

identities

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- ▶ Roberto Esposito
- ▶ Levi R. Bryant
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I Retreating Politics

Roberto
Esposito

A proposito di Derrida: Biopolitica e immunità

Non sono né un conoscitore profondo dell'opera di Derrida né un suo allievo – qualsiasi significato si voglia dare a questa espressione. Lo dico con il rispetto che si deve ad un grande maestro del pensiero contemporaneo, ma anche con la consapevolezza di chi ha percorso, e percorre, una strada diversa dalla sua, pur apprezzandone tutta la forza e l'originalità. E' proprio da questa diversità, da questo scarto, che vorrei partire come chiave d'ingresso in un testo, come quello derridiano, non solo di straordinario interesse filosofico, ma anche di grande complessità interna. Per farlo userò uno dei suoi procedimenti preferiti e giustamente celebri: prenderò le mosse da quello che mi appare un sintomo, la traccia di un problema che la scrittura di Derrida non enuncia in quanto tale, ma allo stesso tempo nasconde e rivela. Mi riferisco al suo attacco a Giorgio Agamben contenuto nei seminari recentemente pubblicati con il titolo di *La bestia e il sovrano*. Non alludo al merito della polemica di Derrida – relativa alla dubbia sostenibilità dell'opposizione greca tra *bios* e *zoe*, così come è impostata da Agamben in una modalità effettivamente contestabile e contestata anche da altri – ma piuttosto alla sua forma, alla singolare virulenza impiegata in questa

occasione da Derrida. La mia impressione è che il suo tono oltrepassi la normale divergenza di opinioni e lo stesso piano filosofico per sconfinare in quello personale, rivelando una insofferenza non limitata ad uno specifico argomento, ma che tocca e colpisce un intero stile di pensiero e di comportamento.

Secondo Derrida, nella sua volontà pervicace di attribuirsi un primato ermeneutico, una priorità storica, nell'elaborazione del paradigma biopolitico, Agamben avrebbe mancato di fare riferimento a chi, prima di lui e con argomenti anche più validi, aveva già tematizzato il rapporto differenziale tra vita animale e vita umana, e cioè Heidegger interprete di Aristotele. Da qui una polemica, nei confronti di Agamben, che per intere pagine alterna il tono della severità a quello dell'ironia. Quello che ci si può chiedere è cosa porti un autore, come appunto Derrida, solitamente generoso nei confronti dei suoi contemporanei, ad assumere un simile atteggiamento. Cosa determina questo singolare inasprimento di tono? Cosa spinge Derrida a superare i confini di una normale divergenza d'opinione? Chi, o cosa, egli vuole effettivamente colpire? E perché?

La mia impressione è che Derrida abbia un altro, o un maggiore, obiettivo polemico rispetto a quello dichiarato – vale a dire Foucault e quello che Foucault oggi rappresenta nel dibattito filosofico contemporaneo. Non solo, ma mi pare che ciò riveli una sua difficoltà a confrontarsi con lui su un terreno che per troppo tempo, se non da sempre, ha visto lo stesso Derrida più arretrato, o quantomeno non collocato in prima linea, vale a dire quello della vita biologica nei suoi rapporti con la politica. Quanto al primo punto si conosce – fin dalla famosa polemica degli anni Sessanta sul cogito cartesiano a proposito della *Storia della follia* – la distonia profonda, lessicale prima ancora che argomentativa, che separa Derrida da Foucault. Due autori spesso assimilati nella vulgata filosofica degli anni Settanta e Ottanta, ma in realtà fortemente distanti nelle intenzioni, nello stile, negli effetti di senso prodotti dalle loro opere. Ricordo ancora una sera a Venezia – c’era appunto anche Agamben – in cui Jean-Luc Nancy, sappiamo quanto legato a Derrida, arrivò a sostenere che Foucault non è un filosofo, ma non più che uno storico, tra le nostre proteste, che invece gli attribuivamo, ed ancora gli attribuiamo un posto eminente nella filosofia novecentesca. Se il Novecento, come Foucault disse, può essere stato un secolo deleuziano, non è escluso che quello in corso sia, filosoficamente parlando, un secolo foucaultiano.

Senza adesso soffermarci su questa valutazione, evidentemente opinabile e controvertibile, richiamo l’episodio come una spia della distanza mai colmata, e quasi dell’allegria teoretica, che sia Derrida sia Nancy hanno in più occasioni manifestato nei confronti di ciò, che, proprio a partire a Foucault, ha assunto il nome di biopolitica. La verità è che entrambi – Derrida e Nancy – sensibili come sono ai passaggi di fase e anche alla dinamica del-

la recezione internazionale, non potevano non avvertire il sensibile spostamento della *french theory*, cioè della diffusione americana del pensiero francese, dall’ambito della decostruzione a quello della biopolitica, evidente per chi si affacci nelle biblioteche dei maggiori campus delle università americane o legga gli ultimi fascicoli di “Diacritics” o di “Critical Inquiry”.

Se, per tornare al merito delle questioni, si ricorda che già ne *Le parole e le cose* Foucault aveva individuato nella vita biologica uno dei tre trascendentali, cioè delle categorie costitutive, accanto al lavoro e al linguaggio, dell’episteme moderna, si può forse partire da qui per rintracciare un filo, e anche il punto originario, della presa di distanza di Derrida nei confronti del discorso foucaultiano e in genere del lessico biopolitico. Ancora preso – se posso esprimermi in maniera forse troppo sintetica – nella svolta linguistica che, già dagli anni Trenta del secolo scorso, concentrava sul linguaggio, o sul suo rovescio, la scrittura, lo sguardo della filosofia continentale ed analitica, Derrida non ha colto in tutta la sua rilevanza la ‘svolta’ successiva che, a partire dagli anni Sessanta, tendeva a sostituire all’orizzonte trascendentale del linguaggio quello, in realtà non più trascendentale in senso kantiano, ma, per così dire, storico-ontologico, della vita. Naturalmente sto radicalizzando un contrasto che andrebbe assai più sfumato e argomentato. Certo, Derrida ha lavorato a lungo sulla categoria di vita, in connessione con quella di morte – la-vita-la-morte – anche sulle tracce di Freud, oltre che di Heidegger, congiunti tra loro in *Speculare su Freud*. Ma egli si riferisce alla vita in un senso inassimilabile, o obliquo, rispetto a quello centrato, già a partire da Nietzsche, della categoria di biopolitica. Si potrebbe dire, anche qui abbreviando forse troppo un passaggio più complesso, che Derrida, come appunto Heidegger e

Freud, pensi la vita dall'angolo di rifrazione della morte, anziché, come fa la biopolitica, pensare la morte dal punto di vista della vita.

