten_06_been_ertussen.jpg

3. Lecture by William Kentridge. <http://performa-arts.org/blog/william-kentridge/>

4. Work of Miroslav Balka. www.canadianart.ca/online/reviews/2010/01/21/miroslav-balka/

Cover: A picture of Etienne-Jules Marey. www.urbanseagull.blogspot.com/2008/08/tienne-jules-marey-1830-1904.html