
The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens

A Semblance of a Conversation *

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V2_Institute for the Unstable Media: *What is central to interactive art is not so much the aesthetic form in which a work presents itself to an audience -- as in more traditional arts like painting, sculpture or video installation art -- but the behaviour the work triggers in the viewer. The viewer then becomes a participant in the work, which behaves in response to the participant's actions. Interactive art needs behaviour on both sides of the classical dichotomy of object and viewer. Paintings or installations also trigger certain behaviours -- from contemplation to excitement -- but they themselves do not change as a result of the behaviour they inspire in their audiences. It's a one way traffic, there's no exchange. This raises several questions. First, since an interactive work aims to evoke a behaviour in the audience, can it really do without a form that is "interesting", and therefore in some way aesthetic? Is putting a sign up saying "You may touch the work" or "You may interact with the work" enough? When is the interaction "interesting" enough to keep the audience interacting? Can or should this interaction generate the sort of aesthetic experience that we associate with the phenomenon of art? Or is interactive art about a different kind or type of experiences, compared to more traditional art forms?*

* I would like to thank Arjen Mulder for creating the context for this conversation by formulating the opening issues. I would also like to apologize to him for his becoming a fictional character in the course of the subsequent exchange. Any grumpiness that character might have displayed is in no way a reflection on him but only of my own combativeness with myself.

Brian Massumi: I'm glad you're raising these questions. I think that there is a real need right now to revisit the aesthetic in relation to interactive art. It's clear that saying "you may interact with the work" is not enough. More and more things in our lives are saying that, and we don't call them art. We often don't even call them "interesting" in any strong sense – more like "entertaining". If "please interact" were enough to define a category, it would be gaming, not art. Beyond gaming in the strict sense, there is a gaming paradigm that has moved into other domains. You see it massively in communications, but also in marketing, design, training, education. Places where it becomes serious and useful. Interactivity can make the useful less boring and the serious more engaging. It is performance-enhancing. It's big business. It rarely has pretensions to art. This makes the question of what it is in interactive art that makes it art all the more insistent.

V2: *So then how do you approach that question? Particularly in a way that allows you to define what distinguishes interactive art from traditional arts?*

BM: I personally don't see how the question can be approached without returning to the question of form. And that requires reconnecting with aesthetics. That's not a popular position in new media art. There is a widespread attitude that aesthetic categories belong to the past. Many people would say they just don't apply, for the reasons you listed: interaction is two-way, it's participatory, and it evokes a behaviour rather than displaying a form. I've heard it said in no uncertain terms that form is dead. That we just can't think or speak in those terms any more. It's almost an injunction. I don't mean to say it's not a serious question. It's identifying a real problem. How *do* you speak of form when there is the kind of openness of outcome that you see in a lot of new media art, where participant response determines what exactly happens? When *the* artwork doesn't exist, because each time that it operates the interaction produces a variation, and the variations are in principle infinite? When the artwork proliferates? Or when it disseminates, as it does when the work is networked, so that the interaction is distributed in time and space and never ties back together in one particular form?

To begin with, you have to get past the idea that form is ever fixed, that there is any such thing as a stable form – even in traditional aesthetic practices like figurative painting, or even in

something as mundane as decorative motif. The idea that there is such a thing as fixed form is actually as much an assumption about perception as it is an assumption about art. It assumes that vision is not dynamic – that it is a passive, transparent registering of something that is just there, simply and inertly. If vision is stable, then to make art dynamic you have to add movement. But if vision is already dynamic, the question changes. It's not an issue of movement or no movement. The movement is always there in any case. So you have to make distinctions between kinds of movement, kinds of experiential dynamics, and then ask what difference they *make*.

V2: *In what way is there movement in vision? Your bringing up decorative motif in this connection makes me think of an author of interest in both of us, the philosopher of art Suzanne Langer. Are you referring to her theories of perceptual movement in art?*

BM: Exactly. Langer reminds us that we see things we don't *actually* see. We all know it, but we tend to brush it off by calling it an illusion, as if something is happening that isn't real, and doesn't have anything important to say about experience. But isn't *something happening* the very definition of real? The question is: what exactly does the inconvenient reality that we see things we don't actually see say about the nature of perception? Well, it changes everything. Langer starts from the simple example of the kind of spiralling, vegetal motifs you see in a lot of traditional decorative arts. She states the obvious: we don't see spirals, we see spiralling. We see a *movement* that flows *through* the design. That's what it is to see a motif. The forms aren't moving, but we can't not see movement when we look at them. That could be another definition of real: what we can't not experience when we're faced with it. Instead of calling it an illusion – this movement we can't actually see but can't not see either – why not just call it abstract? Real and abstract. The reality of this abstraction doesn't replace what's actually there. It supplements it. We see it *with* and *through* the actual form. It *takes off* from the actual form. The actual form is like a launching pad for it. We wouldn't see the movement without the actual design being there, but if we only saw an actual design we wouldn't be seeing what it is we're seeing – a motif. The actual form and the abstract dynamic are two sides of the same experiential coin. They're inseparable; they're fused, like two dimensions of the same reality. We're seeing double.

V2: *And that's different from seeing an object, say the leaves themselves that suggested the motif? Weren't you saying that this tells us something about the nature of perception?*

BM: Yes, the next question is if the same thing happens in so-called 'natural' perception of objects. It's clear that it does. For example, to see an object is to see volume. We don't infer volume. We *see* the voluminousness of an object, directly and immediately, without having to think about it. We don't say to ourselves: "let's see, there's a surface facing me, I would wager that there is a backside to it, which means it's a 3D object, and therefore I could walk around it and see and touch the other side." We don't say this to ourselves because we don't say anything to ourselves. We just see. We see what's before us directly and immediately *as* an object. We see the "backedness" of it without actually seeing around to the other side. That's precisely what makes it a perception of an object, rather than a deduction about a surface. We are really but implicitly – abstractly – seeing the object's voluminousness. The perceived shape of an object *is* this abstract experience of volume. Part of it, anyway, because we also directly and immediately see an object's weightiness. For example, We see weightiness through texture. Voluminousness and weightiness are not in themselves visible. But we can't not see them when we see an object. In fact, we see them *in the form* of the object. Form is full of all sorts of things that it actually isn't – and that actually aren't visible. Basically, it's full of potential. When we see an object's shape we are not seeing around to the other side, but what we are seeing, in a real way, is our *capacity* to see the other side. We're seeing, in the form of the object, the *potential* our body holds to walk around, take another look, extend a hand and touch. The form of the object is the way a whole set of active, embodied, potentials appear in present experience: how vision can relay into kinesthesia or the sense of movement, and how kinesthesia can relay into touch. The potential we see in the object is a way our body has of being able to *relate* to the part of the world it happens to find itself in at this particular life's moment. What we abstractly see when we directly and immediately see an object is *lived relation* – a life dynamic. Once again, we don't see it *instead of* what we think of as being the actual form of the object. We're seeing double again. But this time, we're seeing the actual form "with and through" that set of abstract potentials. The reason we're directly seeing an object and not just a surface is because we can't not see what we're seeing without also experiencing voluminousness and weightiness – the object's invisible *qualities*. Seeing an object is seeing through to its qualities. That's the doubleness:

if you're not qualitatively seeing what isn't actually visible, you're not seeing an object, you're not seeing objectively.

That's why some currents in embodied perception are now coming to the conclusion that all visual perception is "virtual." It's a point Alva Noë makes. Seeing, he says, is a kind of action. Only, I would say, without the actual action -- action appearing in potential. We never just register what's actually in front of our eyes. With every sight we see imperceptible qualities, we abstractly see potential, we implicitly see a life dynamic, we virtually live relation. It's just a kind of shorthand to call it an object. It's an *event*. An object's appearance is an event, full of all sorts of virtual movement. It's real movement, because something has happened: the body has been capacitated. It's been relationally activated. It is alive in the world, poised for what may come. This is also "seen" -- there's a sense of aliveness that accompanies every perception. We don't just look, we sense ourselves alive. Every perception comes with its own "vitality affect" (to use a term of Daniel Stern's).

That's why we see movement in a motif. The form "naturally" poises the body for a certain set of potentials. The design calls forth a certain vitality affect -- the sense we would have, for example, of moving our eyes down a branch of rustling leaves, and following that movement with our hands. But that life dynamic comes without the potential for it to be actually lived. It's the same lived relation as when we "actually" see leaves, it's the same potential. But it's *purely* potential. We can't live it out. We can only live it *in -- in* this form -- implicitly. It's like the motif has taken the abstraction that is the leaf and made it appear even more abstractly. So abstractly it can't go any further than *this* appearance. The body is capacitated, but the capacity has nowhere else to go. It's in suspense. Langer calls this a "semblance."

A semblance takes the abstraction inherent to object perception and carries it to a higher power. It does this by suspending the potentials presented. Suspending the potentials makes them all the more *apparent*, by holding them to visual form. The relays to touch and kinesthesia will not take place. These potentials can *only* appear, and only visually. The event that is the full-spectrum perception is and will remain virtual. A life dynamic is presented, but virtually, as pure visual appearance.

This produces another level of vitality affect. It feels different to see a semblance. Even in something so banal as a decorative motif, there is the slightly uncanny sense of feeling sight see the invisible. The action of vision, the kind of event it is, the virtual dimension it always has, is highlighted. It's a kind of perception *of* the event of perception *in* the perception. We experience a vitality affect of vision itself. This is like the doubleness of perception I was talking about becoming aware of itself. A direct and immediate self-referentiality of perception. I don't mean self-reflexivity, which would be thinking *about* a perception, as from a distance or as mediated by language. This is a thinking of perception in perception, in the immediacy of its occurrence, as it is felt – a *thinking-feeling*, in visual form.

