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## Sensation and Embodiments of Virtual: In Contact with the Real

### <Map 1>: Affective awareness

The contemporary cultural machine has been producing the apocalyptic discourses to reflect our experiences of living in and our encounters with an information-saturated environment for over the two last decades. Intrusions and invasions of monsters, machines and beasts into the human world have become rather familiar narratives of academic and cultural texts. This is not surprising. Times are vicious; brutal things are happening. Urgency to creatively respond to rapidly changing conditions that contemporary subjects experience today is becoming greater, especially because it is becoming hard to account for the changes that are unfolding. Escaping the velocity of change is like trying to depart on an ancient jet. It is a flight hard to choose. And while this urgency “flows” through and across our bodies, we can hear the echo of Morpheus’ words: “What you know you can’t explain. But you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life. That there is something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is. But it’s there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad.” (*Matrix*, 1999)

Immense proliferation of academic texts within the intellectual landscape that urge us to re-consider our relationships with ourselves, other humans, the world, we live in, and an array of art works that present us with the

potential for escaping Cartesian dualism and the master subject forcing us to re-connect in thinking and acting differently – beyond dualisms, still leave intact the dominance of the logics of identity premised on the economy of the Same. This is, in the very least, frightening. As Paul Baines rightly observes:

We are encouraged by some to believe that we inhabit a world of pure exteriority and manipulate ‘body parts’ available for configurations. (The fascination with cyborgs). Or even a world where ‘subjectivity’ has been taken outside of the skin into internet – (Stelarc) [...]. Dualisms in and out through the bloody back door. (Baines 2002, 102).

Such a state of affairs implicates that the grasping of a real unity of feeling, a *unitas multiplex* (a unity in multiplicity), is in itself a process that encounters a thick territory with thorny strata with which it needs to struggle before its pure potency is able to blossom. To go beyond the thorniness of structure and reductive fixations on the face and the unit implies going beyond the familiar existential territory and expanding into new landscapes where it becomes possible to embrace living beings, partial objects and abstract entities in all its dynamic and processual connectedness. These

new landscapes - or what Felix Guattari refers to as “existential territories,” are as much the things of science fiction as of real affective spaces created by an experience or a situation. Affect, Guattari writes, “is not a question of representation and discursivity, but of existence.” (Guattari 1995, 93) The world of sensation beyond the familiar is the world of existence; and sensation, Gilles Deleuze writes, has no faces; it “is the opposite of the facile and the ready-made, the cliché, but also of the ‘sensational,’ the spontaneous...” (Deleuze 2004b, 34) Rather a persistent and feisty dogmatic image of thought (informing a commonsense perspective), and its model of recognition based on the “referring representations to already established identities” (Tamsin 1999, 111) belong to the representational theatre, where actors are too tied to the script and thus rather than act they react. In experimental theatre, actors are experimenting “in contact with the real;” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 12) lose their much/ness in releasing their forces/energies, while affirmatively accepting all outcomes of the dice thrown. Losing much/ness and affirming all possible outcomes in the game of active forgetting<sup>1</sup>

is a part of the process of grasping of *unitas multiplex* as it involves non-discursive, affective awareness (of pathos). Effacing faces, erasing proper names are creative processes in a subject’s formation; processes that involve connecting elements, relating particles within a single field without fusing them into an amorphous one, without positing them one against one. The absolute overflight (survol).<sup>2</sup> And the plane of composition. Face your canvas, and “have no fear or hope, but only look for new weapons, suggests Deleuze (Deleuze 1992, 3-7).

In keeping with the Deleuzian philosophy of future, Deleuze and Guattari’s diagram of the landscape of subjectivity, and starting with the perspective informed by

Michel Foucault’s “the care of the self,” in this essay I engage with the notion of becoming in Enki Bilal’s science-fiction graphic novel and film to suggest that his work of art embodies sensation, and extends it beyond through a process that entails abandoning a dogmatic image of thought for an affective production of mind/body assemblage/s. Bilal’s experimental stage of vital living, I argue, is a political kaleidoscope through which we can see humans and human others in different colors responding actively and affirmatively to changes. In eluding the present and erasing his face, Bilal gives us futures enveloped by chance, futures that take us into realms beyond the logics of identity and beyond apocalypse that the machine of I/eye-Cyclopes subject feed. Blending Bilal’s art with the conceptual cartography of Deleuze and Guattari is about mapping, experimenting “in contact with the real,” about re-imag(in)ing our culturally mediated embodied experience and ethical living with human and non-human others. With becomings, connections and difference/s on all levels, the logics of identity has already entered a labyrinth with no signs to represent the path - Ariadne, as Deleuze wrote in *Difference and Repetition*, “has hung herself.” (Deleuze 1994a, 56)

