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7 Propositions for the Impossibility of Isolation

or, the Radical Empiricism of the Network

Erin Manning

1. Thoughts and things are one

'Thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are.' (James, 1912).

Begin with concern for the network and its modalities of process. Understand concern as that for which and through which thought is activated. Think concern for the event as the terminus through which the process of taking-part begins to take form. Note that the process and the thought are difficult to keep assiduously apart. Become cognizant of the fact that thoughts and activities interrelate. Explore how thought itself becomes a networking. Take note that thought and things seem connected. Take note that things aren't as stable as you thought they were.

Take William James' example: the pen.

> 'This pen is...in the first instance, a bald *that*, a datum, fact, phenomenon, content, or whatever other neutral or ambiguous name you may prefer to apply. [...] To get

> classed either as a physical pen or as someone's percept of a pen, it must assume a *function*, and that can only happen in a more complicated world. So far as in that world it is a stable feature, holds ink, marks paper and obeys the guidance of the hand, it is a physical pen. [...] So far as it is instable, ...coming and going with the movements of my eyes, altering with what I call my fancy, continuous with subsequent experiences of its "having been" (in the past tense), it is the percept of a pen in my mind. Those peculiarities are what be mean by being "conscious" *in a pen*.' (James, 1912: 123-124, my emphasis).

In a pen? 'In' because it is pen-ness which has concern for the event's coming-together, in this instance. 'In' because in James there is no primacy of the human subject as the instantiator of experience and experimentation.

Having concern for the event suggests that the event is the force through which thought-things take form. This takingform occurs at the precipice where thought and things collide in an experience of the not-yet. What emerges: neither penin- itself (as object already constituted) nor thought-in-itself (as thought *of* the pen). The event: a new variation on penning.

The thought-thing relation is often located within web-based networking as the human/computer interaction. This stabilizes not only the terms themselves, but the potential of their convergence. Hierarchically divided, there is no question where the process begins and ends: in the human. With James, this hierarchy is undermined. Knower and known are no longer situated at the predictable extremes of a given relation. Knower and known are co-

constituted in and by the event itself. This is what is meant by being conscious in a network.

When knower and known diverge from their predictable standpoints, the idea of network shifts dramatically. The knower is the subject of the event, the known the object as shifting quality or objectness. The knower is an actualized set of conditions emergent in relation to a series of propositions. This relation does not assume a predictable configuration. What is knower may become known under a different set of criteria. The knower is not necessarily the human. In James' example, the pen-event is the experience of how the pen as thing becomes pen as thought, and vice versa.

This is an additive process. Usually thought is directly aligned with consciousness. In order to separate consciousness from experience, thought is subtracted from consciousness, leaving consciousness 'outside', looking-in on the event. In James, consciousness is an aspect of experience. 'Experience, I believe, has no [...] inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition' (James, 1912: 9). To subtract would be to make consciousness a priori – to place it outside and beyond experience. Such a placement situates consciousness firmly in the human, neutralizing the spacetime of experience by casting it always as secondary. As in Kantian thought, consciousness then acts on an already-constituted set of relations within a stable conception of spacetime. Consciousness *added* makes consciousness one aspect of the event. It allies consciousness to the pliable thought-object of which the event is made. To come back to the pen: instead of situating the bearer/knower in the human subject and the thing/known in the pen, James makes pen-ness the junction through which thought and object collide. Conscious experience is the event. In the pen.

2.The percept is out there

‘ If you agree that the perceptual object is not an idea within me, but that percept and thing, as indistinguishably one, are really experienced there, outside, you ought not to believe that the merely thought-of object is hid away inside the thinking subject.’ (James, 1912: 19)

Gilbert Simondon has a word for the thing-thought at work: a technique. A technique is a set of relations that activates new conditions for thought/action. Within the Walled Garden conference, our technique was subtle intervention into the networking process of the actual event. We proposed to fashion a mode of intervention that would stimulate thought-in-action, working at the threshold of perception. Our goal was not to directly intervene in the nodes of the network (the workshops or plenary sessions), but to make palpable the virtual connective tissue that held the spark of of the Walled Garden event’s networking potential.