E' vero che già col concetto di 'gramma' o di 'programma' Derrida allude, non solo in senso metaforico, al paradigma del vivente. Ma anche in questo caso senza tematizzare il passaggio decisivo che, ad un certo punto, comincia a fare della vita biologica insieme l'oggetto e il soggetto prevalente del potere. Naturalmente in un autore ricco e profondo come Derrida si può sempre trovare tutto ciò che si cerca – spunti, allusioni, illuminazioni che vanno in ogni direzione. La sua forza teoretica è tale da illuminare per contrasto anche ciò che lascia in ombra, anche il rovescio cavo di ciò che analizza frontalmente. Ma resta la sensazione – la *mia* sensazione – di uno scarto, e anche di un limite, che in qualche modo lo trattiene al di qua di una soglia epistemologica, gli preclude il transito in un diverso orizzonte di senso – Derrida, nonostante la sua straordinaria potenza innovativa, resta dentro l'orizzonte heideggeriano, e prima ancora kantiano, anche quando comincia a correggerlo in direzione di Levinas; non penetra in quello che Gilles Deleuze avrebbe definito 'piano di immanenza', resta sostanzialmente estraneo al discorso sulla centralità paradigmatica della vita. Si tratta di qualcosa come un'opacità – o un punto cieco – rispetto a quanto a Foucault, ma già a Nietzsche, appariva un'evidenza: la presenza sempre più estesa della vita biologica in tutti gli ambiti della vita contemporanea e la conseguenza che ciò determina anche nella pratica contemporanea della filosofia.

Una riprova di questo scarto analitico, di questo *retrait* teoretico di fronte a un passaggio d'epoca di tale rilievo, la vedo nel modo con egli ha successivamente impostato

il rapporto tra comunità ed immunità. O meglio *non* lo ha impostato, separandone le sematiche, non valorizzando adeguatamente l'elemento chiave che le lega e le mette in tensione reciproca, vale a dire il *munus*. Certo, anche in questo caso sappiamo tutti che Derrida ha a lungo e lucidamente lavorato sul concetto di dono e di dono avvelenato, ma senza connettere il *munus* al *cum* della relazione, senza pensare il comune e l'immune e soprattutto la dialettica che insieme li congiunge e li disgiunge. Ciò – questa opzione per così dire riduttiva – lo conduce ad una doppia conseguenza. Da un lato a rifiutare il tema, o almeno il lessico, della comunità. Dall'altro a non cogliere tutte le implicazioni e gli effetti di senso della questione dell'immunità, una volta separata da quella della comunità e non inscritta a pieno titolo dentro l'orizzonte della vita biologica.

Partiamo dal primo punto. Come è noto, soprattutto in *Politiche dell'amicizia*, Derrida rifiuta l'uso del termine-concetto di 'comunità'. E non solo di quello fatto proprio dai vari comunitari otto e novecenteschi – da Toennies ai neocomunitaristi americani, ancora presi nel lessico organicistico della *Gemeinschaft* o portatori di istanze regressive e localistiche. La riserva di Derrida si rivolge anche a coloro, da Bataille a Nancy, passando per Blanchot, che in anni più recenti hanno decostruito la mitologia organicistica e appropriativa del comunitarismo americano a favore di una differente concezione della comunità. Benché legato a questi pensatori da tanti fili, Derrida se ne distanzia in maniera netta proprio sulla questione decisiva della comunità. Perché? Come mai? 'Comunità', a suo dire, è parola, termine, concetto, troppo compromesso dalla sua storia recente e meno recente per poter assumere un significato diverso ed opposto a quello che a lungo gli si è dato e che in qualche modo gli si continua a

dare. Le stesse formule che tentano di distanziarsene o di decostruirlo dialetticamente – come quelle di ‘comunità inconfessabile’ o ‘inoperosa’ o di ‘coloro che non hanno comunità’ – ricadono, per Derrida, inevitabilmente preda del significato che intendono negare. Anzi tale negazione, o autonegazione, gli appare il sintomo più evidente della incapacità di uscire da qualcosa, da un circolo semantico, che ha i caratteri di un rimosso della tradizione occidentale – la potenza dell’indiviso, più forte di tutte le differenze, le diversioni, le divergenze e perciò stesso destinata a riprodurre la genealogia del sangue fraterno.

Che dire di ciò? Come valutare questa presa di distanza, lessicale e concettuale, dal linguaggio della comunità che spinge Derrida lontano da qualcosa che per molti di noi è stato, assai più di un tema, un modo nuovo di fare filosofia? Intanto si potrebbe obiettare che se non fosse possibile lavorare ad una trasformazione semantica di parole che hanno una storia complessa e ambivalente, non dovremmo più usare neanche un termine come quello di ‘democrazia’ sul quale Derrida è invece, giustamente, sempre tornato. Ma proprio perciò l’unica via che mi pare capace di ridare senso a una parola irrinunciabile come, nonostante tutto, resta quella di ‘comunità’ è un’interrogazione capace di penetrare a fondo nella sua scatola nera, vale a dire nella fonte di senso custodita nella sua origine etimologica. Solamente in questo modo – tornando ad un’analisi radicale del termine *munus* – da cui quello di *communitas* deriva, è possibile spezzare la crosta che si è formata lungo la sua storia, liberare la parola e il concetto di comunità da quel significato appropriativo che l’ha stravolto e pervertito nel suo opposto. Se è vero che, per quanto indicibile, inconfessabile, inoperosa, la comunità non riesce a liberarsi del tutto del suo significato moderno, che rischia sempre di essere riaffermata

da ciò da cui pure prende le distanze, ciò non vale per la *communitas*, che non si limita a rovesciare a posteriori un significato canonico, ma fin dall’inizio ne origina uno diverso ed ampiamente compatibile con ciò che lo stesso Derrida intende per amicizia – un niente-in-comune che unisce nella distanza, un vuoto o una faglia costituita dal non-poter-essere tale dell’individuo o dell’indiviso.

Direi, anzi, qualcosa di più. Mentre il concetto di amicizia, di *philia*, per quanto decostruito, resta inevitabilmente esposto ad un tonalità umanistica, ciceroniana, di carattere etico-morale, la *communitas*, intesa nel senso appena definito, ha una connotazione meno recuperabile dal linguaggio del soggetto e dalla sua logica della presupposizione perché originariamente attinente al linguaggio della esposizione. In fondo l’amicizia, comunque la si declini, resta inevitabilmente situata all’interno di un lessico intersoggettivo. Ad essere amici sono pur sempre soggetti individualmente definiti e rivolti l’uno al riconoscimento dell’altro. Mentre i membri della *communitas* – in quanto costituiti dal *munus* comune – non sono riconducibili a una figura della soggettività, né all’*ego* né all’*alter*, ma ad un taglio originario che apre ed altera il soggetto in tutta la sua estensione.