Semblances, by whatever name – pure appearances, self-abstracting perceptions, thinking-feelings – occur in “natural” perception as well. It's just that they're backgrounded. An object is a semblance to the extent that we think-feel things like its backedness, volume, and weight. But that thinking-feeling slips behind the flow of potential action that the objectness suggests. We let the vitality affect, the “uncanny” apprehension of the qualitative dimension, pass unnoticed. Instead, we orient toward the instrumental aspect of the actions and reactions that the perception affords. The self-reflexivity of the experience is backgrounded. The sense of relational aliveness disappears into the living. The “uncanniness” of the way in which the object appears *as* the object it is – as if it doubled itself with the aura of its own qualitative nature – disappears into a chain of action. We live out the perception, rather than living it in. We forget that a chair for example, isn't just a chair. In addition to being one it looks *like* one. The “likeness” of an object to itself, its immediate doubleness, gives every perception a hint of *déjà vu*. That's the uncanniness. The “likeness” of things is a qualitative fringe, or aura to use a totally unpopular word, that betokens a “moreness” to life. It stands in the perception for perception's passing. It is the feeling in this chair of past and future chairs “like” it. It is the feeling in this chair that life goes on. It presents, in the object, the object's *relation* to the flow not of action but of life itself, its dynamic unfolding, the fact that it is always passing through its own potential. It's how life feels when you see it can seat you. In Antonio Damasio's terms, it's the “feeling of what happens,” that background feeling of what it's “like” to be alive, here and now, but having been many elsewheres and with times to come. Art brings that vitality affect to the fore.

All of this suggests a way of bringing art and “natural” perception together while still having a way of distinguishing them. In art, we see life dynamics “with and through” actual form. Or rather, we always see relationally and processually in this way, but art makes us see that we see this way. It is the technique of making vitality affect felt, of making an explicit experience of what otherwise slips behind the flow of action and is only implicitly felt. It is making the imperceptible appear. In everyday perception, the same thing occurs. There is a certain artfulness in every experience. Art and everyday perception are in continuity with one another. But in everyday experience the emphasis is different. It is all a question of emphasis, an economy of foregrounding and backgrounding of dimensions of experience that always occur together and absolutely need each other. Art foregrounds the dynamic, ongoingly relational pole. Everyday experience foregrounds the object-oriented, action-reaction, instrumental pole. That pole comes across as stable because it offers our action perches – “affordances” in J.J. Gibson’s vocabulary. We attend to the perchiness, and let the other side of that same coin, the passing-relation side, slip behind the use we can exact from the perception. Art brings back out the fact that all form is necessarily *dynamic form*. There is really no such thing as fixed form – which is another way of saying that the object of vision is virtual. Art is the technique for making that necessary but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by. Art is the technique of living life *in* – experiencing the virtuality of it more fully, living it more intensely.

This also suggests a way of dealing with the question of interaction in art, and why the question of whether it is art or not comes up so insistently. A distinction of Whitehead’s is useful here. He calls the experience of the flow of action “causal efficacy”, and the qualitative, vitality affect, aspect he calls “presentational immediacy.” You can’t have one without the other, but presentational immediacy tends to disappear into the flow of causal efficacy. We see with and through it to the affordances we take as the actual form of things. Only rarely do we do the opposite – see with and through the actual form to the dynamism of life. Now, you have to take *interactivity* at its word. Its flow is a flow of action. It’s true that the flow is two-way. But the back and forth is of action and *reaction*. It always comes back to causal efficacy, instrumentality, affordance. This backgrounds the qualitative-relational aspect – even when it is supposed to be all about social relation. By putting relation so fully into action, interactivity

backgrounds its own artistic dimension. That's the dimension of relationality in its own right, as opposed to a particular relating-to, for this or that already determined purpose. That's why you so often here the comment from participants that it feels like a video game. I'm not at all saying that all interactive art does this. It's just that this is the trap that is automatically laid for it, the problem it has to grapple with. The problem is: in what way is this different from a game? Is this doing something that mainstream informational capitalism isn't already doing, ever so profitably, by generalizing the gaming paradigm? What's new or different or freeing or feeling about it?

V2: *It sounds like you've boxed interactivity into a corner. If interactive art is about action and art is about perception, then it sounds like it can't ever really aspire to art. The way you've approached the question also seems to resuscitate some very old ideas about art. For example, the classical idea that it is "disinterested." The modernist version of that idea is that art has to be about "estrangement." Isn't your idea of "suspension" of causal action-reaction chains just rehabilitating these notions? That neglects a major motivation behind a lot of new media art. A lot of people consider the traditional ways of doing art to be pacifying, precisely because they "suspend." That artistic gesture is critiqued for creating a false sense of art's "autonomy." "Elitism" is another word many people would use for that, and for art's "aura." Interactive art is meant to take art out of its ghetto, out of the gallery, out of the frame, into life. And you're saying it misses the liveness. Interactivity is often looked upon as liberating because it does this. For a lot of practitioners, that's the whole point of it. How would you respond to this kind of criticism?*

BM: I entirely endorse attempts to bring life into art and art into life – although I'm not sure if I subscribe to all of the assumptions about art and about life that often go with explanations of why and how this should be done. For example, I think the notion of framing in these kinds of critique is often very reductive. But before I go into that, I think it's important to remind ourselves that there can be a kind of tyranny to interaction.

Interactivity is not neutral with respect to power. In fact, according to Foucault, among the most invidious of regimes of power are the ones that impose an imperative to participate, particularly if the imperative is to "truly" or "authentically" express yourself. You are

constantly interpellated. You are under orders to be yourself -- for the system. You have to reveal yourself for who you are. In fact, you become who you are in expressing yourself. You are viscerally exposed, like a prodded sea cucumber that spits its guts. You are exposed down to your inmost sensitive folds, down to the very peristaltic rhythms that make you what you are. This is generative power, a power that reaches down into the soft tissue of your life, where it is just stirring, and interactively draws it out, for it to become what it will be, and what it suits the system that it be. This is what Foucault calls "positive" power or "productive" power. It produces its object of power interactively through its own exercise. That object of power is your life. Not just your behaviour, not just your labour -- your life. It's what Foucault calls a "biopower." It's a soft tyranny.

You see it everywhere today. The tell-tale sign is the positive feedback loop. For example, you buy things with your credit card, presumably to satisfy needs or desires in your life. Needs, desires: you purchase at your soft points. That visceral act is actually an interaction: you have just participated in a data-mining operation. Your input feeds a marketing analysis apparatus, and that feeds a product development machine. The system eventually gets back to you with new products responding to the input and with new ways to reach you, massage your rhythms, air out your viscera, and induce you to spend. New needs and desires are created, even whole new modes of experience, which your life begins to revolve around. You have become, you have changed, in interaction with the system. You have literally shopped yourself into being. At the same time, the system has adapted *itself*. It's a kind of double capture of mutual responsiveness, in a reciprocal becoming.

This is just a quick example to make the point that interactivity can *be* a regime of power. It is not enough to champion interactivity. You have to have ways of evaluating what modes of experience it produces, what forms of life those modes of experience might develop, and what regimes of power might arise from those developments. The power element is always there, at least on the horizon. You have to strategize around it. You have to strategize how not to make prodded sea cucumbers of your participants, at the same time as you don't want to just let them stay in their prickly skins. Simply maximizing interaction, even maximizing self-expression, is not necessarily the way. I think you have to leave creative outs. You have to build in escapes. Drop sink-holes. And I mean build them *in* -- make them immanent to the

experience. If the inside folds interactively come out, then fold the whole inside-outside interaction in again. Make a vanishing point appear, where the interaction turns back in on its own potential, and where that potential appears for itself. That could be a definition of producing an aesthetic effect. The semblances I was talking about earlier could be a definition of aesthetic effect.

Understood in the way I'm talking about, an aesthetic effect is not just decoration. I started with a decorative example, but the point I wanted to make was not that art is decorative but rather that even decorative art is a creative event, however modest. It creates a semblance. A semblance is a place-holder in present perception of a potential "more" to life. The framing of it is what determines the intensity or range or seriousness of that potential. Take the way an object is doubled by its own "likeness." You don't just have an experience of the single present thing. You, at the same time, experience what it's like to experience its presence. That "likeness" marks the object as a variation on itself. You perceive what it's like because in your life there have been other appearances "like" this one, and you implicitly anticipate more will come. The likeness is the invisible sign of a continuing. This puts a certain distance between the object and itself, a kind of self-abstraction. The thing stands for itself, and for difference *from* itself, over time because in time it will appear episodically, under variation. It holds these variations-on in the present, which is why it is a kind of immediate, lived abstraction. This haloes the object with certain genericness, extending what it is beyond its own particularity. The thing is both itself and a place-holder in life's process for others like it. The semblance is the leading edge, in the present, of future variation, and at the same time a doppler from variations past. It is the thing's perceived margin of changeability, the thinking-feeling of potential appearances of particulars belonging to the same genre, appearing in the same style. A semblance is a direct perception of a life *style*. It is like an intuition of the thing as a life motif – a pattern of varied repetitions.