Techniques are directly allied to thought in emergence. They are processes that work with the relational potential of that which is already underway. Their goal: to activate new forces for thought. Our practice: to make thought felt such that it might transduce into the network and its nodes. A technique is inherently metastable. ‘It is the thing as power and not its structure that technique seeks, matter as reservoir of tendencies, qualities and proper virtues.’[1] A process becomes a technique when it makes palpable the inherent potential of a milieu. All techniques require iteration, repetition, but no technique can survive without difference. A rigorous technique makes felt the interval of the not-yet-thought *in* thought. Such a technique not only intervenes within existing processes – it creates new modes of thought.

Indeterminate and ontogenetic, thought is active in the multiplicity of its time-slips. But it does this always in tandem with the thing. The thing forces thought toward its realization in the field of consciousness. Without the thing, there is no motor for thought's emergence into an actual event. Thing here is not object preformed but objectness fielded by its relation to thought.

The thought-thing continuum activates the nexus of experience through which a singular set of potential relations becomes an event. Thought as technique is a tending towards. It opens the event to its fielding of experience. It activates and adjusts the passing from pure experience to the nowness of the event's actual occasion. 'The things in the room here which I survey, and those in my distant home of which I think, the things of this minute and those of my long-vanished boyhood, influence and decide me alike, with a reality which my experience of them directly feels' (James, 1912: 20).

Thought is feeling-with. For James, things-thought "decide me", create a reality "which experience feels." No subject here that iterates a final taking into account. The thought-thing is the event. As the thought transduces into a becoming-event, it actively merges with the thing's potential in this singular configuration. The event is the remarkable point of this wider experimentation with thought-thingness. Thought *things*, emerging as event with the world worlding.

James calls this the 'not-me character of my recollections' (1912: 20). Not-me is a singularity. This singularity is relational. It makes the nexus felt even as it singles itself out from an infinity of potential concurrent experiences. These experiences are not 'inside' consciousness. They make (consciousness) work (*ils font oeuvre* – Etienne Souriau[2]). 'The work [oeuvre] resulting from the

exigency of creation, of this sensitivity to places and moments of exception, does not copy the world or man, but prolongs them and inserts itself in them.'[3]

3. Make consciousness a field

A field is open, ontogenetic. It (e)merges with experience but does not precede it. It focalizes the forces of potential for an emergent event. It forces a recombination of figural structures and qualities of ground. Itself not a ground, it nonetheless grounds potentiality into an actualisable network of relations that themselves activate new relations of figure-ground. Figure is never pre-formed, nor is ground. Figure-ground is an intense web of shifting relations through which remarkable points appear. Remarkable points are palpable in the field of consciousness as the felt determination of the nowness of experience.

Thought couples. Key points activate this coupling, a coupling which invariably opens thought to the unfathomable. 'Some couplings have the curious stubbornness of fact' (James, 1912: 21). Fact emerges out of relational couplings; it does not precede them. Facts entice a coupling that tranduces into remarkable points. Consciousness feeds on these remarkable points, itself a fielding of a given assemblage of thought-things that stubbornly resist dismissal. Stubborn facts turns what Whitehead calls 'potentiality for process' into 'actual occasions'. '"Actuality" is the decision amid "potentiality". It represents stubborn fact which cannot be evaded' (1938: 43). Stubborn facts limit and provoke. They limit the infinite potential of thought and provoke the creation of a new nexus of experience. They make felt the eventness of experience in the now. They are singular, but not individual.

Making consciousness a field shifts consciousness from human self-interest and situates it in the emergent network of relations out of which a singular worlding occurs. It cannot capture everything that is at stake – many of its tendencies remain unexpressed and unlived. Virtual events, they affect the tendingtoward which is *this* singular movement of thought. These feed the becoming-event with a collecting and collective tendency that makes felt the more-than of any given experience. Experience is first and foremost collective: an immanent coupling of thoughts-in-the-doing and things-in-the-making.

The taking-form of a field consciousness has the quality of a vertiginous oscillation of figure and ground.

4. Do not translate: transduce!

The network out of which an actual occasion individuates is transductive. It moves continuously across processes, while jumping registers. It proposes horizontalizing tendencies between modalities of thought-things which allow for metasable passage from one mode to another without first relying on already-constituted object relations.

