A thousand tiny interfac(ing)s: fertile acts of resistance.

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Abstract: This paper examines the process of interfacing between organic and technical objects and how this might be utilized as a tactic to promote invention within new media art events. Raphael Lozano-Hemmer's *Relational Architecture* is examined in relation to concepts of parasitic action and folding to show how the work develops a complex ecology of relation through interfacing.
 Keywords: Interface, parasite, folds, concretization, ecology, autopoiesis, relation.

1. Introduction

These spaces between are more complicated than one might think…less a juncture under control than an adventure to be had. Michel Serres [1]

Philosopher Brian Massumi has argued that the interface is an unsustainable concept within a process-centered world. As a 'privileged site of mediation' within a system, he argues, [2] the idea of the interface as a prime site of creativity and interaction denies what in process philosophy might be seen as the relational nature of all entities. Massumi's philosophical stance emphasizes the 'primacy of processes of becoming over the states of being through which they pass' [3], that is, the fact that any entities that are interfacing with each other are themselves composed of relations. As such, discrete interfaces are problematic in that they might be seen to imply a world inhabited by ideal, internally stable objects, between which interactions occur. The interface's role, in such modes of thinking, is to rejoin entities that are by implication discrete, and the complexity of continued unfolding and relation to the dynamic virtual or potential is then greatly diminished.

 There is indeed much to be critical of in the privileging of the interface. As Massumi notes, it can promote a naïve excitement in 'the joy of connection' and

undifferentiated flows of information, an unquestioning, utopian promotion of 'interface, for interfaces' sake' [4], that fits in perfectly with Capitalist models of circulation and surplus-value [5]. To this one might add the cybernetic conflation of biological and technical of which Simondon is so dismissive [6], which Massumi describes as the 'industry philosophy' [7]. This extension of the 'prosthetic function' of the interface, is utilized as a method of controlling, 'a relay point in the dissemination of human ordering activity into space…transform[ing it] into a realm of expansion onto which the human projects itself', with real difference erased as the body 'disappears behind a techno-logical shield' [8]. This subjectification of the technical object, Munster has pointedly termed 'interfaciality', a codification as face to face, rather than body to machine relation [9].

Nevertheless, the primary sticking point for any level of discussion of the interface within process philosophy remains that its distinctive identity relies on it being a privileged site of interaction within an otherwise inert representational system. In this paper I want to attempt to show some ways in which one might think through the process of interfacing as a creative force within an art event without succumbing to the type of static, representational models of which Massumi is justifiably critical.

To do this I am going to examine a particular incidence of interfacing that occurred in Raphael Lozano-Hemmer's work *Re:Positioning Fear: Relational Architecture 3*, (1997), in order to consider ways in which some unplanned interfacings between a public and the technical assemblages of the work helped to develop a greater level of both self organization and openness in the event. But, while I am certainly going to suggest in this paper that an interesting shift in agency in the work occurred, moving from those preconceived by the artist to a new shared and emergent agency developed through an interfacing of a public bringing their own intentions and tonalities to the event, I do not wish to overstate the uniqueness of the case. Certainly, as Lozano-Hemmer has said, the events were significant in his rethinking of the ways in which he staged further *Relational architecture*

iterations [10], however this does not necessarily imply that the occurrences were particularly out of the ordinary for such large-scale interventions, which are necessarily always composed of multiple and often contradictory intentions and forces, and can potentially head in numerous directions, both predictable and surprising. Rather, the example provides an opportunity to consider some of the creative potential of interfacing and its ability to complicate the event. I want to use this work to rethink the place of the interface within the paradigm of process philosophy, and to put it to productive use as a differential tactic within an art process. Here I will propose that the interface might provide a logic of self-regulation capable of internally driving the creation of intensities of resonance or disturbance through connection.

2. Interfacing

 I propose to begin by thinking temporally rather than spatially, by thinking of these interfaces as moments rather than points of action or relation. This suggests that the interface might now be thought of more as a process of interfac*ing*, as an unfolding or contingent process within a larger nexus of relation, asn in-action moment of intensity of disruption, contrast and invention rather than a privileged or static position within an art event.

 Here I will briefly consider the idea of an art event as a machine producing transductions of forces, before attempting to unpack the creative role of interfacings in *Re:Positioning Fear* by suggesting that interfacing might productively parasite, fold or concretize; three different, though sympathetic, concepts concerned with intensive organization and creativity.