Each repetition will be different to a degree, because there will be at least micro-variations that give it its own singular experiential quality and make it an objective interpretation of the generic motif. The semblance makes each particular a singular-generic. It is because it presents difference through variation that it is a thinking-feeling of margin of changeability. You could even say of indeterminacy, since likenesses can overlap and contaminate each

other. A chair is like itself and the next chair. But it is also like a sofa, from the perchability point of view. How far the “likeness” goes is determined by the body’s relation to the thing. It’s not cognitive per se, like a recognition or deduction. It’s integral, a thinking at one with a feeling: a thinking-further fused with a feeling of what is. But the fusion is asymmetrical, because the feeling of what is zeroes in on what can be settled in the present, while the thinking-further pulls off-centre and away toward more, so that together they make a dynamic, never quite at equilibrium. This gives the present perception its own momentum, even though it can’t presently sign-post exactly where it’s going. It’s more an open-ended tending-to than a reflection-of or a reflecting-on. It’s a posture – if you can call a disposition to moving in a certain style a posture. It’s a dynamic posture. The “likeness,” then, will smudge strictly logical categories to the extent that the body tends-to, moves on, transfers habits, reflexes, competencies, and thinking-feelings from one thing to the next, expands its repertory of dynamic postures by mixing, matching and alloying them, explores its own living potential, strikes new postures – invents new ways of affording itself of the world, in collaboration with the world, with what the world throws before it. A singular-generic is not a general category, any more than it’s just a particular. It’s not positioned in a way that pigeon-holes it. It’s on the move – it’s on a *dispositional* continuum. There is no such thing as site-specific. The very word conjures up what Whitehead called the “fallacy of simple location,” which he identified as the basic error of modernity.

At any rate, thought and imagination are the leading edges of this exploratory expansion of potential, because they can wander from the particular present posture even without actually leaving it. And without being limited to the potential next steps that it most presents, that it makes most available or automatic. They raise the smudge factor exponentially. A thing felt is fringed by an expanding thought-pool of potential that shades off in all directions. It’s like a drop in the pool of life making ripples that expand infinitely around. William James spoke in those terms. He said experience comes in “drops.”

The semblance, or pure appearance, of a thing is a kind of processual distance it takes on itself. When in the course of everyday life we march habitually and half-consciously from one drop of life to the next, we don’t attend to the ripples. We see *through* the semblance to the next, not letting it appear with all its force. It’s like the thing falls back from the distance it

potentially takes on itself. It closes in on itself. It falls from its distance on itself into itself. As a result, it appears banal, so paltry a thing that we just pass on to the next thing, hardly noticing what the last one was “like.” Only the most available and automatic ripple ring of potential appears, and often even then barely at the threshold of awareness. In his writings on art, Deleuze would always say that to really perceive, to fully perceive which is to say to perceive artfully, you have to “cleave things asunder.” You have to open them back up. You have to make their semblance appear as forcefully as possible. You have to give the thing its distances back. He quotes Francis Bacon: you have to make a Sahara of it. You do this, in Bacon’s words again, as a “matter of fact.” Not as a matter of principle. Not as a matter of opinion. Not in accordance with purely logical categories, progressions, and relations. Not to represent, not to reflect. Instead, as an event in a drop of lived relation that has a style all its own, that exemplifies its own singular-generic logic, and is as really appearing as it is infinitely expansive.

This sundering of things is what I meant by “suspension.” It’s the opposite of disinterestedness, if you interpret that to mean neutrality or a subjective posture of noncommittal. The semblance is not subjective. As I tried to explain, it is what makes the object an object. There is no subject, apart from the singular aliveness appearing in the object’s generic wake. The subject is life. *This* life. “A” life, as Deleuze would say. So the process I’m talking about can’t ever be contained by any elitism, because it always potentially exceeds, at very least on its outermost fringes, any standard of taste or coolness that a particular social grouping might succeed in imposing on it. It’s the opposite of all that. It’s intensifying. Enlivening. Potentializing.

It’s artificial to be talking about this only in relation to single things. Every thing appears in a situation, along with others. The situation itself is a life-drop. It’s a bigger drop, with its own ripples of potential that overlap with those of its constituent things but can also diverge from them, subtract them from itself or alloy them in other configurations. Every appearance is at a cross-roads of life. At the limit, what appears isn’t just a drop or a pool, but a whole ocean, with calm stretches and turbulence, rippings that cancel each other out and others that combine and amplify, with crests and troughs, killer surf-breaks and gentle lappings at the

shores of other situations. For James, the fact that experience comes in drops doesn't mean it can't also come with "oceanic" feeling.

What interactive art can do, what its strength is in my opinion, is to take the *situation* as its "object." Not a function, not a use, not a behaviour, exploratory or otherwise, not an action-reaction, but a situation, with its own little ocean of complexity. It can take a situation and potentially "open" the interactions it affords. The question for interactive art is: how do you cleave an interaction asunder? Setting up an interaction is easy. We have any number of templates for that. But how do you set it up so you sunder it, dynamically smudge it, so that the relational potential it tends-toward appears? So that the situation's objectivity creatively self-abstracts, making a self-tending life-movement, a life-subject and not just a setup. How, in short, do you make a semblance of a situation? These are technical questions, essentially about framing, about what it means to situationally frame an event, or house a dispositional life-subject. But when you're getting there technically, I think it's because you've shifted the emphasis from interaction to lived relation, and are starting to find ways of operating on the qualitative level of thinking-feeling, where you are pooling styles of being and becoming, not just eliciting behaviours.

There are practices, of course, which already do this implicitly, to one degree or another, usually in a more determinate way, more narrowly focused on assuring regular and dependable affordances, functional or instrumental perchings, than on sundering and fringing. What is architecture, if not "site-specific" life-design? What is an institution, if not a distributed architecture of experience? Architecture and institutions are two dynamically connected poles on a processual continuum between position and disposition, settling the present and disseminating settlement. A practice which pries open existing practices, of whatever category, scale, siting or distribution, in a way that makes their potential reappear at a self-abstracting and self-differing distance from routine functioning in a potentialized semblance of themselves -- a variational practice of that kind could be called (to borrow the felicitous term Rafael Lozano-Hemmer applies to his own approach to interactive art) a *relational architecture*. A relational architecture is oriented toward the disseminating end of things, toward potential expansion, but is anti-institutional. It unsettles. It pushes the dispositional envelope of the processual continuum I just mentioned.

That's the angle from which I would encourage a rethinking of interactive art – from the premise that its vocation is to construct a situation or go into an existing situation, and open it into a relational architecture. Ways of doing that, the nuts and bolts of making potential reappear, are what Erin Manning and I, in our collaborative work, call *techniques of relation*. We use the word “technique” in a sense inspired by Gilbert Simondon, whose account of the technical invention is in similar terms of emergent relational potential and becoming in a way that places the technical object and art in the same orbit, without reducing one to the other. The difference, of course, is that the regulatory principles of the technical process in the narrow sense are utility and saleability, profit-generating ability. Art claims the right to having no manifest utility, no use-value and in many cases even no exchange-value. At its best, what it has is event-value.

This is precisely what makes art political, in its own way. It can push further to the indeterminate but relationally potentialized fringes of existing situations, beyond the limits of current framings or regulatory principles. Aesthetic politics is an exploratory politics of invention, unbound, unsubordinated to external finalities. It is the suspensive aspect of it that gives it this freedom. The suspension of the most available potentials, the potentials already comfortably embodied, well-housed and usefully institutionalized, gives a chance for more far-fetched potentials to ripple up. Aesthetic politics is “autonomous” in the sense that it has its own momentum; it isn't beholden to external finalities. It bootstraps itself on its own in-built tendencies. It creates its own motive force in the dynamic form in which it appears. Practices that explicitly define themselves as political, and do not claim the artistic label, can be characterized as aesthetic politics to the extent that they similarly strive to bootstrap far-fetched event-value and make it tendentially appear in a present situation. This kind of practice has been with us, not continuously but in drops and smudges, since at least the Situationists, and it gained new momentum in our own time in the anti-globalization movement post-Seattle.

Artistic practices that explicitly attempt to be political often fail at it, because they construe being political as having political content, when what really counts is the dynamic form. An art practice can be aesthetically political, inventive of new life potentials, of new potential

forms of life, and have no overtly political content. I would go so far as to say that it is the exception that art with overtly political content is political in the sense I'm talking about here. When it is, it's because care has been taken not only to make sense but to make semblance, to make the making-sense experientially appear, in a dynamic form that takes a potential-pushing distance on its own particular content. The work of Natalie Jeremijenko and the Bureau for Inverse Technology stands out in this regard. In recent interactive projects, Jeremijenko has attempted not only to encourage participants to reflect on environmental issues, focusing in this case on human-animal relations, but has also used the interactions to slip participants into perceiving, in one case, like a fish. The ideational content was doubled by a perceptual becoming. The thinking-feeling-like-a-fish was the semblance in the situation of the situation, pointing beyond it. A quality of experience was built-in that could potentially lead to thoughts, sensations, and further perceptions that might fold-out, toward follow-on in other situations that neither the participants nor the artist could foresee (never having been an environmentally aware fish before). An aesthetic politics defies the law of the conservation of energy. It can get more creative energy out of a situation than it puts in. It's inventive in a more radical way than a technical invention in the usual narrow sense. It's not the gadgetry or setup that's creative, even if nothing like it has ever been seen before. The setup is creative to the extent that an emergent experience takes off from it, that has its own distinctive lived quality, and because of that its own self-differing momentum.

V2: It's quite a stretch to go from a decorative motif to a worldwide political movement, not to mention human fish. There are some who might accuse you of explanatory over-kill. For one thing, all of the main examples you've given are visual. One orientation that is almost universally shared in new media art is a turning away from the visual in favour of the tactile or haptic. This is considered a political gesture, because the visual has long been critiqued as a form of dominance under the name ocularcentrism. How does the perspective you're advancing position itself with respect to that? How can you generalize from simple visual examples to interactive art that tries to access other dimensions of the body, against the domination of vision?

