COSMODELIA

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OF

ATTENTION

The emergence of the question of attention (our attentions!) in public space denotes both the threats weighing down upon it, due to all of the forms of predation it is being subjected to, as well as the renewed concern given to collectively learning to "pay attention". Who then will pay attention to our attentions? Who then is there to be attentive to our attentions? And where?

Attention to who, or to what?

Attentions for who, or what?

Beginning with the capturing of attention by capitalist forces, the article proceeds to explore the reinvestments of the question of attention which translate into gestures that Jérémy Damian has dubbed "cosmodelic". These gestures of attention temporarily and tenuously call for, "instaure" (Souriau), and compose inhabitable cosmoses.

Would it be too generalistic to say that we are living in an overzealously vigilant world?

In "The Mast-Head", chapter 35 of Moby Dick (1851), Melville weaves a dense and complex scene of attention going from vigilance to standing vigil, surveillance to care, from concentration to distraction, defense to dissolution. The mast-head is the platform adorning the mainmast of the Pequod; the ship that Captain Ahab set out to cross oceans with in search of Moby Dick. It is a cramped, austere, and precarious place, with no real holds to grapple onto, and "so sadly destitute of anything approaching to a cosy inhabitiveness" that it requires its own special training (to know how to support oneself, to seek comfort; how to see, to discern, to warn; how to think, to let one's mind wander) with the collective support of all of those who go stand watch. Curiously, the lookout is a place of exposure as much as it is of detachment. Whoever watches and keeps guard is in charge of "singing out upon discovering any strange sight". To be robust and vigorous is of little importance in comparison with the ability to "descry what shoals and what rocks must be shunned.". Though the success of the fishing expedition may depend on it, it is, on a far deeper level, a matter of life and death. Conversely, it is an elevated station offering the possibility of detaching oneself from all that weighs upon the world. Melville's narrator, Ishmael, makes it out to be "exceedingly pleasant [...] to a dreamy meditative man." This form of vigilance could be a kind of hypersensitivity to the world, to its events as much as its perils or threats, a site of dissipation, disidentification and enchantment, the place in which a relationship to the world is made. In short, an untenable place.

What is attention? It is this very place.
What does it mean to pay attention? To inhabit it.

LIMITED RESOURCE, PRIZED TARGET

According to philosopher Matthew Crawford, we are experiencing a balkanisation of attention (2016). Yet more than its mere fragmentation, we are having to come to grips with a paradoxical attentional regime.

Note: I would like to thank J. Bruneau, M. Cros, R. Herbin, C. Le Blay, E. Merabet and E. Tournaire for their suggestions, close reading and advice. This text owes a great deal to Yves Citton and the crew of pirates he left orphaned and mutinous in Grenoble: Amandine Dupraz, Martin Givors, Jacopo Rasmi...

Neoliberalism targets and formats our acts of perceiving, it scrambles our attention spans, alternating between over-solicitation and deprivation. It administers a very unusual regime, trapped as we are between constant hypersolicitation and diffuse anesthesia (De Sutter 2017). The paradox hinging on the fact that, beyond the sheer alternation of both of these states, we are affected in both ways simultaneously. If one were to try to translate the effect this regime has upon us, perhaps we could find it in Hitchcock's work. For the filming of Vertigo (1958), he asked his director of photography, Irmin Roberts, to implement a technique—invented by Romanian cinematographer Sergiu Huzum—for the very first time, in order to depict his lead character's feeling of vertigo. The dolly zoom, also known as the vertigo effect, consists of zooming in in proportion to the pace at which the camera tracks back. Nothing has changed, and yet all is transformed, or rather transforming, inducing confusion, vertigo, and anxiety. It is difficult to define what attention is, strictly speaking. "My experience is what I agree to attend to", philosopher William James once wrote (1892). Jean Philippe Lachaux likens the act of "paying attention" to an offer of existence made to an object, a scene or a being, within the field of our sensory experience (2011). Or more simply and mysteriously, he offers the following minimalist definition: attention is "what is moving when nothing is moving." (2011, 9). Willing/unwilling, focused/peripheral, profound/superficial, serial/parallel, the alleged experts

of attention (neurologists, psychologists, advertisers, sales representatives) equate it to the organ that supports it: the brain, with attention becoming the reflection of its activity. They consider it exclusively through this cerebral primacy, freezing it into the figure of a limited resource, one that is truly rare and precious.

