

Entertaining the environment: transduction and distributed agency in the art event.

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Introduction

In the late C18th the Abbé Nollet created entertainment by passing electric current from a Leyden Jar (an early battery prototype), through a line of 300 Carthusian monks holding hands, causing them to simultaneously jump in the air (Elsenaar and Scha 19). This was one of a series of early experiments exploring a fascination with this newly discovered force in the world, capable of passing through and rearranging bodies and objects. Such works demonstrate a shift in positioning the human and environment: an enthusiasm for an exploration of a distinctly non-human agency active in a lively world of forces and an entrancement with the capability of such forces to transverse and reorganize human body potential into a decidedly ‘post-human collective body/assemblage’ (Manning, *Entertaining the environment 2*).

In her recent writing and art production, Erin Manning has proposed two concepts, that of ‘entraining’ and ‘entertaining’ the environment (*Entertaining 6*)¹, as a way of thinking through Whitehead’s two perceptual categories in relation to the phases of perception in the art event, that of “causal efficacy”, and “presentational immediacy” (Whitehead 310 – 321). ‘Entrainment’, Manning says, concerns the ‘immanently relational intertwining of perception with action’ (*Entertaining 6*). Isabelle Stengers explains causal efficacy as a construction of chains of cause and effect, often based on prior knowledge or habitual response to sense data (401)² – a succinct description, though perhaps something of a simplification of the potential of causal efficacy, which might also be thought of as a ‘lure’ towards prehension, ‘call(ing) forth new immanent associations and new assemblages’ (Manning, *Always more than one 57*) – a more slippery operation with artistic possibilities. ‘Entertainment’, on the other hand, is indifferent to such concerns (Whitehead 324), rather it is the process by which an art event might ‘place us immediately in a relational framework rather than investing in the hierarchy of subject and object’, concentrating on ‘the direct perception of the fielding of experience such that it brings its qualitative resonances to the fore’ (*Entertaining 1*). It is this potential for a perception of the processes by which causal efficacy folds into the presentational immediacy to provide a sense of the ‘witness of the body (as) an ever present’ (Whitehead 312), a felt resonance with environmental fields that the changes in affective tonality that are produced by processes of transduction activate that I wish to examine through Lygia Clark’s propositional art work *Caminhando*, concentrating on the transductive potential of an opening of the body to a wider field of distributed agency to produce a suspension in-process, a moment of slippage, which evokes a sensation of being, as Manning says ‘always more than’ a subject (Manning, *Always more than one passim*) .

Of course, ‘environment’ here has nothing to do with concepts of ‘nature’, nor, with environment as content – the environment as a distinct separate system for a subject to gaze upon, discuss or traverse, nor ‘environmentalism’ in the sense of something to be rescued from the human. Rather, I would argue, it reflects a more radical view, that of environment, including what remains of the human, as pure process – autopoietic system – in line with Felix Guattari’s concept of ‘ecosophy’ (*The Three Ecologies* 34-36), a generalized ecology that ‘questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations’ (*The Three Ecologies* 52). As Manning says, ‘to feel ecologically is to directly perceive the relations out of which space-time is composed. Perceiving environmentally does not imply giving meaning to form, but forming environmentally’ (*Relationscapes* 73).

The question of how to think beyond the human, as O’Sullivan states, is not as simple as a turning away from the human. Rather it is ‘a kind of stretching or twisting [of the human], a rupturing and stammering, a releasing of forces from within and the contact of forces that are without (both in fact being the same operation)’ (64), that is being considered here. This paper attempts to ‘think with’ Manning’s concept of entertaining the environment in order to unpack the experience of *Caminhando*, concentrating on its potential for the opening of the body to a wider field of agency, and for the production of a phasing, a moment of slippage, a crack in which to escape oneself.

From agency to transduction.