2.1 Differential machines
In this paper, I am going to use the terms 'body' and technical object' in specific ways. Following Katherine Hayle, the 'body' referred to here is in no way limited to the subject or to a fixed or post-individuated stable entity, but can be taken to be always in-process, corporeal and enactive rather than 'the body' in any coded sense [11]. This is in sympathy with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a body as 'a discontinuous, non-totalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances

and incorporeal events, intensities and durations' [12]. Similarly the term 'technical object' as used here implies not a fixed object in the material sense, but is used to address a technical or non-biological entity that is itself capable of becoming, leaving the term 'machine' open for another use.

Machines, as Guattari tells us, are any system that produces an effect; they function immanently and pragmatically [13]. Massumi, in expanding on this notion, explains that they are 'not subordinate to utility or laws of resemblance' [14]. Guattari's concept gives us three potentially useful ideas that help to expand the concept of the machine, in a decidedly non-humanist direction. Firstly, the need for an understanding of the role that the wider ecology in which technical objects are embedded (or with which they unfold) has in determining what potential is actualized. Machines here are 'proximity grouping[s]… [of] man-tool-animal' [15]. Secondly, an understanding Guattari perhaps shares with Simondon that machines inherently contain potential beyond their immediate actualization, 'ontogenetic elements' [16]. That is, they are held together not so much by any physical bond, but by a shared virtual milieu, as an 'assemblage of possible fields' [17] that develops through the process of concretization. Thirdly, that we must consider machines not through utility or representation, that is, as not being 'limited to [their] materiality or functionality' [18], but in terms of their productive capabilities. Guattari's conception of the machinic here shifts the assemblage from 'what is it composed from/what is it an aggregate of?' to 'what does it produce?'

Such machines, as Munster states, operate to produce and regulate flows between the poles of movement and organization, between the qualitative or diagrammatic and concretization [19]. Thus perhaps one might propose that they are producers of the transduction of force: of a process by which such 'an activity sets itself in motion' at the same time as it generates 'processes of modification' [20].

2.2 Transduction
It is perhaps common to think of interfaces as translators of code, points of information exchange, from digital to analogue or visa versa, or as a 'point of contact where humans and machines meet in order for exchange to take place' [21]. However to assert the primacy of the flow of forces rather than the secondary exchanges of text, transduction, I would argue, is a better way to fully think the event of interfacing. That is, as this paper will discuss below, transduction positions interfacing as the integration, through the flow of forces of differing viscosities, of formerly disparate things within a becoming-concrete system [22].

An art-event might be such a machine: regulating and producing affectual flows, a 'machinic of expression rather than a signifying apparatus' [23], a producer of movement or difference [24]. This, I want to demonstrate, positions interfacing as a prime creative force-form, for, as Deleuze states, 'difference, potential difference and difference in intensity [is] the reason behind qualitative diversity' [25]. Seeing interfacing as a machinic action implies a shift in designing art events to emphasis their machinic potential: their productive capacity or capability to produce difference, rather than for their aesthetic qualities. It is this operation of the interface as a *differential machine* that the rest of this paper addresses through an unpacking of *Re:Positioning Fear: Relational Architecture 3*.

3. *Re:Positioning Fear*
Re:Positioning Fear consisted of an orchestrated shadow dance composed of a projected conversation thrown onto the architecture of the city that was made visible within participants' shadows that were also cast on the surface, creating silhouettes of differing sizes depending on their distance from the light sources.

As Andreas Brockman writes [26], the work initiated a dynamic 'social inter-facing', constructing a 'fragmented and heterogeneous system of engaging different publics in a variety of specific ways' [27]. Here Lozano-Hemmer, as he often has, employed the bodies of the participants as disruptive 'performed' interfacings [28] within a machine composed otherwise of technical objects. This melding of technical objects with the unpredictable input of a public presents one possibility of providing the technical elements with an expanded potentiality, with the interfacing body play the role of 'transducer between machines' [29]. Here the connection between biological and technical objects was a tactic to *generate* difference, not collapse it, to produce ruptures or gaps in the process of 'dephasing', (in which a stable identity is delineated from ongoing processes of becoming).

