



# The Being of Relation

Erin Manning

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# Errant Lines

Practices make worlds. The worlds they grow are tangled with pedagogies. When we follow those tendrils of worlds in the making, we are always learning. Sometimes we have a guide. Other times we guide. It's a dance, this guiding-being guided.

The guided-guiding path takes the shape of the errant line, a concept that grows out of Fernand Deligny's long co-navigation with autistics in the Monoblet area of France. In deference to other ways of languaging, Deligny attunes to autistic movement, drawing the shape of its expression. These errant lines become tracings, which, in palimpsest, index tendencies. Zones of intensity emerge, which he calls *chevêtres*.

*Chevêtres*, as Deligny defines them, are less the trusses of existence than the reminder that the shape things take matters. This is not about form per se, it is about the trace the shape of experience leaves behind. How it worlds.

Another way of saying this is that errant lines are not without direction. They have momentum, and

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they are made of constraints. They emerge in the decisiveness of a context, in a situation. In this way, they are both absolutely singular *and* they carry the inheritances of worlds already in the making.

A poetics of relation, to write with Edouard Glissant, is a commitment to the erring that guides – and detours – existence. Errant lines cannot be thought without it: relation is what errs, not *me*, or *you*.

*The Being of Relation* is guided by a poetics of relation. It is punctuated, twice, by *chevêtres* of Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* – two short interludes, “Black Beach” and “When You Fall.” These *chevêtres* might be said to carry the approximation of proximity of black life and neurodiversity that never stops resurfacing.

A poetics of relation is a practice. It draws errant lines. Parastrata emerges, thicknesses, overlaps, sidlings. These can't properly be excavated, as though there were a beginning and an end. Relation, the radical empirical middle from which experience unfolds, refuses to segregate objects from activity. Objects, subjects, are the activity of their worlding. Subjectivity is *produced*.

The logic of the para – parainstitutional, paraontological, parapedagogical – is a logic of what Brian Massumi would call “mutual inclusion.”<sup>1</sup> In its difference without separability, the para takes us beyond binary structures of cause and effect into fields of resonance, of alongsideness. Para is not

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against. It is in the witness of what is differentially singular.

The differentially singular, in a poetics of relation, upsets mutually exclusive logics that justify dominant systems. It troubles whiteness, and neurotypicality. It does so not through a frontal attack, but by moving sideways. This is not to suggest that lives aren't at stake. It is to remind us that any inclination to do it alone, to say I (and mean we), is embedded in a logic, in a systemic operation, that can only retain the status quo. A poetics of relation moves otherwise. And in the aesthetics of the earth it calls forth, to speak with Glissant again, other worlds become possible.

Other worlds never means worlds "over there." Other worlds are here, in the middling, always. Relation is not between two, and never at a distance. It is not what is stuck between two terms, the in-between of what we already (think we) know. Relation *is* world. Being of relation is the paraontological register of a becoming-world.

Paraontology recognizes that the ontological could only ever speak the I, and that the I could only ever take the shape of exclusion. I is white.

White is colonial. It is not reducible to skin, though the whiteness of skin does sidle it, and that's always something worth keeping in mind.

An aesthetics of the earth is black. Think errant line. Blackness here does not limit itself to naming a person. I, after all, *excludes*. Blackness is the

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weather, the sociality, of all that is para to ontology, of all that seeks another logic, in difference without separability. That Black people have singular ways of living that weather is incontestable.

If there is an argument in *The Being of Relation*, it is that blackness cannot be captured. This isn't to say that whiteness is not, in every moment, working to colonize it, to tone it down, to sequester it, to make it say I, "in the burdened individuality of freedom," to cite Saidiya Hartman ("Scenes of Subjection" 112). Blackness cannot be captured because each *chevêtre* a poetics of relation crafts holds the world together differently.

The violence is not to be underestimated, however. To say that whiteness cannot be reduced to skin is to recognize that it is everywhere at work, in the logics that hold up systems we have come to identify, whoever "we" are, as common sense. Deligny's commitment to other ways of tracing may be a guide for this. But only insofar as tracing remains a practice, not an end in itself.

If tracing *languages*, it does so in ecologies that hear in red, see in wet. It asks: what is a language that doesn't begin in "I" and that refuses to sit still? In the echo of an errant reading, deeply indebted to a process philosophical ethos, *The Being of Relation* aims to practice the opacity that is a poetics of relation, wandering into language's excess, into the conceptual folds it leaves behind, languaging at the cusp, in the approximation of proximity, of neurodiversity and black life.

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Whiteness is there, policing the cleave,  
neurotypicality always at the ready. But errancy is a  
potent deviator.

Being of relation errs us toward new paths.  
Parapedagogies of resistance are at the ready to  
welcome the wandering.

## Endnote

1. See Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (Duke UP, 2014).

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How does whiteness shape the world? How does neurotypicality police how bodies move, think, and relate? And what happens when we shift our focus from individuality to relation itself?

*The Being of Relation* brings together Edouard Glissant's poetics of relation and Fernand Deligny's errant lines to study the structures that hold whiteness and neurotypicality in place. Moving beyond the confines of pathology and psychological assessment, Erin Manning looks into how blackness and neurodiversity emerge at the very site of relation—where identity is not single, but constantly unfolding.

Drawing from critical race theory, neurodiversity studies, and philosophy, *The Being of Relation* offers a framework for reimagining social connections outside of conventional categories.

Erin Manning is professor of fine arts and philosophy at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Recent books include *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* and *Out of the Clear*.

*"Erin Manning attunes to our wandering ways to world and thought in this achingly timely offering. How do we, and how might we, choreograph and dance ways with each other beyond the one-two lockstep of recognitive intersubjectivity and the neurotypicality this atrophic sociality is indexed to? The Being of Relation might reject the epithet 'landmark' but in its tracings of such non-insistent intimacies, this luminous book is an exceedingly resonant landing site."*

Fumi Okiji, associate professor, Department of Rhetoric,  
UC Berkeley, USA.

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