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Furthermore, they limit it to an individual phenomenon at once inner and private. It is from this presumed scarcity and declared preciousness that attention has come to be the focus of so much attention in the age of post-industrial capitalism. For example, Jonathan Crary (2014) has described a few of the technologies intended to manufacture and pre-orient our attention with regard to our consumer behaviour, and, increasingly, in all spheres of our lives (politics, relationships...). Even the status of the passive television viewer, brimming with "available brain time", once so sought after and the object of every desire, is no longer satisfactory to the most advanced forms of capitalism. It fails to provide sufficient opportunity to gather and generate



data that can be marketed and monetised 1. Passivity is only an ideal in a world that is no longer running. Every individual is now required to be active in light of their tastes, their emotions, their opinions, etc. Everyone is the agent of their own commercialisation. Capitalism has applied itself to the conditioning and the exploitation of our attention; there isn't a sector that hasn't rolled out with its own little expertise: "attention management", "attention marketing", "attentional design"². And yet attention has never ceased to be subject to reinvestments that reveal that it is neither the captive of naturalism-of a reductionist, biological and cerebral kind-or of fatalism-reduced it to its "balkanisation" by the repeated assaults of capitalism. It lives on in the form of what the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey might have called a concern. This is not to be understood as a truth, with manifestations and functions that can be fixed, but rather as a "thing" whose modes of existence and borders are collectively and publicly negotiated (and, at times, disputed). Thus, for example, philosopher Alva Noë (2010) has refused to characterise attention as a phenomenon taking place inside ourselves. He rather describes it as an accomplishment, an activity or something that is done (un faire)—even where this very "doing" may be involuntary. This doing is not the exclusive prerogative of an isolated individual, but rather the fruit of its entanglement with a populated area (populated by things, humans and non-humans, interests and desires, pressure points and resistances...). Somewhere between the naturalising, reductive grasp of the neurosciences, and neoliberalism's consuming grip, Matthew Crawford (2016) and Yves Citton (2017) have, each in their own way, proposed that attention be entered into the realm of common property—so that this "doing" may henceforth collectively, and with utmost priority, become a recipient of care. We must then, according to Yves Citton, orchestrate a transition (which is also a resistance) from an economy of attention to an ecology of attention. Such a transition would rigourously affirm its trifold irreducibility, that is: 1) to a biophysical phenomenon, 2) to a target and 3) to an individual phenomenon. Attention is not a given, it engages desires, challenges, and apparatuses. Its ecology demands that we learn to redistribute our attentions collectively in such a way as to relearn to "make

^{1 &}quot;In this sense 24/7 capitalism is not simply a continuous or sequential capture of attention, but also a dense layering of time, in which multiple operations or attractions can be attended to in near-simultaneity, regardless of where one is or whatever else one might be doing." [Crary 2013, 84]

² cf. Addiction by design (2012), the fantastic and terrifying monograph by anthropologist Natasha Dow Schüll, that deals with the industry of "attentional design" with reference to the galaxy of slot machines in Las Vegas. She leads an inquiry into casinos, thinking of them as apparatuses that are experts in the design of addictive experiences. From the architecture of casinos to the algorithms of slot machines, everything is thought out so as to segment, isolate and privatise spaces which act as "berceptual shelters", and program the ideal behavior of the player turned pure consumer.

ourselves pay attention" [faire attention] (2016, 62), where what matters in this formulation, as Isabelle Stengers often reiterates it, is the making (le "faire") 3.

If attention is accomplished through direct interaction with an environment, it is important to take the transformations affecting our living

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environments into account. For example, two terms have come to be in recent years that bear witness to the current attention given to our living environments' contamination or degradation: agnotology and collapsology. The former refers to the "production of ignorance", an expression forged by Robert Proctor in the nineties, that recalls the actors and institutions that came to be masters in the art of

inducing and sustaining doubt in issues pertaining to health (smoking) and the environment (global warming)⁴. The latter refers to "the study of the collapse of our industrial civilisation", a field of study imagined by Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens, in view of a reinvestment of the conception of knowing how to live together during, and following, this collapse (2015). Agnotology is not merely a question of knowledge, of beliefs, it bears on the very composition of the world through an artful, and often subtle, play on the distribution of legitimate distractions and attentions. For our world lives expressly within an established distribution of the sensible that is ever renegotiable, providing the tenants of this distribution are pushed from time to time (Rancière 2000). By the same token, collapsology is not an awareness of a forthcoming and increasingly inevitable end, but rather a practice that demands a sense of participation. There would be no sense or value in being aware, if it were not to help us rehearse the craft of falling together as a collective. Agnotology and collapsology are two terms that prime and sharpen our attentions, that redirect them. They require that we train our attentions, adapt them, that we negotiate their regimes and formats, their times and places. These terms demand that we learn to turn towards the collectives that feel the desire or the duty, here and there, to carefully learn to pay attention, so that other worlds may still have yet to be made (Escobar 2018).

