# Diagramming Double Vision

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http://vimeo.com/116260231

How does one teach a text about movement, about a dance or a performance? How can one do justice to both the achievement of the author and the work that her text discusses?

It is easy to conceive of what should happen in a classroom following a model of communication, that is, in terms of the transmission of knowledge from an informed instructor to a student. The instructor tells the students what can be said and known about artist X or artwork Y; the student dutifully takes notes and, ideally, retains the information. This model of education certainly has its advantages: it allows for the scope of education to be measured in terms of the content transmitted; it also integrates much more easily with a reorganization of higher education according to a logic of exchange, in this case of knowledge and information. "You can download the slides on Blackboard [or Moodle, Canvas, etc.]": the refrain of quick exchange in education. At the same time, knowledge and information in their exchangeable form are easily accessible on the internet, on Wikipedia for instance. What, then, is the singular project of higher education that stands out from a mass of knowledge traders?

In our opinion, teaching, particularly in the humanities, can stand out by pushing beyond the movements of exchange that characterize the information economy and generate *movements of thought*. In such a movement, it is not a stable piece of reliable information that moves from point A to point B. Rather, the movement is a transformation of the very things that can be known, it is a push towards the *un*known. Pedagogy is radical when it doesn't shy away from uncertainty and

vagueness, not as ends in themselves but as conditions of a process of coming-to-know-differently.

If thought is a creative movement and, differently put, "philosophy is a doing," then the way to teach research on movement may lie just there: in motion, in practice (Massumi 2010: 3). If in turn "every practice is a mode of thought," there is no gap to bridge between (movement) practice and research (Manning & Massumi 2014: vii). Rather, the difference is between the qualities of various modes of thought. The challenge for any thinker is how to make different modes of thought resonate, how to think *with* another thinking.

**T.P.** In the fall of 2014, I taught a class on "Remix and Participatory Cultures." The challenge I had set myself was to not only teach important examples of participatory and remix art as well as academic research on the topic, but to make the productivity of participation and remix felt in the classroom. What can happen in a classroom when it works as a remix? In the first to meetings of the seminar, I tried to create a collective movement of thought through techniques developed within the SenseLab. The first is conceptual speed dating, first proposed by Andrew Murphie (for a detailed description see Manning & Massumi 2014: 96-97). The second is a cut-up reading of a text, a technique I adopted from Ronald Rose-Antoinette. The latter exercise consists in cutting up one or, in this case, two related texts and distributing the passages of text among the students. The task is to find a beginning (not *the* beginning of the original text) and to create a movement of thought from there, that is, to read the passages in an order that makes sense for the group. This requires the students to deeply engage with the text or texts: You need to see how your passage begins and on what note it ends in order to make it connect. You need to listen for the openings in the passages that other people read. You have to adjust to the movement that is already under way: you passage reads differently depending on the moment you choose to insert it; other words come to stand out in light of what has gone before. In this way, the cut-up reading can create a field of attention that includes every student in the room.

After these two propositions, the students were invited (assigned) to propose their own remix exercises to make us engage with readings and artworks differently each week. In what follows, we would like to present one such in-class remix that was particularly interesting. Jorrit Groot and Chrys Vilvang proposed a walking exercise in response to a reading of Alanna Thain's article

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"Anarchival Cinemas," published in *Inflexions* in 2010. The article is in large part about headphone listening and the cinematic qualities it brings to everyday experience. Thain discusses the piece *Spiral Jetty* by the Other Theatre, based in Montreal, Canada. The piece is a collective performance produced by the audience itself: each of the twenty participants receives an MP3-player which plays instructions on how to move and act in the performance space. Thain provides [this link to a video of the piece](#).

**J.G. and C.V.** In response to the article by Alanna Thain, we proposed a walking exercise. We pushed chairs and tables to the four walls of the classroom to create a large space for walking in the centre of the room. Then we assembled all the participants of the course outside the room and gave them a walking score on an instruction card (see Figs. 1-10). Each little card contained a very simple diagram indicating the trajectory and direction in which the participant should walk inside the rectangular room. Then one participant was sent into the room every thirty seconds or so to walk according to his or her diagram. So at first one person walks through the room alone; when the second participant thinks thirty seconds have passed, he or she enters the room. After another felt half-minute, a third person enters, etc. When all the participants are walking inside the room, the person who entered the room first lets thirty seconds pass, then leaves the room. All the participants will leave the room in the same order they entered it and following the same thirty-second relay. During the experiment we chose to play the piece "Sweet 16" by Cory Arcangel, which is a loop of the guitar intro to Guns 'N' Roses *Sweet Child of Mine*. The loop actually consists of two layered versions of the intro: one version consists of the first eight bars of the intro; the other version contains one note less. The continuous loop of these two layers creates a phasing effect that produces a variety of rhythmic and melodic effects over the duration of the piece. [1] The choice of the song compliments some of the principles of the experiment in its defamiliarization of a recognizable form, the building chaos of the audio growing as more participants enter the room. To add an element of distraction or dual vision in the space, a video was projected on the wall to mimic the way people navigating busy urban spaces are increasingly doing so while simultaneously checking their phones. In an attempt to capture the way diverted or split vision produces less attentive experience of space, the video was deliberately shot out of focus on a wide-angle lens, creating a large-scale blur of visual information. It was filmed on one of Amsterdam's

busiest pedestrian streets, an environment in which intersecting navigations of space are highly present. The video comprises the right half of the dual vision film presented in conjunction with this article, the left half is the documented in-class experience of the exercise.