### <Map 2>: Erasing metaphors, towards the being of sensation

While the networks of change are rhizomatically spreading across the contemporary stage, producing all kinds of mutations, metamorphoses and transformations, the brutality of power-relations does not only stay immune to these processes but it seems even more empowered by them. In *Two Regimes of Madness* Deleuze argues that we no longer live in Foucault’s disciplinary society but the

society of control. He writes: “Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control.” (Deleuze 2007, 322) Highways are multiplying, and this is no metaphor. Concepts such as metamorphoses and mutations are no longer only the products of science fiction. These are concepts of elementary significance for educational and scientific institutions, which have already developed a rather intimate relationship with corporations. These processes are empowering. They are tied to biochemical industries where they get further transformed in order to enter the market and contribute to the increase of capital. As Ingeborg Reichle writes, “the research findings become more immediately available on the stock market rather than in the relevant scholarly journal.” (Reichle 2004, 247) The lingering problem that remains is the growing social divide between the wealthy minority that can afford the end products of metamorphoses and the vast majority of people who cannot extend their lives by appropriating them. This alarming state, and the fact that capitalism not only maintains but also contributes to the increase of such extreme poverty, is important to acknowledge. But acknowledgment itself is not sufficient, particularly not if it remains on the level of recognition or the level of reactive perspective. What becomes of vital importance is to become attentive to our perceptions of the world and the processes of becoming, which constitute them. To check our current, turbulent trajectory, we first have to wake those dormant beasts inside of us, locked in safe cryogenic pads, as it is this awakening that carries the potential for attending new ways of thinking and living – ways in which it becomes possible to encounter those differences not only with others, humans and non humans, but within ourselves and the world we all share. In the not too distant future of dystopian urban

decay, Enki Bilal’s science fiction art takes the contemporary issues of inequalities and inequities to their extreme, and in his creative addressing of all the frightening consequences awaiting us if we remain asleep, Bilal draws and paints an experimental stage of vital living, a map, upon which this awakening embraces a non-discursive, affective awareness.

New cartographers are coming to teach us more about our “becomings.” They no longer map places but people. They are no longer only cartographers; they are architects, designers and machine-learning specialists, and their maps are dynamic, thematic and changeable. The information the new maps display is radically different; it is about processes on all levels; it is about transformations – dynamic transformations of the map and the information. In other words, the new cartographers illustrate the assembling processes. The contemporary subjects are singularities assembled with other singularities. We are becoming pieces of information, “dividuals,”<sup>3</sup> and moving pixels colored in groups of different colors. Pixels are assembling with other pixels – it is a joint process, a political process. We are processes. We are transformations. We are moving colors in a constant process of becoming other. Bilal is one of those cartographers. He maps transformations and metamorphoses of subjectivities and subjects without locking them back in the capsule of the Same.

Before engaging with Bilal’s prairie of becoming, I must pose some questions that haunt me regardless of answers and potential new worlds and subject formations that I find in Bilal’s work of art. The first question is: How do I/we, as much entangled in the networks of change as I/we are, as much moving pieces of information on

dynamically changeable maps as I/we am/are, (a) dormant beast/s, resuscitate and productively engage in thinking about these processes? How can I/we add a different hue to my/our own pixel and disturb the sleeping beast inside of me/us? There are contradictions, injustices and paradoxes that are integral parts in this factory of rapid changes. How do I/we productively engage with these? How do I/we, after all, represent these changes to myself/ourselves if not by shaking up long-established habits of thought? There is an intensifying dimension of urgency to slash the mental habits of linearity, to cut and split objectivity and concepts that bind adequate representations of those very processes that I/we am/are experiencing, that I/we am/are becoming. There is urgency not to react to the brutality of power-relations and its boosted immune system, but to become active agents in the production of changes in order to bring intrusions capable of dismantling this organism and its conceptual ties that hold “brutality” in place as a pacemaker that regulates its beating. By cutting “concepts” I mean cutting the frame within which they are fixed as monolithic entities and releasing their potential for assembling with other concepts in the game of creative productivity, which they are capable of playing. Language is vibrant, alive. Like a map, it can always be ‘mapped’ differently. By slashing the mental habits of linearity, I mean to give way to nomadic thoughts – thoughts that are creative movements, becomings through flows and interconnections. In borrowing the Deleuzian conceptual plan of difference I stimulate my own nomadic thoughts in the productive process of further challenging and questioning the continuing intellectual dominance of the Enlightenment orthodoxies of reason, knowledge and truth. Since, there is a strong conceptual knot that prevents the boat of the Same from sinking, the quest for untying this knot lies, among other

things, in the game of re-imagining reason and imagination, virtual and possible. It is an affirmative game of dynamic, processual symbiosis that Bilal gives us.