To begin with, agency, it seems to me, is at best a problematic term, filled with nostalgic longing for transcendence. ‘Agency’ has a tendency to imply the primacy of ‘agents’ – discrete stable entities positively exerting force (that is, more than simply reacting to the world), while somehow in themselves remaining internally immune to it. Even those seeking to position agency beyond the human tend to think in those terms – actor network theory at its most programmatic, for example, or Pickering’s language in *The mangle of practice* of ‘resistance and accommodation’ and the ‘capturing’ of agency (65, 92), staged as a kind of epic battle of wills between scientist and material world. How then to think ontogenetically, to think agency as a more radical, primary force, shaping entities as well as the relation between them, not as a force to be distributed amongst entities as such, but a co-emergent force, making and in the making of entities: a ‘system of intensities’ that is the event (Livesey 338). How then to think in the language of forces, how to think the transformation of these forces as they move through entities? How to think affects that flow across entities/bodies that are always caught in between, in the (always) emergent/immanent, both phasing and de-phasing simultaneously, in ‘future-past’ relation³.

In *Vibrant matter* Jane Bennett thinks such forces a ‘distributed agency’, a ‘swarm of vitality at play’ (31-2). After Simondon we might also think it as a process of transduction. Transduction, Simondon says, is a process by which we can understand individuation. Individuation ‘operates beneath all forms [and] is inseparable from a pure ground that it brings to the surface’ (Deleuze 152), it is an ongoing and in itself multiple

process that underlies individualization. Individuation is the ‘more than of becoming’ (Massumi, in *Always more than one* 9) - becomings being dephasings of ongoing field-entity relations, singular expressions – differentiations - of larger ecologies of forces. Transduction then is the process by which such ‘an activity sets itself in motion’ at the same time as it generates ‘processes of modification’ (Simondon, *The genesis of the individual* 313). It is, for Simondon, a way of understanding and expressing the relation of pre-individualization to individualization in ontogenetic terms (Simondon, *The genesis* 314).

Transduction describes the integration of formerly disparate things within a concrete system, that is, the evolution of a shared associated milieu. It is, in simpler terms, how the becoming of an entity generates further unfoldings: how ‘formative force becomes form to become force again’ (Manning, *Always more than one* 51), thought not as a linear progression but rather series of overlapping, always transforming forces of differing viscosities, driving ongoing individuation. Whitehead similarly describes such a process as a system of concrescence and continuity: an entity having achieved satisfaction (the completion of its own process of concrescence), becomes an ‘object’ for other entities, an ‘external resonance’, its prehension initiating/conditioning their unfolding concrescence (235). This (again) Whitehead describes not as a simple progression. An entity is a window onto the world - a monad - that has a relation to every other actualized entity, by whatever degree of separation and whether prehended positively or negatively (239). In such a complex and intertwined system the transduction triggering prehension must be seen as more a vast nexus of complex forces than a simple cause and effect paradigm.

Darkness (a detour)

Torn apart by sudden darkness, the self scatters, disappears in to the cracks. Body boundaries, organs, ego, go their own ways. Contingent assemblages begin to form – hand/surface, foot/shoe sole/gradient, ear/echo/thought, head/wall – there is a scramble to cobble together some kind of workable new ‘organ’ to make sense of the available data. But they remain disparate, loosely connected at best: floating. Free of central nervous system co-ordination and losing causal efficacy, sense relations become ‘vague’, losing spatial definition yet retaining and even amplifying the emotional tonality (Whitehead 176). No longer bound to an organism busy personing (Arakawa and Gins 2), they conduct their own perceptual experiments in the art of bricolage – systems unencumbered by pre-constructed individuals. In such a space the whole body surface becomes a groping hand, skin feels the edge of an object – as a resistant force - gains information but never really knows the object – a edge could as well be a table, bookcase or doorway, nerves responds only to the immediacy of the hard flatness, reinventing the object and body in relation at the next cautious groping forward. Navigating in such conditions a certain tentativeness naturally arises, as Arakawa and Gins might say (45), as both cause and affect of a body rearranging, reaching out and in to: in that sensitive, quiet turning out of ears, skin, awareness towards the environment, slowly seeking to gather fragments of information from all angles and sources, to assemble from the field.

