# Fielding Misunderstanding

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**In these texts art theoreticians Sher Doruff and Jeroen Boomgaard *[www.onlineopen.org/the-art-of-publics]* take a bifurcating approach to art praxis in public space from a Dingpolitik point of view. Two distinct vectors, one speculative and the other practical, explore and 'transduce' the current exigencies of artmaking in the public sphere and the relevance of the thing as it is made and as it continues to make. What's happening now to the affective before and after of the work of art and the practices that inform it? Referencing key concepts from Bruno Latour (instauration matters of concern, making things public), Isabelle Stengers (ecology of practices) and Gilbert Simondon (transduction), issues concerning the current state of affairs of public space art praxis are fielded, considered and argued, marking a dynamic oscillation between making things public and things making publics.**

There's a certain familiarity to the litanies of Latourian networks (such as tyres, camouflage, rubber, poetry, China, Damien Hirst, diamonds, whales, Pinocchio, wisteria, parliaments, derivatives) in which a gathering of things engage in the making of indeterminate relational events. *Making* is the pivotal term. It's indicative of several variations of transformative agency: 1) between actants and milieu, 2) between actant and actant, 3) between thing-maker and thing-made.

We could consider an additional variant that distinguishes the interplay between two distinct modes of making, or what might be deemed 'modes of existence': *making things public,* as coined by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, and *things making publics*, a simple inversion of the phrase that invites an ontological shift in perspective regarding the genesis, function and situated engagement of the object/thing in the public sphere. As differentiated operative modes they potentially allow for a productive phase-shifting between *making things* and *things making* that affectively speaks to contemporary art-making praxis. It's an oscillating dynamic with roots in pragmatism and radical empiricism. It suggests a provocative ethical-political entanglement with things that is both ontogenetic (the becoming and development of beings) and autopoietic, in the sense that it operatively engenders a relational field of autonomous practices. Negotiation between these modalities conflates the three 'making' variants suggested above.

## On Making Things

Around the time of Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel's 'Making Things Public' exhibition (2005), Isabelle Stengers introduced the concept of (plea for) an ecology of practices.[1] These contiguous events are resonant with Dingpolitik affinities in which autonomous things, animate and inanimate, [2] come to matter as heterogeneous hybrids. Stengers envisioned ecological praxis as a 'tool for thinking what's happening' in which ordinary tools of practice surpass their patterns of habitual use and neutrality to catalyse the power of a specific situation as a matter of concern. In an actively lived engagement with what' s happening now we meet how Stengers' philosophy of science and her frequent reference to the Leibnitz axiom 'dic cur hic' (say why you are here) intersects with the wellknown configuration of Latour's democratic networks of human and nonhuman activity – material gatherings in a plasmic Umwelt. It's within the shifting relations of this 'fielding' activity, the concrete making of relations and their agonistic belonging together, that a Dingpolitik unfolds as an energetic assemblage of facts and fictions; an ecology of practices of measurable mass and immeasurable event, of quantitative data and qualitative affect, of agreement and misunderstanding. It's how what's happening now actualizes. At play are the affective dynamics of quarks and cosmos, Asterix and asterisks, riverbank and Rabobank, stone and script, fork, fig and finger experienced as unique events within an evolving topology.

What's been happening since Latour and Weibel went public with their exhibition and catalogue? Has there been a perceptible tendency towards an ecology of practices that precipitates sustainable difference in the sciences and arts when publics matter? Has there been a perceptible turn in our negotiations of subject/object, knower/known dualisms towards an experience of subject and object as interacting operative modalities? What' s happening to art in a Dingpolitik network? What's happening between the work of art and its public encounter, between making and milieu?

Let's return to the original proposition of alternating *modes of making publics.* These modes could be considered discrete and opposite. Alternatively they could be experienced as a modulating transduction [3] inducing differential change in a domain of activity in which all differentiated agencies are both conserved and integrated; an ecology of practices. How might this work?