Re-imag(in)ing is a creative act. It is a political act. It is in the constant process of painting differences that paint differences. If we are to recognize differences, which differ in themselves, without subordinating them to the conceptual form of the identical then we have to enter this labyrinth with no signs to represent the path. This is a kind of reimaginative landscape that Bilal paints. If we go back to those changeable maps, which are no metaphor, we find a lot of scintillating pixels painted in blue. They are intermingling together on this beautifully dynamic map. We also find a lot of pixels painted in red, and they are changing directions rapidly and intermingling with other red pixels. There are pixels painted in green as well. Each pixel emits a distribution of singularities, as Deleuze writes for “thought.” (Deleuze 1990, 60) Each blue is different in itself. There is no identical blue, green or red. There is no original blue pixel to which we can subordinate other blue pixels. There is no identification, but rather differentiation. What we are already taught in the age of computers, microelectronics and digital production is that “reality” can be hacked. I believe that Bilal does precisely this through his art as he becomes with his panels, frames, “absent but everywhere in the landscape” (Cezanne’s paradox) (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 169), and dismantles his face. “The deepest is the skin,” Deleuze writes. (Deleuze 1990, 103) With digital cartography, there are possibilities in changing the maps: paths, colors and movements – reconfiguring power-relations for recognizing difference and reimag(in)ing futures differently. Thus, one blue pixel is not only a blue pixel, but also an active agent that can hack “reality” and

paint futures different colors. In the art of Enki Bilal, pixels are not subordinated as they are not substances, and differences are recognized, differences in kind.

In extracting pure intensities, sensations, from this chaos of changes, Bilal engages with hacking reality. His processual artistic encounters with his characters clearly illustrate that Ariadne is a long-time dead. Significations in Bilal's art are killed; there are no threads to lead, only the zones of differences in which a difference differs from difference; differences that differ in kind. In releasing his own lines of flights, Bilal becomes with his art proposing that there is something imperceptible about our encounters. Abandon the domain of representation for dramaturgy/production of "the sensible" – transcendental empiricism,<sup>4</sup> or Irigaray's *sensible transcendental*. The process of thinking and living, Deleuze argues, comes out from the imperceptible encounters that dismantle the representational thought – one that often results in the production of aforementioned reactive perspective, which, according to Tamsin Lorraine, "analyzes only what is already apparent." (Lorraine 1999, 148) A theatre or rather factory of metamorphoses that has no blocking of actors/workers in the performing arena; a theatre of permutations that knows of no fixity, but only of pure intensities and the affirmed world of differences.

Although in this essay I do not engage with Bilal's technical plane of composition, it does seem important to establish a link between this and the aesthetic plane of composition if we are to fully understand Bilal's art as "a being of sensation." I already briefly mentioned Bilal's extracting of pure intensities referring mostly to his plane of aesthetic composition, which is after all "a single plane, in the sense that art involves no other plane

than that of aesthetic composition." (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 182) This is only to note that the plane of technical composition gets absorbed by the aesthetic plane of composition, but it is, nonetheless, important, because in Bilal's art the material passes into the sensation. In other words, panels, frames, colors, music – the materials of Bilal's art works, are open and dynamic singularities operating as agents that release intensities; these singularities assemble with the affective becomings and events produced by the movements of characters inside of the frames/panels so to produce a continuum of intensities. This permits us to acknowledge Bilal's art work as the *machine of expression*; the machine that cuts and splits monolithic entities, organisms – grand structures, and totalities of bodies, including frames and panels, into fragments capable of crafting new formations, affinities that would no longer replicate 'stable' subjects and/or any totalizing forms. Cuts and splits, along with the processes of assembling the fragments, Deleuze and Guattari argue, happen in the "zones of liberated intensities;" (1986, 13) the dynamic in-between spaces, affective spaces which push deterritorialization of subject (dismantling of *the* human through non-human to find *a* human), language and image to the point of their becoming pure intensities. Bilal's work of art, then, is the being of sensation infused with micropolitics, or politics of desire that runs through the plane of composition filtering out everything major while encouraging raptures and metamorphosis that lead to new creations – those of imperceptible becoming, a *unitas multiplex*. Not just that through these processes we learn to think differently about ourselves, our becomings and about relationships with others – whether humans, animals, machines, etc., but this production contains ontological differences that fuels on concepts such as potential and process – both of which extend and slip



into the world of becoming, the infinite world of differences and repetitions beyond the detrimental economy of I/eye/Same, n+1.