Plunged into unexpected blackness we begin to realize not only how clearly the gestalt is linked to vision (despite all we know about the haptic and synesthetic), but also how a

notion of a stable, material world through which such an individual navigates is integral to the illusions of the subject. In darkness the world itself is also remade: as a series of felt planes, remote sensations, unexpected barriers and mysterious voids. This darkness is ‘the gaze of the alien’, Lingis says, where order ‘enters into decomposition’, things ‘break, blister and decay’ and ‘our substance is left behind in waste and corruption’ (79).

Turn the light back on and what was fluid body-with-body part-with-evolving space-with-part object assemblage devolves back into the more habitual spatial and subjective dynamics. What was for a moment a series of evenly spread fields of energies and relations in flux, of foregrounded individuation, collapses back into the usual groupings and objects, privileged and backgrounded relations, acknowledged and resisted forces.

*Caminhando*⁴ (1963).

Make yourself a trailing: you take the band of paper wrapped around a book, you cut it open, you twist it, and you glue it back together so as to produce a Mobius strip. Then you take a pair of scissors, stick one point into the surface and cut continuously along the length of the strip...When you have gone the circuit of the strip, its up to you whether to cut to the left or to the right of the cut you’ve already made. This idea of choice is capital. The special meaning of this experience is in the act of doing. (Clark 99)

Following the *Caminhando*’s instructions creates a body-tool-object machine producing movement – a ‘mechanics of expression rather than a signifying apparatus’ (Murphie 104), and we must talk of verbs here, as Deleuze says (Deleuze, *Conversations* 50), not nouns, to escape representation. Process can only be described, and even then inadequately, through infinitive verb forms: assembling, person-ing (from ‘what can a body do’, ‘to what is bodying doing?’). Lines of flight are not waiting to be discovered - they must be performed. Escape not through a crack but through a process of cracking. Think agencies, not agents, individuations not individuals, becoming not ever being, event not result. Art is event, not object: never more obvious than in *Caminhando*. ‘At the outset, the *Trailing* is only a potentiality’, Clark says (99). The paper and the cutting are in themselves nothing, in the end the result is inconsequential and it leaves no real trace (Clark, in Suchan 6), just scraps to be binned, of paper, of a persons. The art exists as a moment of resonate intensity, of prehended phasing, its beauty lying in the delicate capacity to activate and foreground transduction.

Perform this work. No matter how much you know of it, how many times you enact it, it will still managed to turn you inside out. At the point where you have cut an entire loop of paper and are back to the beginning, instead of the scissors being next to the original incision, they are somehow on the other side. Sight contradicts expectation, hand/scissors contradicts paper – a gap opens up in the habitual perceptual schema, cohesion falls apart. The understanding of causal efficacy that the skin/hand sense datum leads one to expect fails to match the presentational immediacy, the link between the perceptual processes is made felt through their failure to smoothly orchestrate. Any stable sense of fixed space

dissolves, briefly becoming purely relative to the movement – a sudden plunge into darkness.

All things, Whitehead states, are capable of feelings, prehension - resonances with other entities (220), sensitivities to their environment: wasp and orchid, pen and hand, scissors and paper. Assemblages are more than binary machines. More than the multiple, they are multiplicities with their own logic – concrete not abstract, existing in their entirety or not at all: the chicken is not the chicken without the egg, it is ‘one and the same becoming’ (Deleuze, *Conversations* 2). Multiplicity lies in the gaps (cracks) between molar opposites: between hand/scissors, body/paper, subject/artwork – in the transduction, the movement of forces through simultaneous individuations that pulls apart the molar, makes sieves of its boundaries.