The aim of the exercise was to make felt the constant shifts in an environment that we unconsciously adapt to as well as the many aspects of our surroundings that feed into experience without ever taking centre-stage. The wager was that all of this would come out as the participants attempt to quite simply continue their trajectory in an increasingly crowded room.

What comes into awareness as the room fills is that you have settled into a comfortable speed to the measure of *Sweet 16*. The new people in the space will inevitably force you out of that steady rhythm as your trajectories cross or run parallel. You begin to navigate the room more carefully, extending your attention around you to avoid collisions or awkward double takes on how to walk past one another. A participant told us afterwards that he "realized" he could change his walking speed to allow for the collective walking to go smoothly. Others became less rigorous in following the exact trajectory we had drawn for them; individual points across the room became more important as momentary landing sites. The exercise made participants rediscover all the major and minor ways in which we – usually unconsciously – tweak our movements to move through a complex, shifting world. We do this for instance when we move with on a sidewalk, practically dancing alongside one another. [2]

In this way, we attempted to move participants to think the transition from a conventional notion of the diagram, to the concept of the diagram as developed by Alanna Thain in her article. Usually, one would think of a diagram as a simplified representation of reality, such as the ones we had provided on the instruction cards. These cards are two-dimensional sketches which reduce a movement through three-dimensional space to a black line on white background. These diagrams assume the perspective of a disembodied overhead view familiar in topographic maps. Used as instructions however, they prepare the collective movement within the classroom space. Just like topographic maps, the instructions cards are abstract representations *of* the world that have a pragmatic impact *in* the world. [3] Representations act as formative forces. But instructions cards are not a collective movement yet. To think the complexity of the exercise or any collective movement on the sidewalk or elsewhere, we need to take into

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considerations all the other forces that factor into movement's form-taking, including those arising as the experiment goes along. The relayed entrances of participants, the simultaneity of their walking, the sound of people's gait even as they walk behind us, movements that register only in our peripheral vision and many more shifts in the milieu co-create whatever comes into existence. *This* is the diagram, "a topological transformation of an existing […] field, engaging both with possibility and also with virtual potential, a reserve of newness and difference" (Thain 2010: 53). You are doing the diagram before you are consciously thinking or representing it.

> The diagram is the inseparability of body and milieu; in other words, we no longer have the relation of subject and object, but only a relation of forces, differential intensities and our propensity for assemblage that allows for an intensive experience of an actualization and of the virtual elements of an assemblage, the swarming mass not individuated but made visible in its multiple, heterogeneous compositions (cells, ant, memory, matter, movement, technology). (Thain 2010: 56)

As a concept, the diagram allows us to think everything that is at work in the world without passing through our consciousness. This is also a challenge to education which oftentimes follows the model of conscious, verbal communication. Through the exercise for "Diagramming Double Vision" we attempt to activate the unconscious and embodied modes of knowledge to enrich the experience of conventional classroom teaching.

**Notes**

[1] The piece can be accessed here: http://www.coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2006-005-sweet16

[2] For a description of a sidewalk dance compatible with this account, see Manning & Massumi 2014: 9-10.

[3] For a seminal consideration of the relation between maps and the mapped territory, see Bateson 1987.

**Works Cited**

Bateson, Gregory. "Form, Substance, and Difference." In *Steps To an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale/London: Jason Aronson, 1987. 455-471.

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**Walking Diagrams**

**Fig. 1**
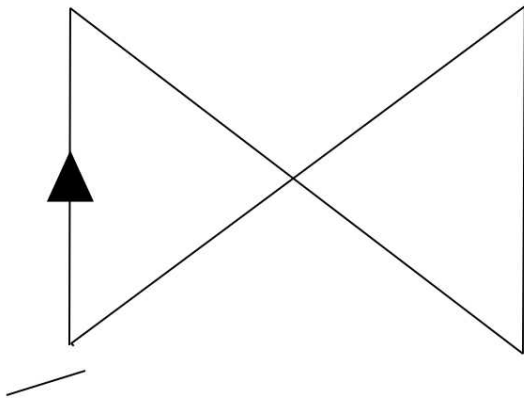
**Fig. 2**
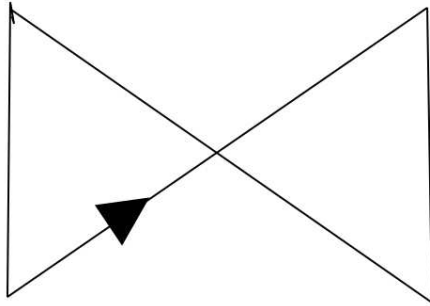
**Fig. 3**
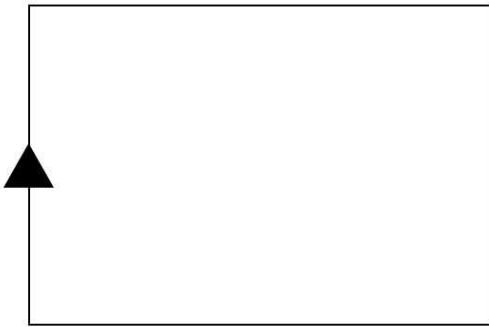
**Fig. 4**

**Fig. 5**

**Fig. 6**



**Fig. 7**



**Fig. 8**

**Fig. 9**