4 cf. (Proctor 2012) and (Girel 2017)

PAYING ATTENTION / MAKING ATTENTION

Making attention implies that the processes involved in paying attention might call for a learning or training process, for negotiation, invention... We must return to William James and the way that he shows the extent to which attention can be prepared, warmed up, stretched or titillated, whilst trying to understand where and how to convey the contrast between warming up and conditioning. Each of us, of course, have perceptive or attentional routines. In the face of what is coming, by habit, we favour one aspect of a situation over another. According to William James, habit is worth "ten times nature" (1892, 97). And this habit of doing, feeling, and so on, plays a crucial role in allowing us to react to our environment without systematically having to bring everything to consciousness. On the other hand, habit acts at the expense of a loss of conscious attention. It is in this sense that William James referred to habit as "the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent." As a corollary, in opening it up to variation, a subversive potential can arise from playing on habits that determine us to the advantage of those that liberate us. In Difference and Repetition (1968), Deleuze imagined that under every supposedly united and autonomous subject were hidden a myriad of contemplative little selves, with each of these contemplations participating in their own iteration of the subject⁵. Attention can be distributed, leafed through, or tentacular—it can be combined. It is born of, and supported by, an entire ecosystem. Of course, it can hone in on a single point, although rarely for long, or else be in vast expansion. We navigate relentlessly between its planes, currents, textures, foregrounds and backgrounds. It is neither a melody or a fugue, it is a polyrhythmic polyphony.

Yet, *making attention* could also mean redefining the terms of our degree of exposure to the world, and thus challenging the self-evidence of the public

exposure of our actions, whether in the realm of politics, relationships, or... From whistleblowers to Anonymous, and passing via The Invisible Committee (*le Comité Invisible*), numerous are those engaged in repoliticising the practice of anonymity, and, in the same stride, revitalising the

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terms of the constitution of new radical political subjects. As if it were the case here of building new forms of attention, inseparable from ways of doing and assembling, that go beneath the continually surveilling radars. *To withdraw ourselves* is akin to another strategy consisting in *distracting ourselves*, that is, suddenly—or at least with the appearance of suddenness—to reorient the span

³ "Making in the sense that attention here is not related to that which is defined as *a priori* worthy of attention, but as something that creates an obligation to imagine, to check, to envisage, consequences that bring into play connections between what we are in the habit of keeping separate." (Stengers 2015, 62) Translated by Andrew Goffey



William Wegman Two dogs and a ball, 1972, Movie on film Assembly of screenshots made by J. Bruneau

of our attentions toward something else. To allow ourselves to be distracted (to give ourselves permission to), is to be absorbed by something more important than that which was alleged to be so, it is to override the expected, official, and legitimate order of attentions, to open one's eyes to programmed attentional blind spots. To be absorbed by something else, but something other than what? There is beauty in this elision of language, in its open-endedness. What is it that motivates or feeds the desire or the will to pay attention to something else? So many people and situations count on our distractions that, in reclaiming and organising them, there lies a potent political act. If attention is a thing that is performed, there is quite another thing that consists in not paying attention. Some have felt compelled to train to not pay attention. Whereas teachers are worrying about their students' deficit of attention, should we not, on the contrary, reassign value to the more wandering, labile and floaty forms of attention? According to Yves Citton, "this lack of resources" can indeed "be transformed into an asset (less is more), holding out the promise of an emancipatory distraction: if we cannot be attentive enough, let us be attentive differently — and make our distraction into an opportunity for a detachment which, freeing us from our voluntarist blinkers, will allow us to reconsider the problem in an entirely new way." (2017, 117) Lifting our gaze toward an elsewhere may, in this way, open a space in which other possibles, other intuitions can flourish.