3.1 Parasitic noise
But in the case of *Re:Positioning Fear*, a more interesting and radical disruption occurred in the unfolding of this work (which was already primed for playful intervention and evolution). It was in this catalyzing moment when, through parasitic action, a new and more complex machine was produced. Alongside the positioning of their shadows on the façade to activate the hidden text, participants began to synthesize a different work out of the components by engaging specifically in play between their projected silhouettes. Here they utilized the potential to radically alter the size of their shadows to engage creatively with one another. For example, a wheelchair bound participant created a giant image of himself and ran down everyone else [30], while other participants played with puppet mastering smaller shadow bodies and with the making of multi-limbed combinatory beings [31].

The 'parasite' as described by Michel Serres, is an inherent noise in a system of relations that forces into existence new logic, new combinations, and new orders of exchange [32]. It disrupts as it produces something else (excessive) through its (mis)translation of relations, composing an indeterminacy within any event of relation.

This free shadow play was, I would suggest, a kind of parasitic noise feeding off the energy already flowing through the work to create new paths, expressively [33], and to creatively bifurcate relations. That is, it was an action that both continued to qualitatively express something of the original relation (moving shadows revealing text on the building's surface), while at the same time producing a new relation through the same initial forms. The contemplative and reflective rhythm of movement in the large-scale text was overlaid with the noise of a quick and teasing play of shadows, creating a tension, a clash of intentions and tonalities: gaps and miscommunications.

These parasitic actions existed on multiple levels, at different scales; they

operated throughout all the transductions of form-force taking place, wherever interfacing occurred, producing excess. For example, as bodies overtly disrupted light to create new imagery, there was also a more subtle disruption of intention, with the artist's intentions (or perceived potential of the work) interfacing with the participants' disparate motivations to create a third, more mobile position, composing an indeterminacy within prescribed events of relation.

Parasitic machinics produced not a linear evolution of the work, but rather enabled 'processes of connectivity and interpenetration...[and] the fostering of specifically transversal connections' [34]. This parasitic action of interfacing was an agent of difference in that it continued to re-express (transduce) relation. It kept the event always on the point of splitting and moving into multiple new forms, suspending it in unfolding differentiation. Again, this is not unusual within works such as this designed to accommodate interference. Perhaps what is notable here is the degree to which such disruptions overtook the original structures.

3.2 Folds - the vibration of the incompossible

If parasitic action was in a sense a continual performed splitting of relation, the interfacing that occurred in *Re:Positioning Fear* might also perhaps be thought as producing difference through connecting, through incitation or a 'dynamics of infection' [35] that worked to prolong and complexify. That is, through a folding of technological objects and bodies in interfacing something new was produced (art). As Murphie writes, this is a doubling that technologies can perform [36], in this case the body becoming-with the lights, the façade becoming-with shadows, portraits becoming-with movement and so on. This folding, rather than collapsing difference to produce a new homogenous history or façade, produced through multiplication new singularities that were performed alongside, throughout and in the gaps of the previously existing iterations. Folding could be seen here to be powerful in both the creation of actualized and *potential* foldings that the interfacing opened up; a bifurcating of future

unfoldings that resonated within the event.

Interfacing here was a performative act by which the machine continued to re-fold its internal systems. It was also a machinic action folding elements outside itself into its workings, and these actions created, as Deleuze says, a 'forced movement' or 'internal resonance' within the system [37]. Thus it was a tactic that re-immersed or re-saturated the event with the virtual as it implicated machinic components in each other's becoming through an ongoing process of variation and re-articulation.

But I want to suggest that the more radical folding occurring in the interruption of *Re:Positioning Fear* through the re-commissioning of the shadow making machine might be seen as a fold of the outside. The 'outside' here is force in non-relation [38] (itself a disruptive gap in the relational field), that 'eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal' [39]. This can produce 'trans-formation…to the composing forces, [which] enter in to a relation with the other forces which have come from the outside' [40]. The participants' shadow-body play was an outside of the event (not a potential), which was folded into emergent relation, at the level of force as well as form. By trans-forming forces shaping the event this folding transformed the affects of the event, since affect is what is experienced in the transduction of force [41]. The new affective tonality that was folded into the event coursed through, transducing, infecting all the systems constructing the event.

This outside, seen as the 'incompossible' (that which was excluded or divergent from the event [42]), defined the limit of the event [43]. *Re:Positioning Fear* had limits defining its concrescence both in the types of performances it produced and the potential from which it was drawn (various potential mutations of shadow playing with text, for example). The introduction of a whole new outside tactic of production through connections between participants co-composing relations together via the interfacing of their shadows then delimited the *Re:Positioning Fear* event. The tactic initiated new performances and fields of potential to compose with, even as it continued to drive towards its previously instigated concrescence. In redefining

the limits and potential of the event, this folding of the incompossible was a more radically differential act. Such folding was, again, a positive generator of multiplicities of difference [44]. This difference was evident not particularly in a shift in the utility or materiality of the technical objects and other components of the assemblage, but as a force of qualitative change, of affective tonality. Interfacing here might be viewed as a vitality affect on a force, producing a felt moment of creative differing.