'For the process of transduction to occur, there must by some disparity, discontinuity or mismatch within a domain; two different forms or potentials whose disparity can be modulated. Transduction is a process whereby a disparity or a difference is topologically and temporally restructured across some interface. It mediates different organizations of energy. ' [4]

The interface in our scenario is the situated doing of making, the 'how' of making, the 'fielding' of public-making, that is itself an emerging relation between the maker and the made. It's the temporal force that's crucial to any experience of a spatial domain just as it is crucial to the experience of art in the public sphere. In the *making things public* mode, a teleological, wizard-behind the-curtain, a decisive-artist, is still imagined as the a priori force behind the event. It grammatically implies the output of a knowing subject that brings something forth, enables some thing's accessibility to its world.[5] In the inverted mode – *things making publics* – an implied subject (things) remains viable but its logic is skewed. Its temporal configuration allows events to emerge that are immanent to conditional heterogeneous activity. As a modality it tends towards a rhizomatic ontogenesis. When the vectors of these two modes are considered as coexistent and transductive they articulate the basis of a vibrantly discordant, modulatory field of pluri-practices.

So a transductive process can be said to be a modulating operation between these making modes of existence, affording each a concrete presence in the ecology at stake.[6] What is transductively happening within colliding and collaborative praxis in the arts, sciences, cultural theory and contemporary philosophy, topologically tuned and turned, has taken on a kind of *zeitgeist* resonance. We can look to recent terminologies used by Latour himself to understand this transductive movement. He has embraced philosopher/aesthetician Etienne Souriau's notion of *instauration*, an alternated modality between thing-making and thing-made. For Souriau and Latour, instauration, restoration and construction are nearly synonymous although the originating force of the doing of making is stealthily inverted from its creative impetus in a knowing subject (artist) to an inventive fielding of conditions and variables: 'But . . . saying of a work of art that it results from an instauration, is to get oneself ready to see the potter as the one who welcomes, gathers, prepares, explores, and invents the form of the work, just as one discovers or 'invents' a treasure . . . the artwork as well as the physical thing . . . But if there is an *instauration* by the scholar or artist, then facts as much as works come together, resist, oblige – and their authors, the humans, have to be devoted to them, which of course doesn't mean they act as simple catalysts for them.'[7]

Souriau's instauration is similar to Simondon's transduction in that they both generate the agency of exchange. The imbrication of an active subject in the object's doing of the making (grammatically and ontologically) establishes the conditions for a modulation between *making arty things* and *things making art* – things performing the conditions of their situatedness. Things, ontogenetic and autopoietic – everyday objects, natural objects, crafted objects, ready-mades, monuments, laws, dinner parties, manifestations, workshops, opinions, concepts, beliefs, hallucinations – all more or less pulsing attractors in the materialization of publics. Within such a speculative ecology/economy, things participate in themselves as modes of existence; intersecting practices of objection, resistance, reciprocity, compliance, generosity. Becoming instaurated as a work of art: sometimes. Belonging seamlessly together: rarely if ever. Becoming intractably: more often than not.

What's happening now with the transactional interplay between making and milieu is an expanded fieldwork*ing* with all the processual, compositional liveness that the gerund suggests.

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## Footnotes

1. Isabelle Stengers, 'Introductory notes on an ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 11 (2005) no. 1, 183196.
2. Latour is adamant that inanimate things have agency because while soulless, they nonetheless speak. Anselm Franke (ed.), 'Angels Without Wings: A Conversation Between Bruno Latour and Anselm Franke', in: *Animism Volume 1* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), 88.
3. '. .. transduction is characterized by the fact that the result of this process is a concrete network including all the original terms. The resulting system is made up of the concrete, and it comprehends all of the concrete. The transductive order retains all the concrete and is characterized by the conservation of information, whereas induction requires a loss of information. Following the same path as the dialectic, transduction conserves and integrates the opposed aspects. Unlike the dialectic, transduction does not presuppose the existence of a previous time period to act as a framework in which the genesis unfolds, time itself being the solution and dimension of the discovered systematic . .. ' Gilbert Simondon, ' The Genesis of the Individual', in: Jonathon Crary (ed.), *Incorporations* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 315.
4. Adrian Mackenzie, *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 25.
5. Latour and Weibel may or may not have intended this reading.
6. Latour quotes Simondon: '. .. objectivity and subjectivity appear between the living thing and its milieu, between man and the world, at a moment where the world does not yet have a full status as object, and man a complete status as subject. ' Bruno Latour, ' Reflections on Etienne Souriau' s Les different modes d' existence', in: Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re. press, 2011), 307.
7. Ibid., 311.

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