BM: Vision has gotten bad press. When people talk about the visual, what they are actually talking about is almost always a certain mode of what in perception studies is called a cross-

modal transfer – a certain way different senses inter-operate. How, for example, does classical perspective painting create an experience of depth? By composing lines and colors in such a way as to trigger a direct experience of the potential I was talking about in relation to object awareness in so-called natural perception: the potential to advance, move around, bring backsides into view, and touch. This is a direct *visual* experience. But vision has been crafted in such a way as to wrap potential kinaesthesia and tactility *into itself*. It's a semblance, just as the object itself was, but with the objective potential suspended, because you can't actually advance and touch. It's object-perception, without the object. The object was already an abstraction, in the sense that what made it appear as an object and not a one-sided surface was what didn't appear, or only virtually appeared – the relays to other sensings. Perspective painting doesn't "trick" object-perception. It activates it otherwise. The experience of depth is not an optical "illusion." It's a real experience of depth, minus the depth. The experience of depth has been made to take off from its usual experiential framing and enter a different frame. What perspective painting does is tap into the abstraction already at the basis of object perception, and carries it to a higher power, where it is the object itself and not only touchings of it and movings-around it that are abstracted, that is to say, really appear virtually, a pure appearance. That pure appearance occurs *through* an actual object – the canvas, frame and pigment setup. But the painting as actual object in its own right disappears into the abstraction it taps. When you are experiencing painted depth, you aren't looking at a canvas, you are seeing a scene. You're seeing *through* the canvas into an abstraction that it has taken off from it, and is a qualitatively different perceptual event. Your perception has been siphoned into the semblance, the canvas's ghostly perceptual double. The semblance can't happen without a perch in objecthood. But when it happens, it is in uncanny excess of actual objectivity. Of course the uncanniness effect weakens with time, as people's perception habituates. At first, it is directly apparent, and not only that, it hits like a force – think of the first cinematic images that had audiences fleeing before the virtual advance of the train. A semblance isn't just like a force. Its "likeness" *is* a force, an abstract force of life. Lumière's moving images were literally capable of launching live bodies into flight.

The force of the semblance can be seized upon and made use of. It is no accident that the development of perspective painting was associated with the rise of court society. The "aura" of it was seized upon and used to heighten the prestige-value of the monarchy at a time when

it was evolving in certain parts of Europe toward absolutism. The aesthetic event-value was captured by that political formation and translated into political prestige-value. The semblance that took off from the framed canvas was reframed by the court institution, which gave it an abstract function integral to its own dynamic system. A similar thing happened later with portrait photography in relation to the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and the private home, as Walter Benjamin's famous essays on the history of photography and the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction demonstrate. The photographic semblance came at a time when production and consumption were being privatized. The photographic semblance was used to transfer the royal "aura" of painting to the private capitalist citizen as pillar of the new civil society. Benjamin emphasizes that early photographic portraiture made visible no longer the political prestige of the head of the state, but the *social* prestige-value that attached to the bourgeois individual in its public role. This was just a brief way-station, because the semblance was already migrating again, thanks in large part to the new traffic in images photography made possible into the magic of the marketed commodity object. What is the ghostly force of Marx's "commodity fetishism" if not a semblance of life lived through consumer artifacts? There is still a kind of aura to it: a kind of *personal* capitalist prestige-value that rubs off on the purchasing privatized individual as such, in its individuality, down to the most banal details of its everyday life. The aura of the life banal. The art of cool. Or in a more mainstream vein, life-style marketing.

But there is always a residue of semblant potential left after any and all of its captures. It is singularly, generically inexhaustible. The residual force of the photographic semblance is what Roland Barthes called the "punctum," which he describes in terms of an uncanny sensation of the lived quality of a perished life surviving that life. The punctum for Barthes is an affective force that makes the photograph breathe with a feeling of life, *a* life, in all the singularity of its having had no choice but to follow the generic life-path toward death in its own unique and unreproducible way. It's not about the content of the life per se, or about psychological associations, a memento of it might arouse in the observer, it's not really even about grief. It's about the affective commotion of a direct, immediate, uncanny thinking-feeling of the dynamic quality of a life no more. The punctum is the appearance through the photo of an affective after-life. It is the strike of a life as a force, beyond an actual life. In other words, as abstracted from it, as a real but abstract force of life-likeness.

The point is that art is in inventive *continuity with* “natural” perception. Every art object works by tapping into a certain aspect of “natural” perception in order to re-abstract it, so that some actual potentials that were there are suspended while others that tended not to appear before, or even had never appeared before, are brought out. The new potentials can be captured and reframed, and even be given functions, political, social, personal, or economic. They can also escape capture – in fact there is always a residue that does – in which case they appear as political, social, personal, or economic *resistance* to whatever external finalities and functional reframings hold sway (even death). The point here is that none of this is about a tricking of perception. It’s about a continuing *expression* of its evolving potentials. Art isn’t about “illusion.” That’s not at all what “semblance” means (although Langer herself uses the terms interchangeably). Art is about constructing *artifacts* – crafted *facts* of experience. The fact of the matter is that experiential potentials are brought to evolutionary expression.

Perspective painting makes the spatial 3D quality of experience into a purely visual matter of fact. In aesthetic philosophy, in Reigl and Worringer, the word “haptic” doesn’t mean touch. It refers to touch as it appears virtually in vision – touch as it can only be *seen*. Any practice of abstraction operates on all the senses at the same time, virtualizing some in order to heighten others with the abstract force of what then doesn’t actually appear. Experience is a continuum. All its dimensions are always all there, only differently abstracted, in different actual-virtual configurations, expressing different distributions of potentials. The actual-virtual configuration itself always appears in the form of an experiential quality or “likeness” – objectness for “natural perception.” It is an objective spaciness without actual objects for perspective painting, a certain animation without actual life for decorative motif, and after actual life for photography, at least of a certain kind at a certain stage of its cultural history.

V2: *If a semblance can be given a function, doesn't that contradict its "autonomy"? What you've just said about the political function of perspective painting, for example, seems to corroborate the critiques of vision I mentioned.*

BM: I'm not at all denying that perceptual artifacts lend themselves to regimes of power, or envelop in themselves power potentials as well as powers of resistance. What I'm saying is that they can do this *because* of their autonomy, as an effect of it. I mentioned before that a semblance in itself is a kind of "living-in" of potential. That was a way of saying that it is a way of holding life potential in immanence – wholly immanent to the semblance's appearance. How can a framed picture presenting a fragment of a scene hold a wholeness of potential in it? By including what doesn't actually appear, but which is necessarily involved in the thinking-feeling of what does. A semblance is a *form of inclusion* of what exceeds the artifact's actuality. That's Leibniz's monadic principle. Leibniz's monads are not "closed" in the sense that they are limited. They're closed because they're saturated, because they hold within themselves their own infinity. There's just no room for any more. They have their own "moreness," in how they potentially continue, how they self-distance, stretch themselves further than they presently go. A monad is the semblance of a *world*. An artwork is a kind of monad.

There is always a specific device or mechanism that is integral to the structuring of the artwork that operates the inclusion and makes the artifact world-like in its own unique way. In Barthes's account of photography, it's the punctum as including in the portrait the dynamic wholeness of a life-world. In perspective painting, it's the vanishing point. The vanishing point is how the scene's continuing into its own distance appears. What is *in* the distance doesn't appear. The vanishing point is not more content. It is where the content of the scene fades out into the distance. The distance *itself* appears, through the fading. But the fading-out doesn't even have to be painted in. It can be included in the painting without actually being painted, through the way the painting projects the eye into an abstract distance. The distance doesn't have to be painted-in because it can be lived-in by the eyes. This is achieved in perspective technique by a compositional principle that follows rules of geometric projection. The composition of the painting is guided by a geometry of parallel lines projecting infinitely toward the vanishing point in whose virtual distance they appear to converge. This produces a virtual visual movement, not unlike the movement I described in decorative motif. Except in this case, the movement doesn't appear for itself, it appears for the geometric order that produced it. It doesn't take off in its own right; it falls back into its abstract cause. What we see is not so much the movement. Through the virtual visual

movement, we see the scene with a feeling of the regularity of its geometry. We can't see the artwork's content without thinking-feeling its spatial *order*, and without producing it for our own experience of the scene. Perspective painting *spatializes* the visual movement it creates in order to produce a perceived order. The harmony and regularity of this perceived spatial order continues infinitely into the distance at the virtual center of the vanishing point. But it also radiates. It circles back from the virtual center, around to the outside of the frame. The scene is centered on the infinity of its spatial order, and is also fringed by it. It is immersed in it. The artwork is actually bounded by the frame, but its scene is virtually unlimited. It's the semblance of a world, bounded and unlimited.

The frame allows this unlimitedness to appear within a larger frame. It allows the painting, and its principle of order to be inserted in another world – the world of the court institution. The semblance of a world created by the painting has no *actual* connection to the world of the court. After all, it is virtual. It makes appear a principle of order, and it is a principle the monarchy aspires to, an infinitely radiating harmonious and regular order. Like the realm. The monarch is the eye whose virtual movement is the abstract cause of the ordered space of the kingdom, the preeminent thinking-feeling body who produces the macro-order of the whole that the painting presents just one particular take on. The space of the painting and the space of the realm are analogues of each other. They don't connect in any direct way. They don't actually connect. As appearances, in the way they really appear, there is an unbridgeable gap between them. They have different qualitative natures, operate at different scales, have different contents and components, and are put together differently. Actually, they are in a relation of *non-relation*. Yet they produce, each in its own way, a semblance of the same order. Where they overlap is at their virtual centers – the vanishing point. The vanishing point only has an abstract or formal existence, because what it contains never appears. It's the form in which what doesn't actually appear appears. Except it isn't even actually a form, it's a form of abstraction, an abstract fading away, the appearing of a disappearing into the distance, the way the form of their respective present contents takes a distance on itself. The painting and the court enact the same form of abstraction, across their differences. They are different creations revolving around the same virtual center, which is immanent to both of them, the vanishing point where they each live themselves in. They coincide purely abstractly, at the very point at which they are immanent *to themselves*.