Un riscontro anche esterno di quanto dico – del *deficit* teoretico derivato dalla mancata elaborazione del concetto di ‘comunità’ inteso nel suo senso originario – lo trovo nella teorizzazione avanzata nelle ultime opere di Derrida dell’idea di ‘immunità’ o meglio di ‘autoimmunità’, che avrebbe dovuto, o potuto, accostarlo alla riflessione biopolitica e che invece lo tiene lontano da essa, per come è da lui elaborato. Ma andiamo con ordine. L’autoimmunità – cui Derrida si riferisce per la prima volta nel suo saggio sulla religione e poi, più diffusamente, in *Stati canaglie* e

nella intervista con la Borradori sull'11 settembre – allude alla potenza dissolutiva di un apparato difensivo tanto forte da rivolgersi contro se stesso distruggendosi, come accade appunto nelle cosiddette malattie autoimmuni. La globalizzazione, intesa come una sorta di contaminazione generalizzata, ha scatenato una reazione di rigetto, una sindrome autoimmunitaria, destinata a devastare lo stesso sistema che vorrebbe proteggere. Come questa analisi colga un tratto decisivo dell'esperienza contemporanea è sotto gli occhi di tutti. Non a caso negli stessi anni, anche se in modo indipendente gli uni dagli altri, in Italia, in Germania e negli Stati Uniti i filosofi più attenti a quella che Foucault chiamava 'ontologia dell'attualità' – da Sloterdijk a Donna Haraway, ad altri – hanno preso a lavorare su questo concetto, anche se a partire da presupposti differenti. Personalmente penso che la categoria, il dispositivo, di immunità, per esprimere tutte le sue potenzialità, vada inquadrata nel doppio riferimento alla semantica della comunità e a quella della biopolitica. Derrida, pur cogliendo la rilevanza del tema e fornendone una significativa interpretazione, non fa né l'una né l'altra cosa. Non connette il paradigma immunitario né alla questione della *communitas* né a quello della biopolitica. E' per questo, credo, che da lui l'immunità è sempre e soltanto intesa nel senso, distruttivo ed autodistruttivo, dell'autoimmunità. Ciò deriva dal fatto che non è legata né ad una elaborazione concettuale del *munus* comune né a quella del nesso, potenzialmente affermativo, tra politica e *bios*. Fuori da questo doppio riferimento l'immunità finisce per essere interpretata sempre in chiave negativa ed escludente – condannata in anticipo a battere contro se stessa.

Ora, come invece appare dagli studi più recenti, anche di immunologia medica, il sistema immunitario è qualcosa

di più articolato e plurivoco: protezione e negazione della vita. Ciò vuol dire che, insieme e in contraddizione con la sua figura negativa, esso implica anche una potenza positiva – altrimenti non sarebbero possibili né i trapianti d'organo né le gravidanze, entrambi fenomeni non solo consentiti, ma in un certo senso resi possibili soltanto dai sistemi immunitari del nostro corpo. Se reimmesso entro l'orizzonte della vita biologica, oltre, e forse più, che barriera difensiva e offensiva contro l'altro da sé, il sistema immunitario può essere inteso anche come un filtro, come una cassa di risonanza, in cui il sé si relaziona con l'altro, il medesimo con il diverso, l'interno con l'esterno. Non so se l'assenza di questo lato – affermativo – della problematica immunitaria in Derrida sia riconducibile a quella diffidenza, o quantomeno non integrale assunzione dell'orizzonte della vita biologica, cui ho accennato all'inizio. Al fatto che nella sua opera sterminata e geniale Derrida non conferisca un posto adeguato al fenomeno del vivente, come invece fa l'altra linea della filosofia francese contemporanea che va da Bergson a Canguilhem, da Foucault a Deleuze.

Anche nel già citato libro sull'amicizia il tema del *bios*, della vita, viene pensato da Derrida sempre in negativo – in rapporto alla categoria, potenzialmente violenta, di fraternità. Ma se le sue considerazioni sono assolutamente pertinenti quanto alla deriva etnocentrica della fratellanza, ciò non vuol dire che la vita, il *bios*, in quanto tale, non contenga anche una potenza affermativa, costitutiva, come emerge dalla grande tradizione spinoziano-nietscheana e poi dagli studi più recenti sulla biopolitica. Naturalmente questi elementi affermativi nella politica della vita non vanno enfatizzati, come non lo sono mai stati dallo stesso Foucault. La politica della vita è sempre esposta ad una relazione complessa ed

anche ambigua con una logica di morte, al rischio di rovesciarsi in tanatopolitica. Ciò non toglie, tuttavia, che è difficile lavorare su categorie, come quelle di immunità o comunità fuori da un quadro teoretico aperto a una considerazione anche affermativa del paradigma di vita. Si potrebbe arrivare a dire che il discrimine fondamentale della filosofia novecentesca passi tra coloro che pensano la vita a partire dall'orizzonte della morte – come Heidegger, Freud e lo stesso Derrida – e coloro, come Nietzsche, Bergson e Foucault, che pensano la morte a partire dall'orizzonte della vita. Che non presuppongono la morte alla vita e anzi la fanno finita con la logica stessa del Presupposto. Con l'idea che ogni origine abbia alle spalle un Inizio indicibile e irrepresentabile che la tormenta risucchiandola in una morte già da sempre presente. Forse il senso stesso della filosofia contemporanea sta nel rompere quest'incantesimo, nel ricacciare nelle tenebre questo antichissimo fantasma, nel liberarsi insieme dal Precedente e dall'Adveniente, a favore di un presente senza resti, di una coincidenza assoluta della vita con se stessa. Naturalmente queste mie osservazioni nei confronti di un grande filosofo quale è stato Derrida non vanno intese come una critica, e, tantomeno, come una presa di distanza nei confronti di un maestro indimenticabile, ma come la traccia di una differenza che, mentre separa, al contempo unisce percorsi diversi nella forma della condivisione di un orizzonte comune. Nulla del lavoro svolto da tutti noi in questi anni sarebbe stato lo stesso senza il riferimento ad un testo – quello di Derrida – che non solo penetra profondamente nell'orizzonte del nostro tempo, ma che ancora a lungo segnerà le vie del pensiero.

Levi R.
Bryant

Of Parts and Politics: Onticology and Queer Politics

Onticology and Queer Politics

Objects are dynamic systems that exist at a variety of different scales of time and space, that are entangled in one another, that are operationally withdrawn from one another, that must reproduce themselves across time and space to sustain their existence, and that are defined by their affects, powers, or what they can do.¹ Objects or substances are not a pole opposed to or standing in front of a subject. There is not one domain of being composed of objects and another domain of being composed of subjects. Rather, being is composed entirely of objects or systems. “Object” and “dynamic system” are synonyms. As a consequence, rocks, stars, tardigrades, aardvarks, corporations, nations, *and* subjects are equally objects. Some of these objects are parts of other objects. While objects can and do enter into relations with other objects, their being *qua* substances is characterized by “independent-being” or the ability to break with relations to other objects and enter into new relations with other systems.

In this regard, objects are not constituted by their relations, but rather all relations between objects are *external* to the objects related. The externality of relations is the

condition under which change and emancipation is possible. All relations between objects are *exo-relations*. The fact that relations between objects are external does not entail that the severance of relations leaves the object severed unchanged. Clearly a frog severed from its relation to oxygen changes significantly. It dies. Yet “being-alive” is not the *substantiality* of the being of the frog, but rather a *quality* or *local manifestation* of the frog. The frog is still *this* frog, this substance, even though it is now dead. Proof of this lies in the fact that through certain medical interventions the frog can be resurrected. Likewise, a country cannot exist without its citizens, but these citizens sometimes renounce their citizenship, and, at any rate, live and die while the nation continues. Consequently, the substantiality of substances cannot be reduced to either their qualities or local manifestations, nor the parts out of which they are composed. Rather, the substantiality of a substance or system consists of its spatio-temporal *endo-relations* or its internal structure across time, coupled with the powers or affects of which the object is composed. This substantiality is the virtual proper being of an object, while the qualities an object actualizes or produces when it enters into relations with other objects are local manifestations of the object.

