

# RELATIONSCAPES

**Movement, Art, Philosophy**

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The MIT Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
London, England

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This book was set in Syntax and Minion by Graphic Composition, Inc.  
Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Manning, Erin.

Relationscapes : movement, art, philosophy / Erin Manning.

p. cm. — (Technologies of lived abstraction)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-13490-3 (hard cover : alk. paper) 1. Movement (Philosophy)

2. Technology I. Title.

B105.M65M36 2009

128'.6—dc22

2008031040

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## Prelude: What Moves as a Body Returns as a Movement of Thought

Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to rise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is not an object of recognition, but a fundamental *encounter*.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, with members of the Sense Lab<sup>2</sup> and the Workshop in Radical Empiricism,<sup>3</sup> Brian Massumi and I started thinking about how we might envision a collaborative event that would create a movement of thought. For over a year, we considered what constitutes an event and how techniques of creation create concepts-in-the-making. In May 2006, the Sense Lab hosted “Dancing the Virtual,” the first of four events scheduled to take place over a four-year period under the larger rubric of Technologies of Lived Abstraction.<sup>4</sup>

“Dancing the Virtual” was conceived as a challenge to the often upheld dichotomy between creation and thought/research. The specific aim of “Dancing the Virtual” was to produce a platform for speculative pragmatism where what begins technically as a movement is *immediately* a movement of thought. In the active passage between movement and movements of thought, the participants of “Dancing the Virtual” collaboratively began to build a repertoire of new techniques for experimentation that performatively bridge the gap

between thinking/speaking and doing/creating. Not only did this facilitate creation and communication across fields of inquiry during the event itself, it also provoked a continued exploration among many participants of ways to orchestrate future participatory events that challenge the active/passive model of speaker/listener or artist/spectator. For the events in the Technologies of Lived Abstraction series, new forms of collaboration are conceived not simply as locales for experimentation but as matrices of cultural becoming. We want experimentation to function as much at the collective level as at the conceptual level.

In August 2007, we hosted our second event, “Housing the Body—Dressing the Environment.” The force of thinking still emanating from “Dancing the Virtual” had by then created its own momentum: the participants from “Dancing the Virtual” were active collaborators in the fashioning of this second event.

For “Housing the Body—Dressing the Environment,” we attempted to shape the intensity of our collaboration by sending an open call for “platforms for relation,” relational techniques proposed and carried out by teams of participants who had either already participated in “Dancing the Virtual” or who would become new members of the series of events. “Housing the Body—Dressing the Environment” built on the concerns outlined for “Dancing the Virtual.” It was dedicated specifically to a collective exploration of the dynamic cross-genesis of the body and its constructed environment, where the environment is taken to include not only the architectural surround but also technological and cultural extensions of it. From selected platforms, we developed skeletal structures for relational improvisation through sound, skin, textiles, movement, architecture, and new media. These platforms were conceived as pragmatic points of departure for thinking/doing throughout the event. The way they took form throughout “Housing the Body—Dressing the Environment” made apparent the force of well-designed creative techniques to further the thinking of doing and the doing of thought.

For Henri Bergson, as for theorists of “embodied cognition,” the relation between perception in all its modes is one of reciprocal reach-and-return. This cross-genesis of action and perception opens onto thought. Every perception is already a thinking in action. Every act is a thought in germ. The premise of all Sense Lab events in the Technologies of Lived Abstraction series is that there is a generative nexus between action, perception, and conception that can be modulated from the environmental side. In constructing our environment we not only house the body, we build modes of embodied experience and thought.

This is a micropolitics in the making that in turn fashions us: we refit the body for new forms of life, cross-dressing its self-expressive potentials.

*Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* was conceived amid the movements of thought generated by the Technologies of Lived Abstraction series. Like the events, it is a book that is immediately collaborative.<sup>5</sup> I wrote it with the force of movement moving. Every aspect of the Sense Lab's events-in-the-making folded into the writing, provoking exploration into how thought works, where creation begins, what constitutes novelty, what a politics of movement might do, and how thinking through movement can alter the force of thought.

Sincere thanks are due to all those who have fueled our initiative to create movements of thought. Here in Montreal, I am indebted to those who make the Sense Lab the singular node it is. For your generosity, humor, and brilliance, thank you Brian. For your passionate dedication to thought-in-the-making, Nadine Asswad, Antoine Blanchet, Tagny Duff, Nasrin Himada, Valérie Lefebvre, Paul Mélançon, Céline Pereira, Chiara Paganini, Stamatia Portanova, Felix Rebolledo, Troy Rhoades, Bianca Scliar-Mancini, Alanna Thain, and Jon Yu deserve a special mention. Thanks also to all who participated in the first two events of the Technologies of Lived Abstraction event series and to those who are involved in designing the two final events, "The Society of Molecules" and "Generating the Impossible." We couldn't experiment without you!

Much of our thinking happens across various kinds of divides. I want to thank those who make these divides fluid, fielding difference with curiosity.

For your close reading of the manuscript in various stages, and your regenerating enthusiasm about all things processual, thank you Ken Dean, Sher Doruff, Brian Massumi, Steven Muecke, Andrew Murphie, Luciana Parisi, Philipa Rothfield, Steven Shaviro, Philip Thurtle.

For making thinking and doing coincide politically, artistically, and philosophically, a warm thanks also to Michelle Barker, Lone Bertelson, Jean-Claude Bustros, William Connolly, Luc Courchesne, Joao Da Silva, Scott de la Hunta, Toni Dove, Pia Ednie-Brown, Nora Heilmann, José Gil, Heidi Gilpin, Michael Goddard, Steve Goodman, Catherine Herrmann, Yvan Joly, Thomas Lamarre, Bruno Latour, Andre Lepecki, Derek McCormack, Anna Munster, Sally-Jane Norman, Christopher Salter, Monique Savoie, Michael Shapiro, Christine Shaw, Isabelle Stengers, Sha Xin Wei.

For your generous openness toward improvisation and relation in dance, thank you Mireille Painchaud.

For believing in the Technologies of Lived Abstraction book series and for your ongoing encouragement, thank you Doug Sery.

For inviting thought, thank you to my family: Ben Jones, Margaret McCullough, Eric Manning, Pascale Manning, Yves Manning, and Jesse Massumi.

Thank you also to all the students in my classes who allow me to experiment with ideas in the making, and who take the risk of learning collaboratively. Relationscapes often start in the classroom.

*Relationscapes* was written with the generous assistance of a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Grant.