The wisdom of rocks

Deleuze describes the perfectly simple world of the tick: three feelings, for height, warmth, blood, that allow it to navigate, to form workable assemblages, to become with its environment (*A Thousand Plateaus* 257). Such ‘Whiteheadian’ feelings are not necessarily conscious, they do not privilege sentient over inanimate beings, neither, as Manning states, is feeling ‘attached to a form already taken’ (*Always more than one* 55), to preformed entities. Rather, think feeling as a force gathering towards form, immanent with the occasion, moving the event. Accept Whitehead’s challenge; carry this to its limit – beyond entities with attributes easy to anthropomorphize - beyond animals, and beyond plants and trees even. Ask instead: What does a rock feel? To which forces are its sensitivities tuned – to rain, salts, wind, tides, heat? How does the becoming form of the rock instigate new force - shape the wind, give new direction to the current, absorb or dissolve salt solutions? See the rock-world relation anew: the rock’s continued fielding in the world, the field’s continuous expression through the force of the rock, rock-world as an ecology of operations: learn from the ‘wisdom of rocks, from which we can derive an ethics involving the notion that, ultimately, we too are fluxes of matter and energy’ (DeLanda 143).

In *Caminhando* hand/scissors/ears form an assemblage based on shared rhythm of vibrations of the cutting of paper, hand/scissors/paper form alliances around the felt pressure of the cut, eyes/skin/paper form another assemblage around kinesthetic sensations. Affects pass through, initiate assemblages - new forms - instigating new forces. The assemblage is always in process, both gathering and dissipating. The arrangement of fibers in the paper form tendencies – to tear in this direction, resist in this way – that shapes the displacement of the force of the scissors. What do the scissors, the fingers, and the paper feel, what sensitivities form their worlds? How does their combined individuation, their folding into one another, their shared assembl-*ing* create, mix and shape their potential? Each component in the assemblage both retains its own potentiality and is engaged in a dynamic exchange of force to unfold the larger, shared potentiality of the combined machine they become, trans-subjective in their ‘shared responsibility in events’ (Ettinger, in Bertelsen 32). In the event they become through the action of cutting, defined by their assembling(s), their shared sensitivities to the

becoming-form of each other. That is, it is the forces instigating the unfolding individuation flowing through the entities – the event of cutting and their intertwined affectual relations (their ability to feel) – that forms the assemblage, distributes the agency, not within objects per se, but in the event itself.

The ‘environment’ here is not some stage for a theatre of operations, but the field of forces passing through entities – the force of the event that is processed through the hand/scissors/paper/eyes/ears/skin. Perhaps with transduction in mind we might venture to say that rather than things having feelings or sensitivities to an environment, entities have types of forces that can pass through them, that can transduce them, activating phasings.

Multiplicity

Such transduction integrates, as Simondon states, disparate realities into a system of relation (*The Genesis* 315), which is a relation not only of the actual, but also the virtual or potentiality. Irreducible multiplicities: the sound of the ocean, wind, fog, flocking birds. The earth’s multiplicities, ‘nebulous set(s)...whose exact definition escapes us, and who’s local movements are beyond observation’ (Serres 103), that we are thrust into, or rather, born out of (already always re-phasing): growing like grass, Deleuze says, in the middle, always from the middle of things (*Conversations* 23). And how do such leaderless birds collectively navigate so gracefully without pre-planned direction? Because their shared individuation brings into being not only the individual, but also its associated milieu, its pool of potentiality. That is, Mitchell says, the ‘complete system in which the synthesis of the individual occurs’ (73). Subjects themselves are not communicating, but rather ‘regimes of individuation that meet’ (Debaix 7).

The individual is a cut in the flow of unfolding, ‘a singularity in the plane of individuation’ (Manning, *Always more than one* 30), this individuation an always-in-process, a ‘more than’ reaching towards the next (a body-ing, a cutting, again, always from the middle of things), the body a ‘plural one-ness’ (Arakawa and Gins 41). The becoming-scissors of the hand, the becoming paper of the scissors, or the becoming-cutting of all the components that is their shared potential, their transduction back into forces that transforms not only the paper but the subject.