Change the exo-relations in which the object exists and the local manifestations will often change as well. For example, a rock from Earth becomes lighter when placed on the moon and fire flows like water in outer space.

It is because objects exist at a variety of different scales and because they are entangled in one another that something like politics – or, following Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, cosmopolitics – takes place and that all politics is essentially queer politics. Politics is what takes place when a *part* of an object rises up within *another* object and contests its status as a mere *element* of that object. As Rancière puts it,

...it is through the existence of this part of those who have no part, of this nothing that is all, that the community exists as a political community—that is, as divided by a fundamental dispute, by a dispute to do with the counting of the community's parts even more than of their "rights."²

Politics is not the social, nor is it governance. Rather, politics is that *moment* where “the part of no part,” that part that is not counted yet which nonetheless exists, appears and contests the mechanisms by which an assemblage counts and constitutes its elements.

It is for this reason that all genuine politics is queer politics. Politics is what takes place when something appears out of place or when that which should not appear appears within another object. The etymology of queer has it that the term appeared in the 1500s, denoting that which is,

“strange, peculiar, eccentric,” from Scottish, perhaps from Low Ger. (Brunswick dialect) *queer* “oblique, off-center,” related to Ger. *quer* “oblique, perverse, odd,” from O.H.G.

twerh “oblique,” from PIE base *twerk- “to turn, twist, wind” (related to thwart). The verb “to spoil, ruin” is first recorded 1812. Sense of “homosexual” first recorded 1922; the noun in this sense is 1935, from the adj.³

Increasingly queer theory has experienced a crisis revolving around what, precisely, it is about and whether it has an subject.⁴ This state of affairs should not, however, be seen as a crisis but as marking the essentially mobile and empty place of the political *as such*. If politics finds that it lacks a single theme and object, then this is because politics is essentially evental, marking the *contingency* of any social order, such that what occurs at this site is the appearance of an object that is uncounted by a larger-scale object or system. The political is the appearance of the “odd,” the in-apparent (from the standpoint of the larger scale object and its mechanisms of counting), of that which is out of place in a social system or larger scale object, and is that which turns and twists that larger scale object forcing re-organization and evolution. Politics always revolves around the appearance of that which does not appear. As such, politics marks the site of the volcanic anarchy that bubbles beneath any social organization, thereby announcing the contingency of that order. Queer should thus not be restricted to politics surrounding sexual orientations and gender - though we will see that there are essential reasons that queer theory first stumbled on these anarchic sites of twisting and oddness – but rather should be generalized to any process that is genuinely political whether it be the proletarian announcing itself, civil rights movements, suffrage movements, ecological movements, and so on. However, we require an account of just why politics is necessarily queer politics. Let us look a bit more closely at these issues of scale and entanglement to see why this is so.

While many things are *social*, nothing, in and of itself, is *political*. *Anything* can become a *site* of politics, but not *everything* is political.⁵ Rather, politics is an *event* that occurs under very specific circumstances and the procedures that arise from this event as a result of a *dis-relation* between larger and smaller-scale objects. It is only in this dis-relation, in this revelation of the absence of a relation where hitherto a relation was thought to exist, that politics takes place. As a consequence, politics is essentially rare. Much of what we often call politics is *governance* rather than politics. Governance consists of the manner in which a larger-scale object strives to maintain its structure or organization in its adventure across time and space by domesticating and regulating the elements of which it is composed. Governance consists of the mechanisms by which elements are counted and constituted within an assemblage of entities. Politics, by contrast, challenges the manner in which the larger-scale object counts or fails to count other objects, challenges the status of those objects that animate it as elements, instead announcing themselves as parts, and sets about either severing relations to this larger scale object, demolishing this relation, or reconfiguring it.

Objects and Dynamic Systems

The intelligibility of this thesis consists in understanding that the substantiality of objects does not consist in their materiality – though there are no objects that are not also material – but rather their status as dynamic systems. The class of objects is not restricted to chairs, stars, muskrats, computers, and things like burritos, but also consists of armies, workplaces, classrooms, movements, states, and a variety of other entities besides. If something like an

army is an object, then this is because it has an endo-relational structure defining relations between elements, such that the appearance of any particular element within it in a particular place or position has a low degree of probability. Unlike a crowd, the units that make up an army have distinct positions and identities with respect to one another (generals, majors, infantry, etc.), thereby indicating that the army has a low degree of entropy. As such, it constitutes a unity over and above its elements that constitutes their being as a substance or object. This unity, of course, must be maintained across time, fighting entropy and disintegration, and entities such as armies do this by perpetually producing and reproducing their elements and organization.

Objects are topologically malleable systems that are defined by their ongoing organization across time and space and their powers of acting, rather than any qualities they might currently manifest or materiality they might currently possess. In their article “Autopoiesis,” Maturana and Varela distinguish between two types of systems or objects: allopoietic machines and autopoietic machines.⁶ Allopoietic machines, objects, or systems are produced by something other than themselves and are objects that weakly maintain their existence across time and space. An asteroid, for example, is largely the result of gravitational forces that attracted various particles of matter to one another. It does not strive to maintain its existence with the particular organization or configuration that it possesses, but rather only maintains its organization through its internal atomic forces. If hit with sufficient force it breaks apart and does not strive to reproduce its past organization. As such, allopoietic objects do not actively stave off increases in entropy within themselves. Finally, allopoietic objects cannot initiate their own action. Rocks

do not produce their own local manifestations, but rather only produce the local manifestations they have as a result of being acted upon by other entities and intensities. For example, the qualities or local manifestations a rock possesses might result from the conditions of pressure and temperature under which it develops, generating this particular shape, this particular color, these particular crystalline patterns, and so on. These qualities or local manifestations are actualized in the rock by something other than the rock.

By contrast, autopoietic machines are,

...organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produce the components which: (i) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produce them; and (ii) constitute (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network.⁷

Where allopoietic machines are produced by something other than themselves, autopoietic machines produce themselves. Where allopoietic machines are indifferent to the continued maintenance and organization of their existence, autopoietic machines strive to maintain a particular organization. For example, if I am cut this wound does not simply persist but heals, and it heals in a way that reproduces the earlier organization of my body prior to being cut. Where allopoietic machines are constituted out of elements other than themselves (the particles out of which the asteroid is constructed, for example), autopoietic machines use matters other than themselves to

constitute their own elements or components. As Niklas Luhmann, deeply influenced by Maturana and Varela, puts it, "...element[s] [are] constituted as a unity only by the [autopoietic] system that enlists it as an element to use in its relations."⁸ All objects are either allopoietic or autopoietic machines.