In another sense, *making attention* could mean getting a feel for the extent to which being attentive goes hand in hand with being considerate⁹, and calls for what anthropologist Anna Tsing refers to as the arts of noticing. These would exorcise us from all of the measures of standardisation and

^{5 &}quot;Underneath the self which acts are little selves which contemplate and which render possible both the action and the active subject. We speak of our 'self' only in virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us: it is always a third party who says 'me'. These contemplative souls must be assigned even to the rat in the labyrinth and to each muscle of the rat. Given that contemplation never appears at any moment during the action - since it is always hidden, and since it 'does' nothing (even though something is done through it, something completely novel) - it is easy to forget it [...]" (Deleuze, 1994, 75-76)

⁶ Mattia Gallotti and Chris D. Frith (2013) have given the name "we-mode" to the dynamic which sees a plurality of attentions combining and encountering one another. All of this "bears evidence, as Axel Seeman has written, of the decline in the solipsist conception of the soul, and the blossoming of a perception of mental phenomena as being of an intrinsically social kind." auoted in (Crawford 2016, 203).

⁷ (De Lagasnerie 2015, 101-143 ; Bordeleau 2012)

⁸ Magicians and other pickpockets are avid masters in the art of distraction, orchestrating our distractions in order to cheerfully and almost freely carry out what they have to do elsewhere. See the astonishing work by Machnik & Martinez-Conde (2010), in which two neuroscientists went to a magicians' conference to learn from them what neurologists and cognitive psychologists have been relentlessly seeking to prove in their laboratories.

^{9 (}Butler 2010 ; Macé 2017)

homogenisation particular to capitalist forms of production, in search of "scalability" (2017, 38). Scalability is a method of management and production particular to capitalism. It operates irrespective of the kind of good produced, of the scale or even the place of production, and its value and sole purpose is to make every thing and experience comparable, measurable. To prosper, capitalism needs to, by any means, not pay too much attention to the specificities of what (and on whose back) it intends to create value with. Hence, the standardisation of production chains, rendered generic and interchangeable. Everything else is the art of paying attention, art that an anthropologist may discover in the forests of Oregon, following pickers of a mushroom that is highly prized in Japan, on the other side of the Pacific: the Matsutake. Successfully picking a mushroom which, typically, cannot be seen, demands a plurality of little attentions to infinitesimal clues. Such an art of attention can only be deployed in light of the specificity and the singularity of each of the encounters it faces, cultivating anew all that capitalism thought it could dispense with.

THE STRINGS OF THE WORLD

What are the places, the moments, the apparatuses and collectives that nurture the possibility of such singularities being cultivated? Theatre is doubtless one of the places and the practices that has always kept the question of attention at its core. Paying attention to attention, producing attention. Artists are also, and in an entirely different way, instigators and sculptors of attention. They possess this rare capability for multiplying what it is we devote attention to, whilst diversifying the modes by which we pay attention.

In the sixties, a constellation of artistic endeavours placed attention at the heart of their concerns. American minimalists such as Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris conceived their artworks in such a way as to turn the viewer towards their own attentional activity – to their way of reading volume, of working their way around and being directed towards the space which, with a single gesture, welcomes and disposes both the artwork and the viewer's own presence. In another style, Rauschenberg described his first monochromes as "hypersensitive membranes [...] registering the most infinitesimal phenomena on their withered white skins ¹⁰". John Cage, on the other hand, relentlessly investigated our attentional capabilities, opening a field of experience where listening could turn unto itself. When none

of what is expected occurs, when nothing appears to be happening, or when what *is* happening is bothering us, listening to our listening is one way of making our attention conscious of itself and accepting it as the very landscape to contemplate.

In *L'Expérience esthétique* (2015), philosopher Jean-Marie Schaeffer prolongs these artistic experiments by seeking to describe the attention regime specifically at work in an aesthetic experience. This aesthetic modality of attention regimes is characterised by an intensification of attention that transpires in two complementary processes: a densification and a saturation of attention. Although aesthetic experiences are characterised by an intensification of attention that sharpens our ability to pick up on new nuances in the world, as well as to turn our attention toward it in novel ways, art cannot be reduced to a return of attention on itself, however creative this return may be. Attention operates according to an almost paradoxical principle of inhabitation: the more I devote attention, the more I discern and discriminate, the more the world fills up, becoming peopled with qualities, phenomena, textures (Hennion 2009).