Remember that the vanishing point was what makes the perspectival artwork self-embracing as a whole, what makes it the semblance of a world, even though the scene it contains is partial. That was because the spatial ordering doesn't fade out with the actually perceptible contents. Quite the reverse, the fading-out of the content makes the order come back around, to complete a circuit. The spatial order wraps back around to surround the fringes of the frame, giving a definite present a boundary to the infinity it holds. This off-sets the infinity of the world of the painting from its immediate surroundings. As a result, it enjoys a self-embracing autonomy from what's actually around it. The same goes for the kingdom: it is an infinitely self-embracing order that is nevertheless off-set from other kingdoms around it, and from other political formations (even if they share the same actual territory, as with the budding bourgeoisie already beginning to bubble up in the what Marx called the "pores" of what will become the *ancien régime*, in the gaps its leaves through its self-distancing).

The frame the court gives itself is sovereignty. Since sovereignty's order is in principle unlimited, it is always trying to live up to the principle it lives-in. It must try to expand its boundaries to actually include as much space as possible, to translate virtual expansiveness into actual expansion. Translated into expansionism, into an actual political dynamic, the sovereign framing turns imperialist. Perspective painting contains in itself the same potential as gets played out in the absolutist empire. But there is nothing in the painting that makes a destiny of empire. The very same dynamic can, and later did, scale down to the scale of the human body, which then appeared as what has been critiqued in political philosophy as the "legislating subject" – the individual as sovereign of himself, king in the castle of his own body. We still see continuations of that in the concept of human rights and personal freedom. All of this is in a way recognized by the critique of "ocularcentrism," which was particularly strong in the 1980s, when sovereign-individual freedoms started to be chipped away at by an emergent neo-conservatism that was more concerned again with a latter-day State sovereignty.

I said awhile back that it is no accident that perspective painting emerged at the time the absolute monarchy was taking shape. Well, it was an accident, an historical accident, even though in another way they were made for each other. You can't say that one actually caused the other. They each have their own formation. They may have been in symbiosis for awhile

and mutually reinforced each other, but that was the result of an encounter. It wasn't a destiny. There is no reason why it *should* have happened. It could very well have not happened, even with all the necessarily conditions in place, even with the potential readily available. That it happened was an event, an encounter, an accident. That's precisely what makes it historical. But it was an accident that was *sustained*. Their entering into cooperation was an accident *and* an achievement. Hard work and much technique went into sustaining the encounter, into holding them together – a system of court patronage of artists, an educating of court society and the larger society, a cultivating of taste, an adaptation of architecture to house the artworks implicated in the encounter (the Louvre being the case in point), new institutions (again to give an example from France, the Academy). They were not so much connected to each other as they were encasted in the same machinery, in a kind of active frame or dynamic milieu or zone of operative proximity capable of holding them together, and giving that holding-together a function.

The reason they were made for each other is that sharing the same principle of order put them in “resonance,” as Deleuze and Guattari would put it. They connected abstractly, at the virtual center where their immanence to themselves appeared, in analog off-set. The virtual centre is like a black hole. It sucks everything in, but still emanates a certain energy. For example, the vanishing point in painting takes the whole scene in. But across the variations in painted content, it can also leak something back out. Not a thing, but an abstract quality. Landscape painting, repeated and varied, gave the perspectival spatial order an *ethos*. It gave the purely geometric ordering of perspective space an inhabited quality. The semblance came to be a virtual home to a people. An inhabited quality is just what a realm wants, if it is going to try to unite its people and not only try to expand its territory. It's an attractive quality for a kingdom, for reasons all its own. The empire was predisposed to take that quality into itself, to make it its own, to interpret it, in the sense of producing its own effective analog of it, in its own political world. There was no necessary causal connection in any usual sense of the word. There was more an affective impetus – an autonomous “want” in the kingdom – that happened to echo with a qualitative spin-off effect of painting practice. The want was not an expression of a lack, but rather of the empire's striving or tending to sustain and expand its world-saturation. It was an expression of its dynamic fullness with itself. It's what Spinoza would call “conatus.” The formations communicated with each other through the abstract

coupling of an affect with an effect, which because of its abstract qualitative nature could not be touched by any actually present cause. Simondon calls this kind of analog contagion between different but resonating formations that this is an example of *transduction* to distinguish it from linear causality, with its ban on action at a distance and its presumption of actual, local, part-to-part connection.

What I'm trying to say is that formations communicate only *immanently*, at the points where they live themselves in, or at their self-embracing fringes. They only virtually relate. All relation is virtual. Earlier on, when I was talking about how vision related to the other senses, I ended up having to say that vision is virtual. It is only because relation is virtual that there is any freedom or creativity in the world. If formations were in actual causal connection, how they effectively connect would be completely determined. They might interact, but they would not creatively relate. There would be no gap in the chain of connection for anything new to emerge from and pass contagiously across. There'd be no margin of creative indeterminacy. No wriggle room. Or to borrow Whitehead's expression, there'd be no "elbow room" in the world. The idea that all connection and communication is immanent, that there is no actual relation, is at the heart of Whitehead's philosophy. He calls it the "contemporary independence of actual occasions." He says that all formations cohabiting the present are completely autonomous in relation to each other. They are absolute in that sense. Pure monadic appearances. Presentational immediacies. Semblances. He completely rewrites the distinction between appearance and reality. He defines "reality" as what passes from one event of appearance, from one semblance to another, through the immanence in which they affectively, effectively overlap. "Reality" is a kind of virtual continuity that lies at the very heart of "causal efficacy," which at this point it might be best to call "effective causality" or "affective causality." Whitehead says it operates at the nonconscious, micro-experiential level. One of his examples is anger.

How, he asks, does an angry person know he's angry the next moment, even if it's just a half-second later? He isn't reflecting, he doesn't conclude that he's angry. He just is, still. He finds himself still *in* his anger. The anger is the in-ness of that moment, as it was the in-ness of the preceding moment, and the two moments connect and communicate by overlapping in it. The affective tonality of anger is not the content of the moments. It's their shared in-ness,

their mutual immanence. The angry content is the actual angry words and gestures that repeat and vary from one moment to the next. The anger was the qualitative vanishing point of the last moment, the angriness it trailed out in, and in which the next moment naturally found itself, with no perceptible transition. It's like an experiential dissolve. There's no determinate transition in a dissolve, just a continuous fading-out overlapping with a continuous fading-in. The point at which the changeover occurs is imperceptible by nature. It is purely abstract. But it must have happened. We know it did, because even if it wasn't perceived, it was unmistakably felt. Known-felt, thought-felt. It's a virtual affective event. The thought-felt continuity of the anger is the virtual event of an unperceived background continuity leading from one moment (or occasion) to the next. The anger doesn't determine what happens one-to-one, specific cause to linear effect. This "affective tonality" is not a cause in that sense. It's a carry-over. What it does is carry-across the qualitative nature of what happens. It gives an abstract, purely qualitative background continuity to the two moments. The actual words spoken may skip to the extent that they're angry words; it's almost assured that they will; they won't logically connect from one moment to the next. That's in the nature of angry words. The angry gestures will also be staccato. That's also their nature. It's their defining quality. What is actually said and done from one moment to the next is discontinuous by nature. But something continues, thought-felt across the gaps. In Whitehead's words, it's a "nonsensuous perception," a virtual perception of "the immediate past as surviving to be again lived through in the present." Every situation, whatever its lived tonality, is sundered by these non-sensuously lived micro-intervals filled only qualitatively and abstractly by affect. Like the vanishing point, they wrap back around to surround. What Whitehead calls affective tonality is something we find ourselves in, rather than finding in ourselves. It's an embracing atmosphere that is also at the very heart of what happens because it qualifies the overall feel. Affective tonality is what we normally call a "mood." As Gilbert Ryle says, moods are the weather patterns of our experience. They're not actual contents of it. The contents are precipitation, drops of experience, a rain of words and gestures in the micro-climate that is life at this moment.

The discontinuity inevitably gets smoothed over. The attending-to affordance at the expense of presentational immediacy that I talked about earlier is one way it gets smoothed over. Use-oriented or behavioural focus on the flow of action highlights causal efficacy, but as it appears

on a different level, as translated onto an instrumental level forgetful of the nonsensuous perception at its heart. On that level, the actual discontinuity between drops of experience is bridged by interaction, the back and forth of action-reaction across the gaps. The virtual continuity in the gaps is arced over by what appears as actual connection, giving a sense of active continuity.

Narrative is another powerful device by which the actual discontinuity between drops of experience is smoothed over. Narrative produces a verbal meta-continuity. The angry words will be explained, justified, rationalized, excused, given cause and made understandable, smoothed over. It's fictional. And it's palliative. It takes the edge off. It glosses things over after the fact. It's "meta" in the etymological sense of "after." It's retrospective operating on the level of conscious re-vision. This can be going on a parallel track even in the moment, like a revisory verbal echo of the perceptual déjà-vu of the semblance. Narrative linguistically doubles experience's perceptual doubling of itself, and can do this with the same immediacy. A self-storied semblance. The self-storying reframes the event for ready insertion in the larger operative envelope of socially regulated discourse. This glossing makes sense of the semblance.

This of course isn't the only way in which language can function in art. It has many non-narrative modalities – the phatic and the performative to mention just two – that operate in the immediacy of experience and can be taken up with art. These modalities may underlie sense-making, as the phatic does. Or they undermine it. They may suspend it in order to cleave it asunder – “make language itself stutter,” as Deleuze was fond of saying. Or, like the performative, they may operate within language in an asignifying manner, to make things happen on other, nonlinguistic levels. These modalities may fuse together or relay each other. Lozano-Hemmer's work always has a linguistic ingredient, sometimes operating across all three of the modalities I just mentioned.