Where Maturana and Varela restrict autopoietic machines to the domain of living entities such as wombats, Luhmann, in *Social Systems*, extends the domain of autopoietic objects to social systems (we could also include entities such as tornadoes and hurricanes under the umbrella of autopoietic systems). Let us take the example of a classroom to illustrate this point. Classes are entities, substances, or systems in their own right. They are neither the sum of their parts nor the bodies of which they are composed (students, the professor), nor reducible to any of the events that take place within them. Rather, the class as a class consists of a network of relations in which the *elements* that compose the class (students, professor) are simultaneously constituted by the class and constitute the class. The students constitute the professor and other students as an element in this system through their actions towards the professor and other students, and the professor constitutes the students as students through his or her actions towards the students. The class as a whole has a regulative and constraining effect on the individual students and the professor, and also constitutes these elements. Luhmann remarks that "...the unity of element... is not ontically pre-given."⁹ The elements of an object are not *intrinsic* features of that part, but rather "[t]he elements acquire quality only insofar as they are viewed relationally, and thus refer to one another."¹⁰ Thus there is no being that is *intrinsically* a professor or a student, there is no entity that is intrinsically an assignment or an

answer to a question posed in class, but rather these elements are only constituted as elements as a consequence of belonging to the system of the class and of relating to one another in particular ways. Finally, it is through the constant interaction of these elements that these elements are constituted as the elements that they are. It is through these interactions that the class maintains itself as *this* class across time and space. It is in this way that the class is a substance and a dynamic system.

Elements and Parts

It is crucial not to confuse *elements* in a system with objects. Objects necessarily have independent or autonomous existence such that their relations to other entities can be severed. Yet elements only ever exist as elements *for* a system. Nonetheless, systems must be built out of *something*. As Luhmann observes, we "...must distinguish between the *environment* of a system and *systems in the environment* of this system."¹¹ Insofar as allopoietic and autopoietic machines or systems are exhaustive of what exists, it follows that systems construct their elements out of *other* systems or autonomous objects. A professor and students might not exist independent of a class that constitutes them, but these elements are nonetheless constituted from *other* objects or systems; to wit, the persons or psycho-biological systems that come to occupy these roles.

Following Badiou's convention, I thus distinguish between the *elements* of a system and the *parts* of a system, or between membership and inclusion.¹² An element or a member of a set exists only for the system in question, and is defined relationally such that its being consists only in its relations to other elements in the system. This

is what I refer to as the "endo-consistency" of an object or system. Endo-consistency consists of the elements of a system or object, along with the way in which they are related to one another. The *parts* of a system, by contrast, are those *other* systems out of which a system constitutes its elements, are *autonomous* entities in their own right, and are always in *excess* of the elements that compose a larger-scale system. Mathematically there are always more *possible* relations among *parts* of a system than are admitted by the organization and *elements* in a system. As Hallward writes,

The elements of a national set can be distinguished [...] according to the subsets of tax-payers or prison inmates, social security recipients or registered voters, and so on. The elements of these subsets all belong to the national set, and in their "substance" remain indifferent to the count effected by any particular subset. To belong to the subset of French taxpayers has nothing to do with the substantial complexity of any individual taxpayer as a living, thinking person. Such elemental complexity is always held to be infinitely multiple, nothing more or less.¹³

The point here is that the systems or parts in the environment of another system can always go uncounted, thereby being completely unregistered by the system of which they are parts, always have more complex qualities than are recognized by the system (the class is indifferent to what the student had for dinner), and can be related in other ways not sanctioned by the larger scale system. For example, prior to the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving versus Virginia*, African-Americans and whites were prohibited from marrying. Both African-Americans and whites were *elements* of the U.S. social system, yet this particular way of combining or relating elements was

foreclosed by the social system. Put differently, an interracial couple could not be counted as an *element* in the U.S. social system, though at the level of *parts* such couplings could and did exist. Larger scale objects or systems thus strive to regulate and restrict the admissible relations that can occur between the elements that constitute them.

It is here that we encounter the volcanic anarchy that bubbles beneath any object or system. The *parts* of any system are always in excess of the *elements* recognized by any system in number, powers, qualities, and possible combinations. Not only are there always more parts than are counted as elements by a system – for example, in Hallward’s example above prison inmates might not be counted as elements by the national system despite the fact that they are parts – but there are always more ways of relating parts to form distinct elements than are recognized by the system. It is here that politics emerges, in this strife or *polemos* between elements and parts. Politics occurs at that precise moment where parts appear *qua* part, refusing and contesting the manner in which they have been counted or not counted as elements, and refusing the regulation of admissible relations from the standpoint of the larger scale object or system. Politics is the appearance of that which is not counted as an element by the system, of that which, from the standpoint of the system, does not exist, and is for this reason the appearance of the queer or odd. As Rancière argues, “[p]olitics arises from a count of community ‘parts,’ which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount.”¹⁴ A double count within a system would consist in counting some elements as counting for more than other elements as in the case of oligarchies where the wealthy count more than workers and the poor, or in sexist social structures where men count more than women, in theocracies where

believers count more than non-believers, or in racist societies where one group is counted more than others. In the case of politics borne of an unjust double count, certain elements are counted as elements belonging to the system or community, while nonetheless having less of a voice or say in those systems. By contrast, in the case of a miscount, certain *parts* are *included* in the system, but are not *elements* and *members* of the system. For example, illegal immigrants are parts of the U.S. social system but are not counted as elements of this system. They are included without belonging, and as such they exist without appearing. If the false count, the double count, and the miscount are the sole and only sites of the political, then this is because only the appearance of that which is uncounted and miscounted marks the anarchy beneath any organization, the contingency of any organization, that raises the question of how things ought to be organized altogether. Everything else is governance or the maintenance of elements. Only politics contests elements and their relations. Governance, by contrast, aims at the reproduction of elements and their relations. Governance and politics are thus antonyms.

Withdrawal, Distinctions, and Operational Closure

The rarity of politics arises from the way in which systems relate to their elements and environment. Every system both constitutes its own elements and their relation to one another and the unity of their environment. As Luhmann writes, “...the point of departure for all systems-theoretical analysis must be the *difference between system and environment*. Systems are oriented by their environment not just occasionally and adaptively, but structurally and they cannot exist without an

environment. They constitute and maintain themselves by creating and maintaining a difference from their environment, and they use their boundaries to regulate this difference.”¹⁵ This distinction between system and environment arises from the fact that the environment of a system is always more complex than the system itself. As a consequence, systems cannot establish a one-to-one correspondence between themselves and their environment. This entails that systems must be selective and that therefore every system involves risk. As Luhmann remarks, “[c]omplexity [...] means being forced to select; being forced to select means contingency; and contingency means risk.”¹⁶ Every system risks coming up against something in its environment that was not anticipated or that threatens to destroy it.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the environment of a system is like a container within which the system exists. The distinction between system and environment is drawn by the *system* itself. In other words, the distinction between system and environment is *self-referential* in that it is a distinction that the *system* itself draws.¹⁷ As a consequence, “[t]he environment receives its unity through the system and only in relation to the system.”¹⁸ For the sake of clarity it would here be helpful to distinguish between world and earth. World is the environment that a system or object *constitutes* and to which an object is open under conditions of operational closure. Earth, by contrast, would be what would exist regardless of whether or not any system existed or drew a distinction between system and environment.