Yet, precisely one of the issues with our way of relating to the world is having learned only to perceive emptiness between the entities that constitute it — to have thought of them, dot by dot, from a regime of separation (Quessada 2013). Nevertheless, this regime vacillates and trembles 11, programming the obsolescence of any atomistic thought. Beings are not dots or atoms, discreet or isolated atoms in a vague and homogeneous space, they are tangled with one another and mingle amongst differing species. Donna Haraway (2016) coined the term sympoïesis to refer to the symbiotic associations that produce life forms in contrast to the liberal myth of the self-made man, insisting on the proliferating quality of the connections at work. Anthropologists have long been searching to provide a definition of human personhood mapping it as a network of relationships rather than as an indivisible atom 12. On paper, this map rather closely resembles the image we would make of a puppet that has been deprived of a body of its own, leaving only the strings and fasteners remaining. Perhaps puppetry draws the power to grab contemporary audiences from this analogy? Nothing could be better suited than puppetry to manifest the entanglement of the world: souls, sensitivities, hopes, symbioses, anxieties, forces...

¹¹ The previous issue of the Corps-ObjetImage journal explored a possible reanimation or how — and under what condition:
— something akin to weird animisms were resurfacing everywhere in our everyday landscapes.



Duran adam, standing man. By standing straight, still and in silence during the Gezi Park protests (Istanbul), choreographer Erdem Gündüz rallied a number of fellow citizens gathered in opposition without a message or program, drawing all the more attention given their evasion of any neat label.



A number of Antonin Artaud's texts invoke the figure of the "jumping jack", buffeted and shaken by contradictory movements, making the puppet out to be a metaphor of man as prisoner unto himself. Why not see that a puppet is not merely a bound and restricted entity, but instead connected and sensitive to very particular forms of stimulation? Hélène Beauchamp (2009) invented a possible etymology or a translation into ancient Greek of the term puppet: neurospasta, that is, literally "objects set into motion by strings". The nature of these strings is of utmost importance here, given that the neuron ("tendon", "nerve", "fibre" in Greek) would appear to endow it with a nervous system at the interface of its body and the world. Neurospasta do not represent the world any more than puppets do; they are the world, through their ties and their

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entanglements they continue themselves into it at least as much as it prolongs itself in them. A fastener is a sensitive apparatus; the world's tremors shoot up in waves travelling along the wire of these orthoses. Picking up on, detecting, being affected by. Puppets are being revealed in their

seismographic dimension: they register and make visible some of the world's events and textures, some of its jolts, that we may not have seen without them. They are the very epitome of unseparateness.

Philosopher Timothy Morton has taken an interest in the existence of a class of entities unaccounted for because it does not respond to the ontological standards specific to our modern naturalism: "hyperobjects" (2013). These entities stand out by virtue of their viscosity (they smother us, it is impossible to not be affected by them), their non-locality (they are nowhere and everywhere at the same time, they cannot be isolated by locality) and their interobjectivity (these are not things, they are, rather, constituted by the relationships between what we identify as things). Global warming is, according to the philosopher, a prime example of a hyperobject, and the one that challenges us most: we are very poorly equipped to detect and provide it with a physical depiction capable of making us react to its threats. As Bruno Latour (2017), and more recently, Estelle Zhong Mengual (2017) have put forward, ecological crisis is to be understood first as a crisis of sensitivity. What Anna Tsing is attempting as an anthropologist, and Timothy Morton is alerting us of as a philosopher, boils down to making perceptible and traceable the tangled yarn of entities, bodies, temporalities, stories, knowledge and the invisible entities, interlacing and combining in such a way that something resembling a body can exist. It is not so much that bodies tangle, but rather that entanglement itself forms bodies.

To see the world in this light, to feel it, to *pay attention* to it, starting from the power of this "lyannaj" ¹³. In this lies one of the key issues for the performing arts, that is, to experiment with ways of physically depicting this phenomenon and of accelerating our collective attentions (Citton 2017). Analogously, one could lead an inquiry into our ways of standing the mast-head, witnessing the approach of new oncoming threats, whilst bearing in mind that there can be no pure embodiment of vigilance ¹⁴.

The field that the Centre Dramatique National and this journal are exploring, which diffracts into the three following terms—body, object, image—is to be imagined as one of the platforms where new vigilances are experimented with, where such figurations are explored. Where it is not a matter of unexpected objects entering the stage, unexpected, that is, because of never having been seen on stage, but rather to stage their very entanglement and singular phenomenology.

COSMODELIA

If the sixties were *psychedelic*—literally, that "makes the spirit appear"—we are going through *cosmodelic* years: the current age is working at the inception of an inhabitable cosmos that renews the conditions and forms of hospitality. This will not be achieved without drawing, cultivating, paying, making as well as building, feeding, negotiating, and luring unprecedented forms of attention, including a crowd of new entities and events that theatre takes part in, amongst a multitude of other initiatives, seeking to nurture the possibility of existence.