There isn't the time here to go further into the language question. The important point for the moment is that Whitehead writes actual interaction out of “reality.” He's saying that in the final analysis, when you get into what really happens, there is no such thing as interaction. It has no reality, because there is no actual connection between things. This requires

adjusting the whole vocabulary we use to talk about “interactivity.” We have to continually translate that concept into relational terms, like I was trying to do in the beginning of this conversation, so that when we say “interaction” we’re saying “immanent relation,” with all the adjustments that come along with that in the way we think about what things actually are, what their action really (virtually) is, and how they communicate. For one thing, we shouldn’t say “interaction” without thinking-feeling discontinuity. We will have to give the gaps between things, and from one moment to the next, their virtual due. It is in those gaps that the “reality” of the situation is to be found. If we gloss over them, we are missing the thinking-feeling of what really happens. We have to take a distance on the rhetoric of connectivity that has been so dominant in the areas of new media and new technology. We will have to treat connectivity as a narrative, a meta-fictional revisionism. The same with interactivity. To say they are fictional is not to say they are useless. Narratives happen, and they have their uses. It’s just that their usefulness might appear different against the background of their virtual, Whiteheadian “reality.” (I should mention parenthetically that Whitehead wouldn’t say “virtual.” He’d use the terms “pure potentiality” for the virtual as such, and “real potentiality” for the virtual as it enters and fringes an actual occasion.)¹

At any rate, there’s an ethics and a politics of creativity contained in Whitehead’s notion of contemporary independence that I think is important to explore. It leads in very different directions from the ethical and political orientations we’ve inherited from that other notion of autonomy native to our time, the idea of sovereign-individual freedom. That kind of autonomy seems to be presupposed not only by liberalism, but by many of the “radical” politics interactive art often aligns itself with. The main project of the aesthetic politics I’m talking about would be to rethink autonomy in qualitatively relational terms. It would be an affective politics, more about seeding exploratory weather patterns than cultivating their determinate contents, the particular ideas or behaviours that will be performed.

V2: *Can you make this a bit more concrete as regards to interactive art? We’re still essentially in painting, and in the visual. Can you give an example from interactive art?*

BM: Ok, but give me a minute to work myself out of the vanishing point, which has taken over a bit. As I was saying, classical figurative painting employing perspective technique

renders the abstract movement of perception as a spatial order. What shows-through the dynamic of this perceptual event is a spatial order that comes out as stable. The dynamism of the perceptual event that is taking place is settled down, pacified, civilized, as it is happening. This is why it comes across as more “concrete” or “realistic” than later painting that claims for itself the explicit label of “abstract” art. In art, concrete and realistic means appearing with a stable perceptual order that lends itself to analogue capture by larger frames of stability-seeking social or political orders. We should be wary of calls for a return to the “concrete.”

Decorative motif, for its part, is in no way radical. But it also has less potential for functional capture. That’s why decorative art is considered fluff. It doesn’t have that kind of potential because it doesn’t spatialize. It sticks with a movement-effect. Its effect is anodyne because the vitality affect it produces takes off from patterns of line and curve that in their actual form are figurative of determinate things like leaves and branches and flowers. There is still a gentle uncanniness to the effect, which consists in an animation of the inanimate. But flowers coming to a semblance of life are not the most disruptive or politically powerful of things.

Abstract art, on the other hand, was and continues to be disruptive, or at least dissonant. It’s eternally popular not to like it. Paradoxically, abstract art is disruptive in a way which, from the point of view of the quality of perceptual events gets mobilized, places it in a kinship with decorative art, in that it also produces out-and-out movement-effect, and even takes that further. It is not disruptive or dissonant because it brings threatening things to a semblance of life. It’s because it draws its experiential power from suppressing the figurative element as much as possible. Now there is a dynamic, a vitality affect that has no object. It’s not an animation *of* anything. It’s a pure animateness, a vitality affect that comes from no thing and nowhere in particular. For example, in color field painting, the movement is dispersed across the surface. It is an irreducibly global effect that detaches from the surface, appearing to float above or across the canvas, like its ghostly double. You’re not seeing the work if not seeing this lively immaterial double of it. It has this effect because it’s directly relational. What is being worked with are certain relational dynamics of color – effects of simultaneous contrast and color complementarity, for example. These are relational dynamics immanent to vision, and productive of it. They are the normally unperceived activity constitutive of vision itself.

What is being brought out is a perceptual energy that goes unseen as it makes seeing happen. It's going back to the conditions of emergence of object-perception, and bringing those conditions to visible expression. It's a semblance of seeing itself, as it happens – a perception of perception in the making. It brings out the self-referential dimension of perception that I talked about earlier. It lives vision “in,” in a totally different way than perspective painting does, without the projective aspect. Rather than projecting perception into an order of different dimensions (the three dimensions of space), it brings out the dimensions proper to vision as such, dimensions that *only* live in vision. Touch can also do lines. Color is something only vision can do. It brings these properly visual dimensions out as it lives them in. It brings them out and makes them float, in their own optical take-off effect. There's a tension between a sinking into the dynamic center of vision, from which it emerges, and a floating off from the surface of emergence. The effect can be a powerful visual feeling, a feeling of seeing sight caught in its own act. The thinking-feeling of vision as it happens

People often talk about this as “haptic” feeling. I don't agree. The suppression of the object-like also suppresses the uptake of tactility into vision. The other sense that virtually appears in dynamic visual form is kinesthesia, the feeling of movement as such. Abstract art recomposes the senses. It composes perception with a different experiential palette than either perspective painting or decorative art, which as I said earlier, takes up a certain tactility in its movement-effect. Here, there is a purely optical kinesthesia, a kinesthesia that can only be seen, and only that. Although on the other hand, texture alone is enough to retain a touch of objectness. As I said before, where one modality of perception is present, so are all the rest ... it's a question of degrees of virtuality. The question has to be re-examined in each case to evaluate the nature of the recomposition. We should be careful not to generalize, but rather always re-evaluate, attuned to the singularity of the work.

The perceptual self-referentiality of abstract painting as a thinking-feeling of vision as it happens makes it, in itself, utterly, proudly useless. So what aesthetic politics can come out of it? Is there any way that it can come out of itself, in resonance with other relational dynamics?

I think of the work of Robert Irwin as showing a way. His work has always been concerned with staging what he himself calls the perception of perception. In the early period, he

practiced abstract art that created subtle, whole-field movement from arrays of dots. As in all his work, the effect takes time to set in, but when it does it is absolutely scintillating. It's less an out-and-out activity of vision than it is an *activation* of it. It's like vision vibrates with its own potential. Irwin then moved into a more sculptural practice involving disks mounted on walls, but lit in a way that their three-dimensionality disappears into a semblance of surface that retains a barely perceptible but extremely powerful, inwardly activated feeling of depth, more a depth-likeness than a depth per se. He was making the third spatial dimension rise to the surface and insist on its visuality, in a kind of becoming-painting of sculpture.

He then moved into installation. He moved off the wall, into 3D space itself, but also out of the gallery, into architectural or even urban spaces. People normally call this kind of art "spatial" because of that. They think of it as more "concrete," more "real," than abstract painting and other gallery practices. It's not at all more concrete. It's actually another practice of high abstraction. It's not more real, it's differently real. That's why it's powerful as art. I have reservations about calling Irwin's installation work spatial art. He moved into inhabited space in order to make it become other, as he had done with sculpture. It was what Deleuze would call a "counter-actualization" of spaces of inhabitation. What he made inhabited space become was a living *event*. He carefully, minutely, obsessively prepares the conditions of perception so that an activation event takes off from them. The whole space is doubled by a perceptual activation or vibration effect, like the one he achieved with the dot paintings and disk works. But this time, it's immersive. It's not immersive in a 3D way. It's like a diaphanous surface that's everywhere and nowhere at the same time, a dimensionless semblance of lived space. Dimensionless, but somehow totally space-filling, saturating every atom. The effect is slow to come; a lot of people don't have the patience to let it come. When you do let it come, it takes over your whole being. You have an immersive thinking-feeling of what it's *like* to be alive in inhabited space, and only what *that's* like. It's a perception of the perception of lived space. And you're all in that perception, every thought, every movement, every shadow, every sound, each of them modulating the others, in immediate vibrational relation, in resonance. The resonance is all-embracing. Relationally self-framing. In a way that is only for the moment, uniquely taking off from and floating in that space. It's monadic. A world of perception unto itself. A self-embracing micro-climate of experience.

This is not interactive art. There is no interaction. You have to *stop* acting for the perceptual event to happen. It then wells up of its own volition. It takes you. You're in it, it's not in you. You live it in, rather than living it out. You don't go anywhere with it. It stays where it happened, as its own event. It's an intensive experience, rather than an extension of it. This is an example of *relational art* that suspends all interaction.

When I said earlier that what interactive art can do is to take a situation as its "object," that it could live up to its potential by then cleaving the interactions it situated asunder, I meant something like this, but done with and through interactions. Not suspending them altogether, but opening micro-intervals in them, so that there is a rhythm of departure and return between nonsensuous perception of affective continuity, and actually emergent drops of narrativizable experience precipitating determinate words and instrumentalizable experience precipitating gestures.

I'm not setting up Irwin as a model. I'm saying that his installation work moves to a non-interactive relational limit of art experience, and that interactive art can take that movement up in itself. I'm saying that Irwin's installation work is at an experiential limit or pole that can itself be put into resonance with another pole, the pole at which experience has come out of itself into makings-sense, into performings of meaningful acts, into action-reaction, instrumentation, function. These poles can be played off each other, or with each other, so that the work produces a lived quality all its own, doubles itself aesthetically in a semblance of itself, and at the same time actually does or tells something specific.