The consequence of this is that systems never *directly* relate to other objects or systems that populate the earth. As Luhmann writes elsewhere, the “[...] distinction between

self-reference and other-reference cannot exist in the system’s environment [...] but rather only within the system itself.”¹⁹ In other words, the distinction between self-reference (reference to an event that transpires within the system) and other-reference (reference to events that occur outside the system) is 1) itself an event that takes place *within* the system, and 2) a distinction drawn by the system. For example, the distinction I draw between a dream and an event in waking life is itself something that takes place within me as a psycho-biological system. It is a distinction that *I* draw rather than a distinction that exists independent of me in the environment. The consequence of this is that there is no information transferred *between* systems, but rather systems constitute their own information as a result of irritations issuing from the environment. “There is no information that moves from without to within the system. For even the difference and the horizon of possibilities on the basis of which the information can be seen as a selection (that is, information) does not exist in the external world, but is a construct – that is, internal to the system.”²⁰ What counts as information is something constructed by the system in question. It is not something that exists out there in the world. Thus, for example, when the maintenance person appears to change a light bulb in the classroom, this event does not consist of an event or information *for* that system consisting of the *class*. As such, the appearance of the maintenance person does not lead the class to select a new system state.

In constructing information and making other-references to events transpiring in the environment, the system must draw distinctions. The ability for something to count as information or to make an other-reference requires a prior distinction. In order to indicate anything at all, a system

must first draw a distinction. Imagine a piece of paper covered by “x’s.” How do we indicate some x’s rather than others? We must first draw a distinction. Perhaps, for example, we draw a circle in the middle of the paper. This circle is the distinction and contains an inside and an outside, a marked space and an unmarked space. We can now indicate those x’s that fall within the circle, and those x’s that are outside the circle. Distinction is the manner in which a system both opens itself to its environment and the manner in which it constitutes its elements. In the case of a sports team, for example, it is the jersey that defines whether or not Tom is a member of the team, whereas Tom as a *part* that is the son of Paul is *irrelevant* to his status as an *element* of the team and thereby falls in the unmarked space. The shirt here functions as a marker of the distinction that constitutes Tom as a component or element of the team. The distinction does not exist out there in the world, but rather is the mechanism by which the system constitutes other systems in the world as elements of itself.

The drawing of a distinction as a way of relating to the environment and constituting elements generates what Luhmann calls “blind spots.” As Luhmann remarks, “[f]or every [system], the unity of the distinction [it] uses for the designation of the one (and not the other) side [of the distinction] serves as a blind spot...”²¹ The distinctions a system uses generates blind spots in two ways. First, what falls outside of the distinction becomes invisible to the system that draws the distinction. For example, in the case of the circle drawn on the piece of paper, the x’s outside the circle fall into darkness such that only the x’s in the circle are indicated. Second, as Luhmann will remark elsewhere, that systems cannot distinguish between “[...] the world as it is and the world as it is being observed

[...]”²² In other words, in *using* distinctions to make indications either within itself or in its environment, the distinction used becomes *invisible* to the system in question. This generates a sort of transcendental or optical illusion in which those properties that are effects of *the system* deploying the distinction come to be seen as properties of the *entities distinguished* themselves. For example, the system constituting the sports team sees “being-a-member” of the team as an *intrinsic* feature of the team members, rather than as resulting from how this system draws distinctions. As a consequence, the parts a system uses to constitute its elements get *reduced* to the markers by which the elements are counted and constituted as elements (e.g., “wearing-a-red-jersey”), such that other features of the parts are rendered invisible.

In light of the foregoing, it is now possible to see how parts of a system can be invisible from the standpoint of the system. Insofar as systems use distinctions to count and constitute elements, and insofar as these mechanisms of counting and constitution render features of parts not counted by the system invisible, parts can be included within a system without being members of a system. Tom *as* son of Paul is not counted by the sports team to which he belongs. Elements falling on the unmarked side of the distinction are uncounted within the system. This is the onticological version of what Graham Harman, in his object-oriented philosophy, refers to as “withdrawal.”²³ Harman argues that objects are withdrawn from one another such that they never directly relate to or encounter one another. Within the framework of onticology, “withdrawal” signifies that objects only ever relate to one another through system-specific distinctions and therefore never encounter each other *as such*. Insofar as objects are operationally closed with respect to one another they

are withdrawn from one another; and insofar as objects are withdrawn from one another it is possible for parts to be invisible from the standpoint of systems. *For systems* the indications rendered possible on the basis of the system's distinctions exhaust what constitutes reality.

Aesthetics and Distributions of the Sensible

It is clear that the mechanisms by which a system both counts and constitutes its elements and relates to its environment have a deep relation to the aesthetic. If this is the case, then this is because the manner in which elements become visible within a system or environment of a system are aesthetic in character. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze distinguishes between two senses of aesthetics: the being of the sensible and the theory of art.²⁴ The "being of the sensible" here refers to the *conditions* under which a particular form of sensibility is possible. Here Deleuze hearkens back to Kant's understanding of the "transcendental aesthetic" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁵ The transcendental aesthetic refers *not* to *what* we sense, but rather to that organization or structure that allows an entity to sense this or that. This organization is not itself something that is sensed, but is the condition under which it is possible to sense something. To understand this point, consider the bat which senses the world through sonar. When the bat senses the movement of a particular insect through a sound profile, this is *what* is sensed. By contrast, that organization of the bat's body that allows it to sense in this way is the "being of the sensible." Where Kant restricts his exploration of the being of the sensible to human forms of sensibility, Deleuze extends this domain to the exploration of any organism whatsoever. Thus there will be a different being of the

sensible, a different way of being open to their environments, for cats and electric eels. Moreover, for Deleuze, the various beings of the sensible will not be universal and *a priori* in the strong sense of being eternal and unchanging, but will be the result of a genesis. Bats had to *evolve* sonar as a way of being open to their environments. The fact that various beings of the sensible are the result of a genesis or evolution allows Deleuze to argue that aesthetics in the first sense of mere "sensibility" also converges on the second sense of aesthetics as the theory of art. Forms of openness to the environment are genuine creations analogous to art.

The being of the sensible is thus one half of *affect*. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines affect as "[...] the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections."²⁶ On the one hand, affect refers to the capacity to be *affected* or the manner in which a system or object is open to its environment. I, for example, cannot be affected in the same way a bat can be affected. This form of affect is the being of the sensible to which Deleuze refers. On the other hand, affect refers to the capacities of a system or object to *act*; its various powers of acting. Bats have the capacity to fly. I have the capacity to run. One of the key political questions is that of how it is possible for one system or object to affect another system or object under conditions in which the object it strives to affect is operationally closed or governed by distinctions that render it only selectively open to its environment.