### <Map 3>: A splinter, sensation, and becoming other

Unfolding in the prairie of becoming, the notion premised upon the processual dynamics of the affective forces of materiality of bodies (of which not all are biological) in assemblage with each other, Bilal's plane of aesthetic composition brings us creations of new forms of life, new models of subjectivity. Detouring Oedipal narratives and binary trajectories, and releasing lines of flight upon the late capitalist One-corporation-dominated environment, Bilal incarnates events that enable reconfiguration of power-relations through new and affective connections between organic and non-organic constituents. Lines of flights or flows of movements that break with conventional social codes (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 204) are bridges to new formations of life – formations that escape the forms of repression and stratification as they occur through attraction and the combination of relations that are created out of and in spite of difference. De-oedipalization. Bilal, in other words, is an artist of embodied events, embodied becomings; the artist who engages with the transcendental empiricism and the ontology of difference in the light of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual plan. In his attentiveness to lines of flight that “never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs...,” (Deleuze 1987, 204) he is careful about not stretching them too far. In other words, he produces rhizomatic becomings without permitting lines of flight to “reencounter organizations that restratify everything” (ibid., 9) into dualisms. Embracing the notions

of rhizome and becoming, extracted from the conceptual plan of Deleuze and Guattari, gives us a possibility to explore Bilal's panels and cine-events as maps upon which he sketches the connectedness and the inevitable and mutually informing contact of the lines of flight with the surrounding terrain. Cartography, as a method, is valuable to us, because it carries the potential that maps can always be mapped differently. Insistence upon hybridity (which is almost hard to escape in the science-fiction landscape) allows Bilal to make available those movements that escape re-territorialization into the “natural matrix of unity.” (Haraway 1991, 157) Hybridity undermines the codes of essentialism, the economy of the One/Same, and accordingly the natural matrix of unity. In refusing the ready-made *doxas*, – “According to whose criteria?” Bilal asks in *Immortel*, are Jill's organs in the wrong place (?), he puts a splinter into the theoretical machine of disembodiment, jams it, cracks open a hole through which we slide into the “wonderland” embracing differences, otherness, and specificities. Although in this text I approach one of Bilal's characters, Jill Bioskop, I want to stress that other characters also share this potential and sensitivity for creative approaches to new formations of subjectivity and life. After all, it is Bilal who attends to the processes of becoming; the artist is becoming imperceptible as he loses his much/ness and cuts through the frame of Same/ness.

Jill Bioskop is a mutant, a post-human woman extended into the realm of heterogeneity as she is premised upon embodied encounters with sensible reality. She is infused with the rhizomatic connections that are performed in accordance to an immanent principle of desire. This is to say that previously mentioned lines of flights are created by desire, which no longer conforms to or is contained

within any definite laws or structures. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *Anti-Oedipus*, “Desire does not ‘want’ revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 116). Productive in nature, desire affects movements that rupture the coded and signifying language of dogmatic thought. Whether Jill has background and personal history is already difficult to grasp, because as a character that appears in different narratives, her personal history shifts in a sense that sometimes we can find traces of, although always fragmented (*Woman’s Trap*), and sometimes she is completely left without it (*Immortel*). Given the rather ambiguous traces of her personal history in the former with the later liberated from it, it is possible to argue that Jill is already liberated from the logic of the same that is governing the Oedipalized subject. This further enables her flight from the notions of fixed subjectivity and gendered subjectivity towards unpredictable and new creations of subjectivity. Productive desire, assembling desire, pushes Jill through the ‘hole’ and into the realm of constant metamorphosis and partial connections. In this realm, following Deleuze and Guattari, subjectivity is displaced through immanence, through *sensible transcendental* or the reality that exceeds our conceptual and perceptual grasp. In other words, it is displaced through the pragmatics of “becoming.” (Kennedy 2000, 92) If we are to fully understand what becoming entails and how it relates to Jill Bioskop, let us first establish the link between the notion of becoming and the existence of proto-subjectivities.<sup>5</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write:

All becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. Neither

of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form. Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire... Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter into a particular zone of proximity. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 272).