Thought of in this way, art practice is a technique of composing potentials of existence, inventing experiential styles, coaxing new forms of life to emerge. It's inventive, literally creative of vitality affect. And I do mean "technique." To achieve any affective-effective composition requires the same kind of care, minute attention to detail, and obsessive experimentation in how the situation is set up or framed as Irwin is famous for. In Irwin's case, and this applies to interactive art as well, the framing is non-objective. It's more a *performance envelope* than an objective frame. A dynamic or operative frame.

Think in terms of poles of experience, each of which has its own dynamic and constitutes its own relational world. These are of many kinds. Each of the senses constitutes a pole, that is has the potential to be taken to the immanent limit where it can do *only* what it can do, and its relational conditions of emergence appear. But the senses are always also taking each other up in a way that produces fusion effects, like hapticity. The contrasting poles of the pure exercise of a sense and a cross-modal fusion are always in virtual contact. They are always in any case already in resonance. The same applies for stable spatial ordering and disruptive eventness. Intensity of experience and extension of it. Perception and action. Objective perception and semblance. Object perception and perception of perception. Self-referencing and function. Presentational immediacy and causal efficacy. Appearance and reality. Actual form and non-sensuous perception. Vision and narrative re-vision. Site-specificity and dispersion. These are not dualities. They are polarities, dynamic orientations in an abstract qualitative map of potential experience. It's always a multi-polarity. Because all of them virtually map each other, ripple into each other, cancelling each other out or combining and amplifying, cresting and troughing, for calm and for turbulence, for continuing and turning back in, for immanence and out-living. Any way it goes, we always live at a unique cross-roads of them. Each moment is carried by the current of a singular-generic fusion of them.

What I'm saying is that when an art practice carefully sets itself up, lays down the constraints that enable its own signature operation, it is activating a selection of these poles, or all of them, but each only to a certain degree. Each setup, each situational framing, will orient what happens more toward one end or the other of given polarities. It might, for example, bring narrativity out more than the affective in-whichness, or try to do both equally, superimposing them on each other or oscillating between them. Or it might favour instrumental interactivity more than making the relationalities conditioning it appear. It may fuse vision with tactility rather than kinesthesia, or make felt a jolting disjunction between sound and sight. It might spatialize more than eventuate. It might tend to root in the site-specific, or fan out into a distributed network. The possibilities are as infinite as existence. Art is a literal composing of existential potentials. Life design.

The crux is in the technical laying down of operative parameters. It is in the design of the performance envelope, the enabling operative constraints. If anything goes, it's not art.

Because if anything can go, it does – the aesthetic effect just goes away, dissipates. There is no dynamic form. Not even a semblance of a semblance appears. This was a problem with installation art, which struggled with the temptation to pile everything in. When you do that, what you end up with is ... a pile. A mess. It is a problem again with interactive art, because with digital technology you can connect anything to anything else. When you leave the connective potential too open, you end up with the digital equivalent of a mess. On the other hand, when you close it down too much, you make it a game.

Deleuze used to say that life is an art of dosages. And the art of dosing life is an art of creative *subtraction*. That goes for art as a whole, which as we've seen is not separate from life even when it carefully appears to be. You have to strategically subtract to fuse. And you have to selectively fuse to sunder.

V2: *Still no example.*

BM: Okay. One thing that's happening more and more in interactive art is a fusing of vision with movement. This is operating at the same nexus between visual dynamics and kinesthesia, as Irwin's relational art does, but in a very different way because there is in fact interaction. An example I saw recently was at a work-in-progress session at Sha Xin Wei's Topological Media Lab, which works on responsive environment design. One of the projects was by Michael Montanero and Harry Smoak. The concept was very simple. There were two dancers, going through a choreographed routine on stage in front of a large screen. A motion sensing camera analyzed their movement. When the movement reached a certain qualitative threshold – a certain speed and density of gesture – a video window opened up on the screen. But it wasn't at all like a Windows window, thankfully. It was like a visual bubble that grew from nothing and expanded. It was like vision was flowering out of the screen, expressing a quality of movement, its speed and density, purely visually, in a sight that doubled the actual movement. It was a semblance of movement constituting a transduction of it on a different register of experience and into a differently dimensioned space, a surface. The translation was analogue, as all transduction is according to Simondon, even though technically it was digitally achieved, because what was expressed on the screen was a quality of the movement. A quality of the movement was made visible with and through the actual, digitally projected

image of it. The screen also made otherwise perceptible another quality of movement – its rhythm. When the speed and density subsided, the vision bubble started to break apart at the edges, emanating micro-bubbles of vision, and then collapsed into itself. You got a strong sense of thinking-feeling qualities of movement, and not just seeing bodies in movement and their images. This sensation doubled the technical connection between the bodies in movement and the movement on screen with a more encompassing semblance, a lived quality of the interaction under way, a semblance of the global situation. This is what I meant earlier when I said that the ins and outs of the interaction can fold back in *together* to produce a semblance *of* the whole interaction. Toni Dove’s current interactive project, *Spectropia*, works at this same perceptual nexus, between body-movement and its transduction on screen, but with the added dimension of cinematic narrative. She uses the narrative element, among other things, to translate the interaction into a participatory production of cinematic point of view and even cinematic time. It’s all done with a conscious engagement with the “uncanniness” of the interaction – a very ambitious and exciting project in what interactive cinema can be.

V2: *In the dance example, the interaction is staged. There’s the traditional theatrical separation between the performers and the audience. The interaction is only between the performers and the technology.*

BM: That’s what the audience said. The project was strongly challenged because of that. People said it was politically bankrupt because it had no “real” interaction, and it embraced the stage space without explicitly attempting to network out of it. I think that criticism misses the point. It’s that reductive idea about framing I mentioned awhile back – that the frame is reducible to the actual spatial parameters and anything that appears within that frame has no relation to anything outside. It’s the idea again of “elitist” art trying to be “autonomous.” Why not accept for a moment the constraints that the artist has so carefully built in, and see what you can feel with them? It may turn out to be autonomous in the way I redefined it – in a relation of non-relation with other formations that might analogically “want” it and be able to capture and reframe it, so that it expands or contracts to fit other spaces and takes off from other conditions, where its effect could well be political. While it was true that the audience was not in on the interaction, they *were* in on the relation. You could not see the relation

between movement and vision being recomposed before your eyes. You felt the dancers making an actual sight of their bodies' imperceptible movement talents. Kinesthesia was not only fused with movement, it was like vision itself was emerging from it. Body-vision. Kinesthesia was making vision appear in the bubble, and the bubble was making bodily qualities of movement appear – a double capture of vision by movement and movement by vision, in a unique composition. Why can't that experiential double capture of separate dimensions of experience lend itself to a double capture between the theatrical space housing it and other spaces of interaction? Think of the way vision and movement are coupled so banally in the urban environment, subordinated to the maximum to functional circulation. What if this new composition of kinesthesia and vision were recomposed within an urban performance envelope? What might that do? Who or what might want that?

I don't know. The artist doesn't know. The audience didn't want to think about it. But that doesn't mean that the potential for a transduction of that kind wasn't effectively produced. Xin Wei, responding to the audience's critiques, said something I'm in complete agreement with. He said that the point of the Topological Media Lab was to do *speculative* work with technology. That doesn't mean that we're supposed to speculate on what the technology might potentially do or who or what might want it or what it does. It means that the work itself technically speculates. Its dynamic form *is* speculative by nature. It's a speculative *event*. To speculate is to turn in on yourself. You turn in, in order to connect immanently with what is absolutely outside – both in the sense of belonging to other formations monadically separated from your present world, and in the sense of what may come but is unforeseeable. Xin Wei was suggesting that technically staged *situations*, understood as aesthetic events of recomposition, can also do that. When they do, what is happening is an exploratory collective thinking, a collective thought-event of the outside.

When I talk about relational “architectures” – by now it should be clear that I don't mean architecture in the narrow disciplinary sense, although of course architecture may itself be practiced relationally – I'm talking about the technical staging of aesthetic events that speculate on life, emanating a lived quality that might resonate elsewhere, to unpredictable affect and effect. Stagings that might lend themselves to analogical encounter and contagion. That might get involved in inventive accidents of history. I'm talking about architectures of

the social and political unforeseen that enact a relation of non-relation with an absolute outside, in a way that is carefully, technically limited *and* unbounded. Just to mention an example from architecture proper, Greg Lynn's early explorations of what dynamic or "animate" form could be for architecture in the last few years have folded out into a concern for what I'm calling the semblance or thinking-feeling of what happens, for which he has adopted the term "intricacy." Lars Spuybroek is among a small number of architects using digital technology who have been actively concerned at the same time with dynamic form and lived qualities of events of inhabitation at every stage of his work. They are pioneers in the relational architecture of architecture, or to put it more succinctly, the architecture of relation.

Anyway, demands made to art to display its actual political content, or observe a certain actual form that is deemed more political, are demands to curtail this kind of speculation, and the aesthetic politics it performs. They are demands to curtail aesthetic potential. There is nothing in principle wrong with that. As I said, life's an art of dosages, and there can be very good reasons to dope artistic potential with explicit political content. It's just when that becomes a general injunction against certain kinds of experimentation that it becomes a concern to me, and I find myself vigorously dissenting.