Drops of water & the ocean, waves and the roar of the sea, droplets and clouds – multiplicities that yet consist of singularities (anything but dualities). This is the assemblage (which is also always the assembl-*ing*), trans-singular, more than its component parts, where cause & effect are lost in concrete inter-determined, co-causal birthing. You cannot have the individual without environment, the two are points on a path of symbiotic enaction, individuation driven by transduction that is the becoming of the whole system, both the actual and the virtual with which it resonates. Assemblages in *Caminhando* create ‘concrete’ systems, in Simondon’s terms – a shared ecology in the largest sense (a shared milieu or potential alongside a connected actuality), a system with ‘internal coherence’ (Simondon, *On the mode of existence* 40), because the enaction of

the assemblage is co-causal with its field of potential: field and individual are a multiplicity.

The power of the multiplicity here is that it takes us beyond the stalemate of the dichotomous, denouncing ‘simultaneously the One and the many, the limitation of the One by the many and the opposition of the many to the One’ (Deleuze 203). That is, the concept makes it possible to see that individuation and individualization are neither opposed nor exclusive. Rather, individualization is an expression in and of individuation that neither halts nor contradicts the latter process. The question here for the function of the art event might be: how can this continued undercurrent of the momentum of individuation and its relation to the field be made evident or brought to the fore? Hence Manning’s proposition: unlink the processes of entertainment and entrainment (however briefly or incompletely) in order to submerge oneself in the flow of individuation, of the gathering and transduction of forces from the field, the ‘no-time of the decision in the present passing’ (Manning, *Always more than one* 165).

Tactics

Lygia Clark says: *Caminhando* causes through participation the figure of the participant to ‘deterritorialize itself’ (in *The experimental exercise of freedom* 76). Deleuze and Guattari say: everything can have a microbrain (*What Is Philosophy?* 213), a topological system of forces for a nervous system. Arakawa and Gins say: we are organisms that ‘choose to person’; it is a routine of expected behaviors (1-5). Implicit in these statements are challenges: choose something else, embrace your multiplicity, your connections with the world, the assemblages that transverse your body. Invent procedures, tactics, they urge, to free yourself, learn to ‘swim’ in the tentativeness that is the ‘more than’ of bodying (Arakawa and Gins 84).

Arakawa & Gins’ work shows how bodying makes ‘landing sites’, mobile points of connection penetrating the world, dispersing the body and intertwining with environment. *Caminhando* is just such a procedure, giving rise to new microbrains: in the hands/scissors, in the ears/eyes/paper and so on. The event is a technique to reach into the world, transducing the body into emergent assemblages, to spark new individuations. Individuation implies that one is both dephasing as an individual, and simultaneously more, always suspended in the process of phasing, of ongoing concrescence, a future-present paradox. The art event is a machine that opens up a gap in the subject, that moment of felt phasing creates a flight path: choose here, if you dare, not to person, but to embrace multiplicity, to accent individuation over personhood. Replace the frozen individual with the flows of forces, multiplicities of times; more a diagram-*ing* than a thing, with a dynamic relation to the virtual, ‘the combination of mutating fluxes, on their productions of speed’ (Deleuze *Conversations* 88), become a biogram even: ‘play[ing] at the interstice of individuation and singularity, trembling on the resonant circuit of the virtual/actual now of pure experience . . . the body not as content but as a crystal or potential’⁵ (Manning, *Always more than one* 108).

Towards a new politics

Is this a ‘lively world’? Not in the sense of a separate environment with which to engage, but perhaps in the sense that it is an enactive worlding containing body-ings: individuations occurring always from and in the middle of other enactive process. The agencies that drive this, I am proposing, are best understood as the flow of forces, their transduction as they pass through and trigger the individuation of entities, integrating such individuations into an the ecology of a concrete system as it also drives invention.

Clearly Process Philosophy views transduction as a ubiquitous event, enabling the ‘drive towards novelty’ of the universe that Whitehead describes. What then, differentiates *Caminhando* from the everyday? In some way it is that it makes felt the process of the translation of these forces. But it is not exactly that it makes the process ‘conscious’ in any articulate manner. Rather it is that it makes transduction felt as it slows down the process of phasing, provokes a suspension in the flow, makes evident the potentiality of the event, with opportunity for re-construction and invention.