Think of a conference. Nodes of encounter are pre-established: workshops, lunches, coffee breaks. Other nodes of encounter are more backgrounded: cigarette breaks, bathroom run-ins, conversations-on-the-side. No conference functions seamlessly. On one plane, it runs its course: plenary sessions are held, workshops are attended, lunches are eaten. On a transversal plane, however, subtle shifts occur: tiredness becomes contagious, a conversation persists even after it ends, laughter sparks a new insight. These horizontalizing tendencies do not directly undermine the plane of

organization, but they do affect it. What shifts is subtle but tangible: thresholds of perception are tweaked. What on the first day was a room of chairs facing a screen for a one-way conversation becomes the locus for new forms of relation.[4] The forms of relation in turn affect the group process, altering the conjunction between nodes and the conjunctive tissue of the network.

Object relations become field relations. The thought-thing nexus is infinitely constituting. No object is pre-constituted. Even something as seemingly stable as a chair becomes a modality for new processes of thought/intervention. Thoughtthings individuate co-constituting the event at hand. They transduce the singularity of their eventness by becoming intervals, activities for the making-actual of potential. 'The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are, but are known, which their 'conscious' quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations – these relations themselves being experiences – to one another' (James, 1912: 25).

The passage between knower and known is not linear, not transferable to a new series of conditions. How knower and known set themselves into relation has a lot to do with the terminus that propels the becoming-event. The terminus is the potential of thought-thing's eventness. Not the goal, but the impetus for the actualization of an event. The terminus activates the event's innate tendency to become. Transduction from the pull of potential eventness to the creation of a new and beckoning nexus, unpredictable, always, in its relation of knower/known. The event worlds me before I create it.

5. Make the network a pure experience!

There is a tendency to ask a given site to stand-in for the network. We think it's the landing onto Facebook that constitutes the networking. On the web, this is not surprising: the connective tissue that networks sites is experienced by most as little more than the frustration of waiting. No joy in the relation here. Empiricism flirts with teleology: let me just get there already! Why is the network so slow?! Forget the walledness of the garden – any site that takes time seems walled from experience.

But note that this waiting also *makes* time. It activates a new set of relations, sparking new modes of thought. This can only happen when the 'you' of the equation no longer sets up the experience at hand. Make the knower the relation itself. Radical empiricism means making way for the conjunctive and disjunctive sets of relations that activate a given event. 'The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system' (James, 1912: 42). The radical of radical empiricism does not deny the frustration of waiting – or of being blocked from a site. It makes this waiting the very stuff of experience.

The waiting – the making-time for experience – is where experimentation remains open. At the landing onto the site/ node, the experiment with making time has reached its zenith. It becomes its own actual occasion; it culminates. New events are infinitely possible from this sited node, but the potential of this singular event has come to a close.

There is no single time of waiting. The time of waiting is a time of emergent relations, relations, as James says, of different degrees of intimacy. In the online world, if we no longer posit a duality of subject (human) and object (computer/web) and work instead with the everchanging sets of knower-known relations, we find that

thought-things collide most forcefully in the not-yet of a node's actualization. The networking happens not in the actualization of the node, but in the connective tissue of its tending-toward.

How the potential for emergence is unleashed is what makes the difference. Key is realizing that knower and known are never guaranteed in advance. Radical empirical network thinking demands taking as *real* all of the virtual conjunctions around which knower/known constellations emerge. An empirically radical approach opens itself to the potential that knower and known exist not as distinct entities in a dichotomous system, but as continuous-discontinuous tendencies in the open interval out of which events emerge.

The interval that makes time for the event is not an empty locus for waiting, but a potential for a different kind of connectibility. Remember: we are still in the register of transduction. The impetus for a shift in register activated by the relational interval may lead toward the connective tissue of a different network: it may lead to the kitchen for a glass of juice which may lead to the cat which may lead to the couch which may lead to a nap. Or simply back to the computer to check the status of the latest tab.

6. The first experience knows the last one

You have ten tabs open. The movement between them moves you before you move it. As they slowly shift from loading to appearing, you find yourself distracted by the proliferation of in-betweens the waiting has prompted. Distraction, boredom, half-mindedness. These are the terms we give to the waiting, to the interval that we too often assume is passive. What we don't give credence to is the multiplication not only in degree (the many tabs open) but also in

kind (the different modes of activity the waiting solicits). Habit plays a role here – a habitual repetition already informs the waiting. There is a certain order that we maintain, especially when we want to believe we are in control.