The process of becoming, then, is a molecular process that involves a movement through which particles of one entity are joined with particles of another entity. An assemblage is a process that dynamically becomes in the space of “in-between.” It is composed of singularities or pre-personals that exist prior to any notion of the self, but are constitutive of the self. These pre-personals are in fact molecular elements, which, at the level of what Deleuze and Guattari call “molar” organization, group themselves into relatively stable configurations – molar aggregates. (Lorraine 1999, 121) A stable configuration is, for example, a body, which can never be referred to as a totality because its molecular elements, or partial objects of that body cannot achieve a definite whole given that they are always in flux and do not respond to a master plan, but are rather “engaged in a self-mutating process in which the product affects the process, and extend out into the world.” (ibid., 121). After all, “all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities...” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 275) which suggests that particles are emitted both by living and non-living forms. Bilal’s art embodies molecular becomings, becoming-other of the

senses, through composing of affective productions and (a-conceptual) events that dissolve any notions of “comfortably recognizable and comprehensible.” (Bogue 2003, 175) Being a “machinic assemblage,” a composite that becomes through “the notion of a material affect,” (Kennedy 2000, 88) Jill, in order words, is composed of *affective* forces, and thus always in the process of producing *affective* connections. For Deleuze and Guattari, these affective connections are premised on the affective forces of materiality, or as Kennedy writes, “a materiality of bodies in assemblage with each other, as molecular forces in coagulation.” (ibid., 88) It is important to note at this point, although with all the simplification that this notation entails, that according to Raymond Ruyer, the philosopher whose work was rather inspiring for Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual plan, the molecular force in self-forming forms (in consciousness) is a primary force, while a self-forming form is in “absolute overflight,” that is, it is a virtual in process of actualization, but also being a process as well, it is a force of connection or a force of creation that operates through connecting. (Bogue 2003, 183; Bains 2002, 108) Following Ruyer, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the actualization of virtual is the fundamental process of creation in nature, and the absolute overflight of the virtual entails a creative force that actualizes the virtual. This creative force or force of the virtual is “immanent within the virtual’s actualization,” which takes place in actual bodies as dynamic process of individuation, and it operates as virtual boding that unfolds through “a process of retentive, contracting, self-conserving sensation.” (Bogue 2003, 183) The creative, connecting force is passive, because it presupposes a retentive contraction of past into present, and that contraction is sensation. (ibid., 183) It becomes important,

at least, to acknowledge this creative force when entering panels and cine-event of Bilal’s plane of composition and when trying to put in words this affective connectivity and becoming other that Bilal captures, embodies, makes possible in his artwork. As we shall see, the landscapes and events in Bilal’s art are not virtual, but they nonetheless arise from and participate in the virtual, and above all, make possible escaping the intolerable. Now, let us enter two of Bilal’s science-fiction works of art to extract a couple of segments that capture this affective connectivity in the prairie of becoming. The first segment is extracted from *The Woman’s Trap* (1986) of *The Nicopol Trilogy* graphic novel, which is delicately caught between *The Carnival of Immortals* and *Cold Equator*, and the second is extracted from *Immortel* (2004), a film that is loosely based on the Trilogy. Although we (partially) explore only segments of *Immortel* and *The Woman’s Trap* from the Trilogy, it is important to bear in mind that in their connectivity with two other segments and other narratives, each is already multiple. Narratively, *The Woman’s Trap* explores the story of a special correspondent of unknown origin, Jill Bioskop, whose blue hair and white skin contribute to her distinctive, non-human appearance. The violent and foggy streets of a war-torn London in 2025 provide a dangerous but exciting mise-en-scène, within which Jill is following and dispatching stories thirty years into the past and within which her relationship with a mysterious character, John, is poignantly evolved. A character whose face is covered with black gauze, John appears to intermingle in-between the human and a non-human world. While he is helping Jill to collect information for her story, which is loosely connected to the events that took place in *The Carnival of Immortals*, John is murdered, only to appear again with



white-bleeding bullet holes in his back. His relationship with Jill, which is to some extent ambiguous, develops on the basis of rather unclear past memories and throughout the story it attains an almost guardian-like sensibility - in the sense that he is always there when she needs him, moving in and out of the “real” world. Through Jill’s journalism and her passion for investigating stories from the past, *The Woman’s Trap* sporadically evokes events and characters from two other trilogy stories. It is after the moment when Jill finds John murdered that her investigation and life take a bizarre turn. To assuage her grief over John, she takes the drug H.L.V. – (the action of invisible forces on the body - a spasm) – which eradicates her memories. Following Nietzsche, it is possible to argue that the drug is no/thing but a faculty of forgetting - an active force that halts the production of determinate concepts and perspectives from the past while permitting the influx of molecular flows to take “place.”<sup>6</sup> This way, her reactions refrain from being reactions to traces of the past, but become reactions to “the direct image of the object.” (Deleuze qtd. in Lorraine 1999, 152) In the midst of her investigation and while on the journey from London to Berlin, Jill “falls” into a series of events that “appear” to be mostly in her mind. She commits three murders of men that she encounters on her journey and finds out that her stories are the stories from the future. Always eluding the present. After the last murder and before she takes an excessive dosage of H.L.V. to eradicate what she calls “bloody effective memories” of the murders, Jill decides that she must write about the “horror” for her readers in 1993. It is in between these two events, thus in the sequence of writing, in which Jill enters the process of becoming-other establishing an intense connectedness

with her type-writer; the bond composed of affective forces.