3.3 Concretization and the virtual

I want to suggest that it was through these particular interfacings that the machine of *Re:Positioning Fear* underwent a process of concretization. Processes of concretization shift systems from a limited, linear or closed functioning towards self-regulation and sustenance, and, consequently, towards a 'solidarity of openness' (that is, an increase in self-generative capacities) [45]. *Re:Positioning Fear* shifted from a fairly linear production that was to a certain extent its externally instigated functioning, towards the self organization of a new event that was less reliant on the artist's conception of the event or on the original conceived utility of the technical objects. That is, the system moved from a more 'abstract' configuration, to a self-modulating model. The work's differential tension became an intrinsic component in its production and consequently its processes became more circular. That is, the machinic components invented more co-dependant ways of interacting, and a 'recurrent causality' evolved that is characteristic of concretization [46]. This individuation was shared between components, drawing them into concrete machinic process through the evolution of a shared associated milieu.

Interfacing here might be seen to have incited a phase or register-shift through transduction [47], implicating the external. That is, a complexity beyond simple intensive disruption occurred. While the machine's modulations were driven by the compossible actions of the bio-technical interfacing, these radical interfacings acted more significantly on the system. They were capable of rearranging both how the potential combinations actualized *and* of creating completely new milieus. More than

modulating transduction, a new machine was produced from the field when the system passed a 'threshold of [qualitative] intensity' [48], forcing new flows, with their attendant individuations, to begin.

With such a shift the machine developed new transductive potentials between the internal and external (the field), a 'charged grounding' [49] of the two. That is, the connection of internal spacing and external contrast in dynamic virtual relation created a larger machine ecology [50], a 'conversation' between them that gave new dynamism to the event, another scale on which it was self-modulating. Not only the event, but also the *field itself* had changed. *Re:Positioning Fear* had changed its nature, not just by actualizing a previously un-actualized potential, but by rewriting the very field of potential available to it, generating emergent difference.

4. Conclusion

The shifts that occur in *Re:Positioning Fear* as a result of interfacing were both materially (ontologically) slight and processually (ontogenetically) significant. What the participants brought to the event that instigated such a shift was in a sense no more than a new intention, or perhaps even less distinctively, a new tonality that infected the work to produce something new. This is not to suggest necessarily that what it shifted *to* was in itself significant, but that the way that interfacings performed such a shift was of philosophical and artistic interest, in that it provides a potential tactic towards the thinking of more autopoietic, and therefore open-ended systems of interactivity, suggesting a potential machinic, 'minor' art event, concerned less with signification than a collective becoming [51].

This interfac(ing) was performed, not, one can say, ever entirely by either the biological nor the technical systems making up the machine, but by the machinic action producing also the potential ruptures and the uncertainty of an evolving dynamic virtual that was its fertility. Here the further potential of interfacing remained present even as it was enacted. It perhaps remained as a 'lure' towards feeling, as a pull towards the future [52], a pre-relational tendency towards affectual relation.

Interfacing here was propositional of differentiation, attuning the conditions for potential trans-force-form events; luring multiple transductive events into being. The event, one might say, answered Stern's call for interactive art to move away from privileging signs and images at the interface and the demonstration or fetishization of the technology in the work. Instead it engaged, as Stern proposes, 'with the quality and styles of movement' that were performed [53], with the invention of (new) styles, with the implicit, the potential, to construct new ways of relating through interfacing.

Notes

1. Michel Serres & Bruno Latour, *Conversations on science, culture and time*. (Ann Abor: University of Michigan Press, 2011) p.70.

2. Brian Massumi, "Interface and active space: human machine design", *6th international symposium on electronic art*, Montreal, 1995 p.7. <http://www.brianmassumi.com/essays>

3. Brian Massumi, Arne De Boever, Alex Murray & Jon Rolfe, "Technical mentality revisited: Brian Massumi", *Parrhesia*, 7 (2009) p.38.