When knower becomes the field of relations itself, it is no longer the human subject who makes all decisions. 'Knowledge of sensible realities [...] comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is *made;* and made by relations that unroll themselves in time' (James, 1912: 57). What happens happens in a field of felt transitions where 'the first experience knows the last one' (1912: 56). If the knower and known do not answer to each other, the experience has remained virtual. It affects the event at hand without doing so within the register of actual knowing.

The end of an experience is rarely the node-in-itself. The node is rather the initial concern – the terminus – for the becoming-event. The terminus is what prompts the event to take place. It makes way for the unfolding of an event within parameters that feed the singularity of that particular knower-known constellation. But this terminus rarely holds to initial conditions, open as it is to the new arraw of relations prompted by its emergence. This web of relations is embedded in an infinity of potential that far exceeds the actual configuration of a given node. Websites or network nodes are potential stopping points within a network that flows beyond the Internet, folding, always, through the thought-thing constellation.

James makes an important distinction between 'knowing as verified and completed' and 'knowing as in transit and on its way' (James, 1912: 67-8). It is only when the knowing terminates in an actual percept that we can know 'for certain that from the beginning it was truly cognitive of *that* ' (68). Until the end of this process, the knowing is immersed in a quality of openness and undecidability.

And yet, as James says, *the knowing was there*. Knowing is not an absolute concern for the end-point. It is a modality wherein the coincidence of thought and thing produces a feeling for immanent relational potential. Go back to the web example: 'surfing' can stand in for the undecidability of a knowing which is incipiently there even as it is 'not yet'. Virtual knowing makes felt the connective tissue of network experience: 'the immensely greater part of all our knowing never gets beyond this virtual stage' (68).

7. Relational intervals, or, how experience comes to us

'We live, as it were, upon the front edge of an advancing wave-crest, and our sense of a determinate direction in falling forward is all we cover of the future of our path. It is as if a differential quotient should be conscious and treat itself as an adequate substitute for a traced-out curve. Our experience, inter alia, is of variations of rate and of direction, and lives in these traditions more than in the journey's end' (James, 1912: 69).

We act on tendency as tendency acts on us. Is there agency? Of course. But not solely or even primarily in the human subject. Events are propelled by the knowing which is the thinking/thinging at work. In the relation. Will this lead to new ways of experimenting the network? Yes it will, as long as we don't give in to the idea that the network is an open field strictly delineated for our conscious experience. If we situate the network that way, we become the knowers of a system of possibility that remains limited by the breadth of choice that directs our conscious decisions. If instead our focus turns to the connective tissue of networking thought, a web of tendencies emerges that curve spacetime into unknowable configurations of knower/known. From limited possibility to infinite potential.

It is not about us as purveyors of the network. It is about the network's potential to gather tendencies in the making. It is about the network's radically empirical potential to make the interval felt. This interval is ontogenetically more-than – it will always exceed our limited expectations.

Experience grows by its edges. Tendential events breed tendential events, opening the way for continuities and disjunctions. Events are cognitive of each other in an open field of consciousness. The open field of consciousness is a nexus of experience that feeds actual occasions transductively. Every event is its own cause.

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[1] My translation from Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques,* (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1958) 'C'est la chose comme pouvoir et non comme structure que la technique recherche, la matière comme réservoir de tendances, de qualités, de vertus propres' (203).

[2] Etienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1943.

[3] My translation from Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1958) 'L'oeuvre, résultat de cette exigence de création, de cette sensibilité aux lieux et aux moments d'exception, ne copie pas le monde ou l'homme, mais les prolonge et s'insère en eux' (184).

[4] *Day 2 experiment: (during plenary session):*
1: Rearrange the chairs into constellations that make new kinds of relations possible. Create circles, turn chairs back to back, face chairs in different directions.
2: Bring mandarins and offer them to people by throwing them across the room. Create a network of desire around the mandarins? Speak up, altering the volume of the space.
3: Greet people warmly and offer them coffee.
4: Write messages and leave them on their chairs, asking them to continue the process by passing messages around.
5: Initiate relational processes (through conversation, touch etc).
6: Make sure no one registers that 'something' is taking place.
Group Observations:
- Afterwards – although we never mentioned that we had opted not to 'report' on our group process, no one opted to continue with their task of 'reporting'.
- Workshop groups rearranged themselves with people switching

workshops and becoming more interested in processes occurring outside their ‘home’ bases.