The environment of a system refers not only to other systems *outside* the system, but also the *parts* a system draws on to constitute its elements. In constituting elements and

relating to events in its environment, a system's relation to parts and environment is conditional on a "being of the sensible," a transcendental aesthetic, that opens it to these internal and external environments. Rancière, in his work, has hit upon a similar idea in his work with his concept of the "distribution of the sensible." As Rancière writes,

I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution. Aristotle states that a citizen is someone who *has a part* in the act of governing and being governed. However, another form of distribution precedes this act of partaking in government: the distribution that determines those who have a part in the community of citizens.²⁷

The distribution of the sensible is that endo-relational structure or organization that define elements that belong to a system, how they are to be related to one another, and the sort of events possible within a system or object. The distribution of the sensible is thus not merely the endo-relational *structure* of the object, but also the *mechanisms* by which the object constitutes its elements and the events that occur within it. Marx, for example, in *Capital*, does not merely argue that *commodities* are the elements visible within a capitalist system, but explores the *mechanisms* by which objects are transformed into commodities and take on value.

The elements of a system and their relations are not *pre-given*, but must be *constituted as elements* from one moment to the next. Every autopoietic system faces the question of how to sustain its existence from moment to moment, of how to combat entropy, and must thus engage in all sorts of operations to reproduce itself across time. Returning to the example of Marx, if exchange, wage labor, and the reinvestment of capital *ceases* then commodities cease to exist and value disappears. Commodity labor and exchange are system *operations*, processes, by which commodities and values are constituted.²⁸ Likewise, in the classroom, all sorts of operations or processes must occur to constitute the professor as a professor and the students as students. These operations will include the way in which the professor addresses the students, the giving of assignments, the posing of questions, grading, the way in which students relate to the professor, the questions they ask her, providing assignments to be graded, and so on. These operations are not merely actions on the part of the students and the professor, but are mechanisms, *performances*, operations, by which the elements of the classroom are constituted and by which they come to relate in a particular way. When events occur in the classroom that deviate from these operations in some way or another, negative feedback sets in, steering the elements that compose this assemblage to returns to their proper relations. The professor that spends too much time talking about her weekend, for example, is politely asked by a student whether they will discuss such and such an aspect of the material today. Here the professor had shifted from her assigned role in the class, flattened relations by treating the students as peers, such that the students step in to channel her back in the direction of her proper role.

Objects must often enlist the agency of other objects in order to maintain themselves as the type of object they are. Here we can distinguish between dark objects, dim objects, bright objects, and rogue objects. A dark object is an object completely invisible to another system by virtue of falling in the blind spot of that other object's distinctions. From the standpoint of capitalism, for example, proletariat as the revolutionary class is a dark object. Dark objects are the *parts* of a system that do not themselves appear as *elements* in a system. Dim objects are objects that only dimly appear in a particular system. Dim objects appear in larger scale assemblages but are counted as only playing a marginal role in those systems. Bright objects are those objects counted as *elements* in a system. And finally, rogue objects are objects that circulate in and out of a variety of different systems or objects, perturbing them in a variety of ways, without being tied to any particular system.

Many objects must enlist rogue objects in order to reproduce themselves across time. This is seen, in particular, in the role that many *technologies* play in the constitution and reproduction of elements and their relations. Many technologies are not themselves counted as *elements* of the various social systems that populate the contemporary world, but are nonetheless *conditions* necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of these systems. Fiber optic cables, the internet, satellites, personal computers, televisions, etc., are all necessary conditions for relating human bodies distant from one another in time and space. If negentropic collectives are to be formed out of these human bodies as parts, technologies such as this are required to relate these bodies to one another. Absent this, the requisite organization required to form a unified system or operationally closed object cannot emerge to form the sort of unity required in order for something to count

as a substance. Likewise, in the absence of automobiles, roads, and highways, the distribution of bodies between the suburbs and the city characteristic of modern life cannot emerge. If objects like automobiles, satellites, fiber optic cables, the internet, etc., open up as many *possible* relations at the level of *parts* as they regulate and constrain at the level of *elements*, then this is because the effects of technology are never unilateral. Is it an accident that the sexual revolution occurred in the 60's when young people now had a "mobile bedroom" in the form of cars away from the prying eyes of their parents? The internet, personal computers, and smart phones played an important role in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, allowing for the formation of collective bodies different from those the Egyptian system sought to produce through mechanisms of the police, propaganda, and so on. Television cameras played a significant role in the Civil Rights and Peace Movements of the 60's by allowing the general public to witness events surrounding the oppressive exercise of power and the brutality of warfare. Rogue objects are thus double-edged swords that are often both necessary for the maintenance of certain objects or systems and that open possibilities that introduce entropy into these systems.

Distributions of the sensible code between noise and order through their distinctions and the operations that are governed through their distinctions. In previous social systems, for example, the homosexual is counted not as an *element* within the social system, but as *noise*. When the homosexual does appear in such social systems, he appears not as a viable *element* but as someone suffering from, perhaps, a *sickness* requiring *treatment*. That treatment then consists in a series of operations by which this "deviant" person is constituted as an element or through which their action is regulated and guided by

other elements in the community to occupy a sanctioned position as heterosexual element. The situation here differs little from the manner in which the body generates antibodies to regulate rogue organisms, cells, and viruses that enter the body. Such ways of relating to homosexuality persist today among many conservative Christian communities or macro-level objects. Thus, for example, when it was discovered that Ted Haggard, leader of the National Association of Evangelicals, was engaging in homosexual acts, he did not proclaim himself gay, but rather entered treatment to be cured of his “sin”. This treatment was a way of constituting him as a sanctioned and legitimate element within that autopoietic object.

Likewise, noise can consist of occurrences that aren’t merely unsanctioned forms of relations within a macro-level object, but can also consist of appearances or manifestations not counted or visible to the macro-level object at all. This occurs, for example, in the case of illegal immigrants that are *parts* of the macro-level object, but which are largely *invisible to* that macro-level object. In much the same way that I cannot sense the world through sonar, here the larger-scale object cannot “sense” or encounter these objects despite the fact that they are included in the social system (and often included as *necessary* elements for the social system to function in the way that system functions through their labor).

Queer Politics and Disidentification

From the foregoing, it is clear that two possibilities of politics are foreclosed: politics that is sometimes disparagingly referred to as “identity politics” and politics premised on the recognition of identities. The reason that

politics, as outlined here, cannot consist in the recognition of identities is that identities are the result of and the way in which a system counts *elements* within a system. Identities are the result of the mechanisms or operations by which elements and their relations are constituted by a system and by which sanctioned appearances or fields of visibility within a particular system are defined. Thus the following is a tautology: to be an identity is to be an element. Yet as we have seen in the foregoing, politics pertains to the appearance or manifestation of *parts* that are in excess of a system and withdrawn from a macro-scale object. Identities belong to a system of governance or the mechanisms by which parts are *constituted* as *elements*, whereas politics always pertains to *parts* that contest the endo-structure of macro-scale objects and that are not counted as elements within that distribution of the sensible. As such, all politics is an-archic insofar as it is the appearance of that which is not counted as well as the manifestation of unsanctioned relations.