V2: *This has been a long conversation and you haven't used the word "media" once, except maybe in the stock phrase "new media." It's a word that's all over the place in interactive art. Why have you shied away from this concept?*

BM: Because I don't think it is one. I mean, I think the concept of "media" is in crisis. It's in tatters. That's because the digital isn't a medium, but it is what is now dominating the media field. Digital technology is an expanding network of connective and fusional potentials. You can take an input in any sense modality, and translate or transduce it into any other, say sound into image. You can take any existing genre of artistic practice and fuse it with any other, say animation with cinema. Digital technology has no specificity as a medium in its own right. That is why commentators like Lev Manovich call it a "meta-medium." But that doesn't get you very far. From there the best you can do is catalogue the kinds of connections that are possible, chart their permutations. It leads to an encyclopaedic approach. At best it

gives you a combinatory flow-chart. It entirely shelves the question of art and artfulness. It doesn't give you any vocabulary to think the properly aesthetic dimension, what makes digital art "art." Part of the problem is that the concept of media was never well-formed. Is a medium defined by the material support, say celluloid for cinema? If so, is digital cinema then not cinema? Is a medium defined by the sense modality the product presents itself in – sound for music, vision for cinema? That alternative misses the absolutely fundamental fact of experience that the senses can take each other up. Michel Chion made that point about cinema. He showed that it is not visual. It operates through what he calls audiovision, a singular-generic fusion-effect of sound and image that emerges when they operate in resonance with one another. Neither sound nor image, audiovision is a kind of effective cross wiring of their potentials. The cinematic image, according to him, is a singular kind of relational effect that *takes off* from both vision and audio but is irreducible to either. It's a thirdness, a supplement or boosting, that needs them both to happen, but isn't one or the other. It has an experiential quality all its own. It's not a simple mix. A fusion is more than a mix. *Mixing* as a concept doesn't go much further than meta-medium. It has the same limitations. It's just a general name for the operations that the idea of meta-medium attributes to digital technology. Beyond that, there's the whole problem of the unexamined assumptions about perception that go into the very notion of "mediation." Perception as I have been trying to talk about it, as Whitehead's philosophy says and as embodied cognition also says, is always direct and *immediate*. It's always its own self-embracing event. It always has presentational immediacy.

Chion is pointing in the right direction when he analyzes cinema as staging a certain kind of experiential fusion-event. For an aesthetic politics, I don't think you can use a typology based on the media as they've been traditionally defined, or on mediation, remediation, transmediation, whatever. I think it has to be built on differentiating philosophically between staged qualities of lived experience, and between different kinds of technically achieved fusion-and-separation events.

All arts are *occurrent arts*. That's another phrase of Suzanne Langer. All arts are occurrent arts, because any and every perception, artifactual or "natural," is just that, an experiential event. It's an event both in the sense that it is a happening, and in the sense that when it

happens something new transpires. There is eventfulness in art, just as there is artfulness in nature. And there is creativity across the board. Because every event is utterly singular, a one-off, even though with and through its one-offness a “likeness” is necessarily thought-felt to a whole population of other events with which it forms an endless series of repeated variations. Langer has probably gone farther than any other aesthetic philosopher toward analyzing art-forms not as “media” but according to the type of experiential event they effect.

You have to rethink what the typology is based on, but also what a typology can be logically. It doesn't have to be a classification system, in the sense of subsuming particulars under an abstract, general idea. It can be based on a differentiating singular-generic thought-feeling. That is to say, it can try to take into account the kind of abstraction that effectively *makes* a perception what it actually will have been – the really lived abstraction of the virtual. This is a generative typology, a typology of dynamic forms of perception's speculative appearing to itself and in itself. It is an immanent typology or typology of immanence. It amounts to the same thing. The kind of logic called for is what Simondon called *allagmatic*, an operative logic of the analog expressing “the internal resonance of a system of individuation.” Of individuation, because this kind of typology will always have to keep generating variations on itself, as the experience is always being restaged as an event and in the event, recomposed from within. New dynamic forms are always immanently emerging. Art is part and parcel of that process. Its practice speculatively advances its own generative typology. It practically contributes to its own thinking.

Thinking art is not about imposing a general overlay on its practice. The last thing it should be about is forcing art to fit into another discipline's categories and holding it to them. It's about putting art and philosophy, or theory and practice, on the same creative plane, in the same ripple pool. Art and philosophy, theory and practice, can themselves resonate and effectively fuse. Thinking-feeling art philosophically can intensify art's speculative edge. It's totally unnecessary to put theory and practice at odds with each other.

V2: *One last question. A lot of your vocabulary might strike people as a new romanticism – all the talk of lived qualities and life-feeling, not to mention “oceanic” experience, a term you*

actually used without cringing. What would you say to someone who accused you of doing little more than reviving romanticism for the interactive age?

BM: There are worse things to be accused of, I guess. Any time you try to talk about what happens in the world in qualitative terms, you're bound to be accused of waxing romantic. Personally I don't think of it as a romanticism. Remember that the ocean came in drops, and there is as much separation between drops as there is pooling. And the pooling can just as well turn out to be a puddle. Sense of aliveness in a mud-puddle is not terribly exalting. I'm not advocating a romanticism of connection. That's actually what I've been arguing against. Neither is it about an exaltation of relation. I try to emphasize that the notion of the virtual requires that all relation actually be seen as a relation of non-relation. Connection and relation, such as they are, are not always exhilarating. They can be terrifying. Or boring. Or constraining. It gets you nowhere to romanticize them. But it is important to give them their due, as much politically as philosophically and artistically, and without imposing a value judgment on them from outside or at a general level. Giving continuity and relation their due also involves doing the same for discontinuity, because they are necessarily implicated in each other. Something that is continuous with itself is so precisely because it detaches its activity from the outside it absolutely lives-in. Also, events continuously unfold, but across their unfolding they inevitably "perish," as Whitehead would say. Continuity and discontinuity are in reciprocal presupposition. The problem is always to evaluate, case by case, in what way they implicate each other: *how* they are.

If I am guilty of romanticizing anything, it would be *intensity*. By that I mean the immanent affirmation of a process, in its own terms. This is not a stated affirmation. It's an activity. It's when a process tends to the limit of what only it can do. It's not mystical to call that self-affirming "life." If you like Latin, you can join Spinoza and call it conatus. You can call it many names. The important thing once again is that in each instance you ask and answer "how." Then it becomes a technical question. A technical question of *ontogenesis*, or of the self-production of being in becoming.

Even if you do call it life, that doesn't necessarily land you in a vitalism, because there is no need to posit a life-substance or life-force "behind" appearances. All you need to posit is the

appearance of a tendency. A tendency, as it appears, is always, only, and entirely in process. But tendency is already a complex notion, because it implies a certain self-referentiality. Tendency is a performed self-referencing to other states, past and potential. As such, it is a way in which an event in some sense, not necessarily consciously – in fact most often and in large part nonconsciously – *feels* itself, catches itself in the relational act. And in some sense, not yet separable from this feeling, nonsensuously *thinks* itself, in that very same act. This is what Whitehead calls “prehension” and what Deleuze calls “contemplation.” Both authors apply these concepts to *all* events, whether they occur on organic or inorganic strata. I suspect that this is where many people would part ways. To accompany this kind of thinking, you have to be open to the possibility of rethinking the world as literally *made of* feelings, of prehensive events. The philosophy of the event, in Whitehead’s words, is an immanent “critique of pure feeling.” The feeling is “pure” because it needs no subject – or object for that matter – outside the dynamic form of the event’s own monadic occurrence. You have to be willing to see the world in a semblance. That *could* be mystical. But then again, it could be a question of technique.

Given that the question of technique is at the core of the approach I’ve been outlining, I like to think of it as a *speculative pragmatism*, understood as a species of empiricism closely akin to William James’s *radical empiricism*. This way of formulating might be more companionable to more people. As James defined it, there are five guidelines of radical empiricism. The first it shares with classical empiricism: 1) everything that is, is in perception (read, if you will: in prehension). Radical empiricism begins to part company with classical empiricism with the next guideline: 2) take everything as it comes. You cannot pick and choose according to a priori principles or pre-given evaluative criteria. Since things come in lumps as well as singly, this means that: 3) relations must be accounted as being as real as the terms related. In other words, relations have a mode of reality distinct from that of the discrete objects we find in relation. It follows from this, in light of the first guideline, that: 4) relations are not only real, they are really perceived, and directly so. Relations not only have their own mode of reality, but each has its own immediate mode of appearance. The final guideline says that the vast majority of what is, in perception, actually isn’t: 5) “ninety-nine times out of a hundred” the terms and relations that appear “are not actually but only virtually there” – beyond the frame on the “chromatic fringes” and at the processual

vanishing point, or “terminus” in James’s vocabulary, where each event turns in on its own unfolding towards its tendential end. “Mainly, we live on speculative investments.” The empirical world is ninety-nine percent lived speculation, a surfing “on the front edge of a wave-crest” of “tendency.” In order to avoid a romanticism of connection, James drums it in that guideline number two, take everything as it comes, means that you have to take continuity and discontinuity as *they* come. The beach-falls with the wave-cresting. You have to give each its due. By which time this has continued long enough.

—cut—

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Notes

¹ Simondon speaks of the immanence of relation in the context of technical invention in terms that recall a number of the points about connectivity and contemporary independence made here. He calls the immanence of relation the dynamic “ground” (*fond*) of technical objects and their associated milieu: “Perpetually overlooked, the ground is what holds the dynamisms. It is what allows the system of forms to exist. Forms do not participate with other forms, but rather participate in the ground. The ground is the system of all forms or rather the common reservoir of the tendencies of forms before they even exist as separate entities and are constituted as an explicit system. The relationship of participation connecting the forms to the ground is a relation that straddles the present and imbues it with the potential influence of the future, with an influence of the virtual on the actual. For the ground is the system of virtualities, potentials, and forces on the way, whereas the forms constitute the system of the actual. Invention is a taking in charge of the system of actuality by the system of virtualities. It is the creation of one system from these two systems. Forms are passive inasmuch as they represent actuality. They become active when they organize themselves in relation to the ground, thus actualizing prior virtualities.”

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