This issue would like to bring together some *practitioners of attention*; those who modulate it, diversify it, who open up play spaces, and landscapes for it to be explored: those who cultivate a version of attention that does not reduce it to a homogenous, local and routine activity, but instead, retranslate it under the umbrella of *practices*—dense blends of training and experimentation. Practitioners of attention... to celebrate those who open up territories that defamiliarise us from our habits, who disturb our attentions, giving them a

¹³ The term was born out of colonisation, and the exploitation of enslaved bodies in the sugar plantations. It originally referred to a technical skill: the dexterity involved in sewing the sweet reeds together. It has grown to be a way of composing forces and forms with one another: "The dynamic of lyannaj is to alloy and rally, to tie, connect and relay all that has become universed." (Tourn Bong 2018, 182)

¹⁴ To be convinced this is the case, let us notice that two of the most common expressions in English regarding attention are to pay and to draw attention. Whereas the first remains relatively transparent, the second summons a rich semantic landscape that stretches out to "draw", "sketch", "trace", "siphon", "extract", "collect", and even suggests the less common usage of "to elaborate". This plurivocity informs us as to the non-innocence of vigilance.

change of scenery, in order to regain new attentions 15.

One of the particularities of artistic endeavours could be attributable to the fact that processes that were once presented as "mental" or "cognitive", inner

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and private, are publicised, that is to say socialised, by art. They are currently being reconsidered in the context of their own ecology: an entirely broadened ecosystem that flows from a two pronged dismissal of cerebral privilege: delocalization and distribution ¹⁶. With their attentions conjoined and distributed, practitioners of attention cultivate our dispositions to what

anthropologists call the porosity of the soul, against the Western postulate of insular consciousness.

The contributions to this issue, diverse as they are, all attune to a political frequency not unrelated to themes discussed in the previous issue, that dealt with attempts at reanimation: the question of knowing who and what we pay attention to, who and what we give the right of existence to, and what we make visible, audible, perceptible is a crucial question to which "we", henceforth, have decided to pay attention.

And here we are, back at our starting point: we do not know what attention is, but we are open to what it is likely to become if only we sensitise ourselves to it and insert it into a field of practices.



"Everything is magic, or nothing is, neither white nor black, only what is able to hide reveals itself, of a magnetic mobility the image vibrates and the world along with it, we are never sure we are seeing the little solid suspended, such a discreet and natural signal ready to disappear before returning again for the eyes of the young man and his neighbour who fell from the moon"

Suzanne Doppelt, 2018, Rien à cette magie, Paris, P.O.L

ean Siméon Chardin Bulles de savon, 1834, Metropolitan Museum of New York

¹⁵ Some somatic practices play liberally with this kind of disruption, this can be said of the Alexander technique: to disturb a habit and see what comes of the resulting defamiliarisation. "The great thing, then, in all education, is to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy." (James 1892, 99)

¹⁶ On this twofold approach, see the tenant of theories of distributed cognition (Hutchins 2008), as well as lesser known leads by the Nancy (France) based philosopher, Raymond Ruyer (1952).

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The Corps-Objet-Image journal by the TJP Centre Dramatique National Strasbourg - Grand Est is a peridisciplinary publication gathering artists and researchers to explore the plural territories and thoughts of the contemporary performing arts some

The journal's fourth issue celebrates the practitioners of attention whose practices disrupt and change the scene of our attention regimes, and cultivate new realms of attention. To give rise to the possibility of new attentions is, tenuously, to give rise to other possible worlds.

The journal's articles are published on the Corps-Objet-Image website, in sync with the Centre Dramatique National's "Week-ends" taking place over the course of the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 seasons. They are due for printed publication March 2020, for the occasion of the Biennale Internationale Corps-Objet-Image, by the Centre Dramatique National, Les Giboulées (ISSN 2426-5756 / ISBN 978-2-9520815-8-0).

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Damian Jérémy, 2020, «Cosmodelia — Scenes of Attention», Revue Corps-Objet-Image, n°4

Translated by Spencer Bambrough

Publisher TJP Éditions / Revue Corps-Objet-Image 04 Théâtres de l'attention / Publishing Director Renaud Herbin

TJP ÉDITIONS / 1 RUE DU PONT SAINT-MARTIN / 67000 STRASBOURG

www.tjp-strasbourg.com / www.corps-objet-image.com

TJP Centre Dramatique National Strasbourg - Grand Est

LA SCÈNE CORPS-OBJET-IMAGE POUR TOUTES LES GÉNÉRATIONS / DIRECTION RENAUD HERBIN