That is not to say that the everyday does not contain such moments – those subtle but strange occurrences where the body schema becomes momentarily confused - causal efficacy and presentational immediacy fail to align - and the body scrambles to reassemble itself, allowing a brief glimpse into the processes of exchange and emergence in individuations. But it is perhaps in *Caminhando*’s ability, despite the banality of the actions, to detach the event from the habitual inattention to transduction, to create in Massumi’s words a ‘semblance’ that such processes are drawn to the fore. Semblance, as Massumi uses the term, is ‘the manner in which the virtual actually appears’, that is, its felt ingression into the event (*Semblance* 15-16), its felt presence allowing a diagramming to take place, a thinking-feeling of the ‘dynamic form’ of relation and its connection to ongoing potentiality (*Semblance* 15).

All this, I want to suggest, is perhaps a step towards a new politics of art. That is, clearly, this has nothing to do with the representation of an ‘issue’, but instead attempts to engage in the creation of lines of flight, with the composing of, as Massumi says, techniques for inventing (new) potentials for existence (*Semblance* 14). This is an *ethical* art in Deleuze’s definition, in that it is a practice pursuing expression and connection rather than representation (Murphie 105). It is an *ecological* approach in that it is a politics of art that activates ‘an attentiveness to life and the field’, to the conditions of the event expressing itself (Manning, *Always more than one* 212-13), an ontogenetic technicity⁶ for living. This is not a politics of ecology in the usual sense, rather an ecology-in-the-making: a body-becoming environment, environment-becoming-body. It is ecologically sensitive in that it assists the formation of a trans-subjective attentiveness to an affective field across the becoming of space, time, bodies and objects (Bertelsen 39). The art event here, as Guattari states, can operate as ‘cells of resistance against the steamroller of capitalistic subjectivity’ (*Chaosmosis* 90-91), creating an ‘ecology of the virtual’ capable of engendering ‘conditions for the creation and development of unprecedented formations of subjectivity’ (*Chaosmosis* 91). *Caminhando*’s politics are those of the ‘micro-political’ as Bertelsen defines it, working at the level of bodily habits (43), and the event focuses

attention on the felt continued emergence from which neither body nor field can be detached, the experience of a trans-human, lively world in the widest possible sense.

¹ See also Manning, Erin, *Always more than one*, Forthcoming, and recent works *Stitching Time* at the 2012 Sydney Biennale and *Weather Patterns* (2012), University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and Deakin University, Latrobe University VAC and Bus Projects, Melbourne.

² See pp 399-402 for a discussion of the concepts.

³ That is, what might happen in the future shapes what has already happened as it is part of the virtual milieu of the event, while all actualized entities might also be said to contain within themselves some echo of all past events, each expressing these relationships in its own way. This is the beginning of a conception of an event as a multiplicity, a non-linear system expressed through difference. See Manning, *Relationescapes* 7, and Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and repetition* 57, and passim. The *experiential* quality of this process Manning terms ‘event time’, that is, the felt potential entwined in the past resonance that is felt in the moment (Manning, *Always more than one* 131, 151-2). Affect, as Massumi defines it, is such a ‘pre- and post-contextual’ force that courses through an event, both preceding and outliving its satisfaction, connecting the event both to its reservoir of potential and its prehension (*Too-blue* 185).

⁴ ‘*Caminhando*’ is translated by Clark as ‘Walking’ (Suchan 6) and ‘Trailings’ in Bois, Yves-Alain & Clark, Lygia, “Nostalgia of the body” (99). Clark says of the title: ‘the gerund of the verb *caminhar* [caminhando] signals a becoming.’ (Suchan 6).

⁵ See also Manning, *Relationescapes* : ‘From Biopolitics to the Biogram’: 119-142, for a description of the concept of the biogram as an extension of the diagram.

⁶ ‘Technicity’, as Manning describes it, moves beyond ‘technique’ to touch again with its potential or virtual, a ‘more than’ of technique (*Always more than one* 72). In other words, it might be viewed as the way art can contract or synthesize a technique to bring new life to it.

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