Jill and a type-writer, which is called “script-walker” in the narrative, connect in such an intense way that Jill collapses and the type-writer jams and reaches the point of “still burning” (Figure 1). This happens, Deleuze and Guattari would argue, as “they enter into a particular zone of proximity.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 272) While in the process of “recording,” which is both the process of writing and the process of recalling “bloody” events to mind, Jill enters the state of delirium. The recording process affects her writing, which becomes repetitive and declines to the point of being illegible, and it intensifies the bond between her and the machine. Delirium, a flow created by the process itself, releases Jill’s “singularities” or pre-personals from the molar identity<sup>7</sup> and further reinforces the dynamics of becoming “Jill-the script walker,” becoming other. The invisible, fluid forces of delirium that push the process of becoming other are grafted on the surfaces of bodies of both Jill and script-walker. In other words, the violence that arises from this encounter of two bodies is captured on the panel by intensifying the black color over the ‘burning’ script-walker and bright red color spilled over Jill’s body (Figure 2). A gesture of the material, colors passing into the violent encounter, into the sensation. This figure, the sensation itself, “the violence of sensation,” cuts through the representational, because it becomes inseparable from “its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses... it must have nothing of the nature of a represented object.” (Deleuze 2004b, 39)



panels that have been rendered expressive. In confronting chaos and the infinite field of chaotic forces, Bilal struggles against the cryogenic pod of *doxa*, which offers a comfortable environment for protecting oneself from chaos, and gives us the embodied virtual event. The virtual intrudes the commonsense experience with its chaotic force inducing a becoming-other. But virtual, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is in the domain of philosophy, the sphere of concept creation that takes place on the plane of immanence and requires a conceptual persona. The common task for both a conceptual persona and an artist or aesthetic figure, is to confront chaos. While a conceptual persona works on the plane immanence, actualizes the virtual and “takes events or consistent concepts to infinity,” an artist works on the plane of aesthetic composition, embodies the virtual and “creates the finite to restore the infinite.” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 197) To say that Bilal gives us an embodied virtual event implies that his art captures or incarnates the force of the virtual that is immanent within the actualization of virtual, that is, it captures the virtual boding that unfolds through the process of contracting sensation. And, the contraction, it seems plausible to note, takes place within a conserving, contemplating soul. Thus, he arises from and participates in the virtual giving us a being of sensation, a being of “the virtual as retentive, contracting, self-conserving, contemplative force immanent with the actual.” (Bogue 2003, 185) In addition, the brain that is in the midst of things as the one interfused with becoming other of Jill, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is an “I feel,” “the inject” of sensation that conserves, contracts, composes and contemplates. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 212) As Bogue notes in his interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s plane of immanence and plane of composition, “The ‘I feel’ of sensation... is no less a mode of thought

than the ‘I conceive’ of the superject,” which is the faculty of forming concepts. (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 179)

But, Bilal’s capturing of the virtual event does not stay within the panels. It extends beyond. Art, Deleuze and Guattari write, gives us possible worlds, “monuments” that are beings of sensation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 184) These monuments never stay within the territories created upon the planes of aesthetic composition, because the planes also carry a “deframing” power (ibid., 187) that passes through the territories and extend them beyond, into the world, deterritorialize them onto the universe, which is also the plane of composition composed of “cosmic forces capable of merging, being transformed, confronting each other and alternating.” (ibid., 187) The planes require to “be taken apart in order to relate them to their intervals rather than to one another and in order to produce new affects.” (ibid., 187) Bilal’s action did not begin with the panel, and so it does not stay within it. His capturing extends into the world. In extracting a slice from this infinite field of imperceptible forces, Bilal embodies becoming other, the sign of the passage from the virtual to the actual, embodies sensation that is extracted from bodily perceptions and affections, then renders it perceptible in the expressive matter of the graphic novel, and then through a deframing power extends it onto the world, making us become with it. This may enable a creation of something entirely new and unpredictable – interconnected others beyond the logics of identity. But again, there is always a possibility to stretch those lines of flight too much. The task of the audience is to stay attuned to the processes of becoming.