4. Massumi [2] p.1.

5. Massumi [2] p.9.

6. See Thomas LaMarre, in Muriel Combes. *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Trans-individual*. Thomas LaMarre Trans. (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 79-83, for a succinct discussion of Simondon's critique of cybernetics.

7. Brian Massumi, "The Interface and I", *Artbyte: The Magazine of Digital Arts*, 1, 6 (1999) p. 33.

8. Massumi [2] p. 3.

9. Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (Hanover & London: University of New England Press, 2006) pp.122-124.

10. Lozano-Hemmer, Rafael 'Interview by Jos. Luis Barrios', Trans. Rebecca MacSween, 2005 pp. 5-6. <http://www.lozanohemmer.com/publications.php?subtype=Interviews>

11. Katherine Hayle, cited Munster [9] pp. 62-3.

12. Elizabeth Grosz, "A thousand tiny sexes; feminism and rhizomatics", in *Giles Deleuze and the theatre of philosophy*, Eds. Constantin V.Boundas & Dorothea Olkowski, 1994 pp.193-4.

13. Félix Guattari, "On Machines." *Complexity* 6 (1995) p.12.

14. Brian Massumi, *A user's guide to capitalism and schizophrenia: deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) p.192.

15. Andrew Murphie, "Computers are not theatre: the machine in the ghost in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's thought", *Convergence* 2 (1996) p.80 <http://con.sagepub.com/content/2/2/80>

16. Guattari. [13] p.8.

17. Félix Guattari, "Machinic heterogenesis", in Verena Conley, Ed. *Rethinking technologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p.35. Such machines are 'about symbolic alliances and fusion…about viral or parasitic interdependence'. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: towards a materialist theory of becoming*. (Cornwall: MPG Books, 2002) p.254.

18. Guattari [13] p.8.

19. Munster [9] pp.13-14.

20. Gilbert Simondon, 'The genesis of the individual', in Jonathan Crary & Sanford Kwinter, Eds., *Incorporations* (New York: Zone books, 1992) p.313.

21. Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003) p.198.

22. That is, it has shifted *towards* the pole of concretization (becoming-concrete), rather than seeing the terms as absolute and exclusive.

23. Andrew Murphie. [15] p.104.

24. Munster. [9] p.15.

25. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Paul Patton, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p.57.

26. Andreas Brockman, In Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Ed. *Vectorial elevation: relational architecture no. 4* (Son Torge: Mexico National council for culture and the arts, 2000) p.172.

27. Andreas Brockman, In Lozano-Hemmer [26] p.172.

28. Brian Massumi. In Lozano-Hemmer [26] p.200.

29. Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the philosophy of the transindividual*, Trans. Thomas LaMarre, (Cambridge & London: MIT Press), 2013 p.60.

30. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 'Interview by Jos. Luis Barrios', trans. Rebecca MacSween, 2005 p.6. <http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/publications.php?subtype=interviews>

31. See <http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/repositioning_fear.php> for short video sequences of various installations of the work.

32. Michel Serres, *The parasite* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) p.35.

33. 'Signaletic material', as Deleuze discusses it. Giles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, 3rd ed. (Chippenham, Wiltshire: Continuum, 2005) p.28.

34. Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters with Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006) p.17.

35. Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: a free and wild creation of concepts* (Cambridge, Massachucetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2011) p.160.

36. Murphie [15] p.89.

37. Deleuze [25] p.118.

38. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) p.72.

39. Deleuze [38] p.72.

40. Deleuze [38] p.73.

41. Deleuze [38] p.60.

42. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Trans. by Tom Conley, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p.60.

43. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, (New York: The free press, 1978) p.45.

44. Deleuze [25] p.267.

45. LaMarre, In Combes, [29] pp.92-3.

46. LaMarre, In Combes, [29] p.93.

47. Manning, Erin. *Always More Than One: Individuation's dance*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013) p.133.

48. Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive science and virtual philosophy,* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005) pp.18-19. This is a point of absolute origin of a new machine from the field producing new modes of transduction

49. LaMarre, In Combes, [29] p.93. As LaMarre says the internal and external grounds communicate 'actively across their asymmetry, and have to stabilize that communication. The result is a self-regulating individual'. P.97.

50. See LaMarre for a discussion of the relation between the internal and external, in Combes [29].

51. Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters with Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006) pp.69-71.

52. Manning, [47] p.57.

53. Nathaniel Stern, *Interactive Art and Embodiment: The Implicit Body as Performance*, Canterbury: Gylphi limited, 2013) p.10.