Unfolding in this prairie of becoming, singular yet multiple, Bilal’s capturing of affective, imperceptible forces,

releasing of becoming other on the plane of composition gives us a slice of politics that cuts and extends beyond the frame of the already perceived, already thought, yet a slice of politics that does not exist “outside the concrete, socio-political assemblages that incarnate it.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 48) Deleuze and Guattari remark: “there is no social system that does not leak in all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 204) The processes of becoming/s are our processes, our connecting of particles in everyday life, but it is also our responsibility to relate the particles within a single field without fusing them into an amorphous one. As “desubjectified affects” (Kennedy 2004, 94) that “in-motion-ly” escape the notion of a fixed and unitary subject, as well as any firm subjectivity, becomings are openings of the landscapes for/of non-isomorphic subjects that are “unimaginable from the vantage point of the cyclopan, self-satiated eye of the master subject.” (Haraway 1991, 192) To capture a unity in multiplicity is in itself a process that involves attuning to desubjectified affects.

#### **<Map 4>: Embodying the contemplating soul, becoming imperceptible**

It is from the opening scene of *Immortel* that we encounter chaos – the outside of determinate strata, in which silhouettes of bodies of mutants and humans are moving through a blurred, indefinable space. There is something imperceptible about our encounters. Becoming-imperceptible accesses the chaos. It is “to be present at the dawn of the world.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 280) As soon as we move into the perceptible arena we enter a dystopian New York City in 2098 to find out

that it is Jill, a non-human, an intrusion that emerges from Chaos. Becoming-imperceptible requires one to “eliminate the too-perceived, the too-much-to-be-perceived.” (ibid., 279) In such a dystopian landscape, Bilal introduces us with genetically altered humans living side-by-side with non-altered humans. The city is divided by levels, which designate the zones “safe” and “not-safe” for humans to enter. The “intrusion” – or not-safe – zone warrants the immediate death of humans who attempt to enter. The Eugenics Corporation for genetics engineering, or what was Choublanc’s fascist, totalitarian state in the trilogy, controls the city and is in a constant hunt for non-humans which they use for illegal experiments in the domain of nanotechnological research. The government has an intimate relationship with the corporation, and every attempt of the federal police to intervene in the “business” of The Eugenics Corporation is sanctioned by the merciless killing of its officers. A micro story unfolds with Jill’s arrest and her becoming a guinea pig of The Eugenics Corporation. We learn that her body is only three months old and that her organs are not “in the right place.” Bilal already transverse the organizational structure of organism, and along the orthodoxies of reason and truth. Jill is in the process of metamorphosis from mutant to human, and her body is repeatedly altered by the “unknown” drugs that push this transformative process forward. While in the process of metamorphosis, Jill moves in and out of the “human” world (as many of Bilal’s characters do), which is in itself an action that destabilizes any firm configurations. “Existing” in the realm of pre-personals, the realm of molecularity and the affective, where molecular elements or “singularities” have not grouped yet into stable configurations, Jill functions outside the notion of any agency or fixed subjectivity. The “molar” identity of Jill as woman is irrelevant, as her “existence” involves



the relation to the elemental, the material, and the local forces that push (Oedipal) subjectivity aside in favor of “molecular becomings.”

In another text I wrote about Jill’s becoming human woman through exploring the sequences that give us “the beyond of sensation,<sup>8</sup>” but here I want to engage with a sequence that in all its difference from the previous embodiment touches upon the already mentioned passive force of the virtual or the immanent within the active forces of bodies in formation, and that again gives us a being of sensation beyond the frame of “unquestionable values.” It is the sequence where Jill in the midst of transformation from mutant, post-human to human woman releases a line of flight to attend to affective connecting of three concepts, that of man, woman and human. The concept creation on the aesthetic plane of composition as sensations of concepts. The line of connection that she makes between these concepts goes beyond the deductions of rational thought and involves heightened attunement to corporeal logic, which is, as Lorraine notes, “typically below the level of awareness.” (Lorraine 1999, 139) The sequence opens with Jill’s writing the word MAN on a mirror. She writes the word twice. In the process of her writing, this “concept” /or body is decoded /or denaturalized through its merging into the relation with two other separate “bodies” or sets of letters – “WO” and “HU,” which she writes next to each MAN word. Jill’s creative movement emerges from the very process that she is undergoing, but also through the affirmative will to power. Affirming becoming human woman. Following Nietzsche, the will to power is “after all the will to life,” (Nietzsche 1996, 259) and apparently Jill, who is in the process of metamorphoses from non-human to human, is liberated from the possible reactive perspectives of “all-too-human”

and, thus, she renders life active and affirms it in all its particularity. In other words, she is vigilantly aware of painful and discomforting aspects of life, which is forever in transformation, and yet she is affirmatively creative, letting the present “invade” her regardless of outcome. Jill is in the midst of this assembling of concepts, the “I feel” of sensation. The concept creation is an affect initiated by imperceptible forces that already push her process of becoming other, becoming a human woman. The already perceived, already thought of man, human and woman immediately lose their much/ness as they enter into the affirmative game of productive creativity in which partial elements, as “excessive systems, [...] link the different with the different, and the multiple with the multiple.” (Deleuze 2004a, 115) Repetition of concepts in Jill’s case excludes the becoming-equal in the concept, because it concerns itself with partial elements that link differences and multiplicities. The concept of human-woman, as a result of this affective production, is not a signifier of anything as it unfolds in accordance to an immanent desire, which constitutes itself in the process of creating concepts. Human woman does not imitate any entity. But rather, it is an active and affective concept that can no longer be conceived through binary terminology, because it is rhizomatic in nature and does not proceed by dichotomy. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “The rhizome is the image of thought that spreads out below that of tress.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 204)

Jill situates herself within thought; she is *injected* as she attends the game of assembling concepts and affirming her becoming other. The “I feel” brain’s sensation unfolds the landscapes of contractions, habits and contemplations. In other words, Jill conserves Jill’s becoming other, conserves those vibrations of the transformative



process through her own contemplation on becoming human woman. While contemplating her ceaseless becoming, she creates. Jill is a pure sensation as it is through contemplation that she contemplates the elements from which she arises. And, Bilal embodies this sensation, “the mystery of passive creation.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 200) Jill’s contemplating soul is that virtual dimension of force; the force of the virtual form itself; the immanence within the virtual’s actualization. This purely passive, receptive force of sensation, Bogue notes, “doubles actual forces,” kinetic forces, “and remains within them as a perpetual reserve.” (Bogue 2003, 184)

Plugging into that vest chaos, from which he comes after all, extracting a slice of it, Bilal struggles against the cryogenic pod of orthodoxies of reason, knowledge and truth that brought together dominant perceptions and affections within our contemporary stage. His art embodies becoming other of the senses, embodies virtual, and extends it beyond onto our world of imperceptible becomings. By eliminating much/ness, all-too-perceived, Bilal is becoming imperceptible, becoming with the world, giving us formations infused with micropolitics, politics of becoming that teach us, humans-dividuals and dormant beasts, to take care of ourselves by awakening and becoming attuned to those affective forces of materiality. It is precisely this realm that unfolds differences and affirmations vital for ethical living with human and non-human others. Concepts as much as organisms, formations, can always be created otherwise, beyond the detrimental logics of identity, as long as we create a small splinter that brings us closer to *grasping* the unity in multiplicity, the affirmed world of differences that unfolds in the grassland of minor consciousness. All that is needed to begin this process is to release your lines of flight.

#### Notes:

1. See Tamsin 1999, especially chapter six for an insightful analysis of Nietzsche’s faculty of forgetting. See also: Deleuze 1983, 113.
2. See Bogue 2003, chapter seven for a detailed analysis of the absolute overflight (*survol*), the concept originally created by French philosopher Raymond Ruyer to describe the relationship of the I-unity to the subjective sensation of the visual field.
3. The concept “dividuals” is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze. See: Deleuze, Gilles. 1992. *Postscript on the Societies of Control*.
4. The conception of the transcendental field of the virtual, which entails moving beyond the self/other structure of alterity in order to think the impersonal and preindividual singularities out of which the human world is constituted. The virtual, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the reality that always exceeds our perceptual and conceptual grasp – the realm of the infinite.
5. In this text I mention proto-subjectivities very briefly, but it is important to note that proto-subjectivities relate to a state of being prior to the social and cultural world of language structures, as well as prior to an emergent sense of a physical self. It is the pre-personal that exists as a field of different forces, the forces that interact in ways to produce effects on one another. In *Anti-Oedipus* we see that these pre-personals are sexual drives, one’s internal organs, emotions, aggression, experiences, and the surfaces of bodies. All are “singularities” that are constitutive of the self but not experienced or “had” by a Self, a subject or a person.
6. See Lamija Kosovic 2006, chapter four (“Posthuman Consciousness”) for an analysis on drugs as active forces that enable the transformative process of metamorphoses.
7. This is a form of identity that happens on the molar level, which is the stage where the process of oedipalization begins. It is the process where “the social machines” impose an oedipal organization on the formation of subjects - or “molar aggregates,” and consequently exclude specific formations of desiring-machines – formations that are not contained within the oedipal dramas. See: Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. 1983, 116.
8. See Lamija Kosovic 2006, 80.

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