Here we must proceed with care, for *parts* that appear at the site of the political might very well be counted as *elements* by the system in which they appear. The question then is how it is possible for something to *simultaneously* be a part that is *uncounted* within a macro-scale object *and* be an element within a macro-scale object? To understand how this is possible we must recall that elements are not merely isolated *units*, but that they are units consisting of regulative relations to other elements in a particular macro-level object. The appearance of a *part* in the site of the political is thus often the appearance of an entity that contests the manner in which it is counted as an element and the system of sanctioned relations that regulate it. Take the example of Rosa Parks. When, on December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks refuses to give up her

seat on the bus to a white person, she has transitioned from being an *element* in this social assemblage to being a *part* that appears at the site of the political. Parks' *act* simultaneously discloses the system of relations governing elements that belong to this social system (whites enjoy pride of place over blacks, blacks are to go to the back of the bus, etc.) and this social system's way of counting, organizing body, and the mechanisms by which these relations are produced (the bus driver's orders, the legal system that segregates bodies, the hisses of other white passengers and so on). Yet she also *disidentifies* herself as an *element*, by revealing that *other* relations are possible (egalitarian relations) and by contesting the miscount that constitutes blacks and whites as elements within this system. Rosa Parks refuses to obey this system of constituting elements and relating elements to one another.

In refusing to cede her place, the system of counting is thus contested and the volcanic anarchy of parts and their infinite possible relations beneath macro-scale objects is revealed. Something that is coded as impossible within this macro-scale object appears. This part where the elemental is contested is the moment of *subjectification*, and every subjectification involves *disidentification*. As Rancière observes, "[a]ny subjectification is a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where connection is made between having a part and having no part."²⁹ In refusing to cede her place, Parks challenges the naturalness of her place as a black person: that she belongs at the back of the bus.

Yet why should such moments of subjectification entail that the subject of such acts does not pre-exist their act?

As Rancière remarks, "[...] parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong. Before the wrong that its name exposes, the proletariat has no existence as a real part of society. What is more, the wrong it exposes cannot be regulated by way of some accord between the parties."³⁰ This is precisely because the parts that appear at the site of the political are precisely entities that do not exist from the standpoint of the larger-scale system. The political subject is therefore the *invention* of a *new entity* that transforms the larger-scale object or even attempts to destroy it, not the recognition of an entity that already existed. Rancière writes,

[p]olitical subjectification redefines the field of experience that gave to each their identity with their lot. It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of *doing*, of *being*, and of *saying* that define the perceptible organization of the community, the relationships between the places where one does one thing and those where one does something else, the capacities associated with this particular *doing* and those required for another... A political subject is not a group that "becomes aware" of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society. It is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience...³¹

The political subject is not an entity, but an operator and a set of operations that both constitute a new object – "the party" – and that reconfigure the relations among elements within a larger-scale object. If politics cannot consist in the recognition of identities according to the endo-consistency and operations of a larger-scale operation, then this is precisely because subject as operator of the site of an-anarchy among parts both constitutes a new entity and transforms the relations governing the higher-scale object.

If the subject of this politics is better called *queer* than, as Rancière names it, *proletariat*, then this is because this subject that appears where it should not appear contests the *naturalness* of the order underlying the larger-scale object and its assignment of roles and ways of doing. The queer is precisely that which appears unnatural, out of place, or as a violation of a particular natural order. The queer is precisely that “unnatural” an-archy of *nature* that bubbles beneath every “natural” order. As such, the queer is that which reveals the possibility of parts to always relate *otherwise* than the mechanisms that constitute them as elements would prescribe. In this regard, the politics of the proletariat within a Marxist framework, feminist politics, environmental politics, animal rights politics, disabilities politics, etc., are equally “queer” for all these subjectifications reveal the excess of parts that are uncounted. If queer theory and politics initially stumbled on issues of gender and sexual orientation, then this is because, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, the libidinal is not merely one domain among others with respect to autopoietic systems, but *simultaneously* marks the volcanic anarchy of parts dwelling within the elements of autopoietic systems *and* one of the primary sites through which social systems reproduce their organization among elements through assigning roles to genders, constituting genders, forming libidinal attachments to various identities, institutions, parties, religions, and so on.³² What is important is that the political subject is that site and its operations that upset these mechanisms of reproduction and that produce a new form of organization. In this regard, the political process does not consist in a transition from dark objects to bright objects, but rather in the transition from dark objects to *rogue objects*. For it is in the appearance of rogue objects that bright objects are either reconfigured or destroyed.

Who Can Speak?

All that remains is the question of *who* can constitute a subject. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett observes that,

When asked in public whether he thought that an animal or a plant or a drug or a (nonlinguistic) sound could disrupt the police order [the distribution of the sensible], Rancière said no: he did not want to extend the concept of the political that far; nonhumans do not qualify as participants in a demos; the disruption effect must be accompanied by the desire to engage in reasoned discourse.³³

For Rancière a political subject must always be a *human* object. However, here Rancière seems to both involve himself in a contradiction and undermine the most attractive feature of his political philosophy. On the one hand, Rancière seems to involve himself in a contradiction insofar as the whole point of his opposition between the distribution of the sensible and the political subject is that the site of politics or speech is *contested* such that it is marked by the appearance of a part that, from the standpoint of the larger-scale object, is *incapable* of speaking yet that still manages to speak. Yet in claiming that *only humans* speak, Rancière decides *a priori* what constitutes a political subject. However, when we talk about minorities, women, the proletariat, “the mad,” etc., from the standpoint of the dominant regime of the sensible, we are talking precisely of entities that have been coded as incapable of speech, as *inhuman*, from the standpoint of the dominant object. The mad are coded as incapable of speech because they lack *logos*, women and minorities because they lack reason, workers because they cannot simultaneously devote themselves to their labor and engage in public discourse, and for this reason, the

distribution of the sensible argues, they are in need of being governed just as a child requires parents to govern them. Yet this is precisely what politics contests.

On the other hand, the most attractive feature of Rancière's political thought is that we never know *a priori* who and what is capable of speaking and participating. Women, people with "alternative sexualities", the mad, cyborgs, computers, whales? We do not know. The parts that compose a larger scale object are always what Timothy Morton has called "strange strangers."³⁴ From the standpoint of elements, there is always something inscrutable in their withdrawnness that refuses to be reduced to an element. Yet if we never know what part can suddenly appear and speak, there seems to be no reason to restrict the domain of political subjects to the *human*. Indeed, any part, human or otherwise, can rise up within an assemblage or larger-scale object and force its reconfiguration, the disconnection of certain elements and new connections among elements. These moments where nonhuman agents such as cane toads, natural gas leaks produced through fracking, and hurricanes can rise up and disrupt the orderly auto-reproduction of systems look suspiciously like the agencies of *political subjects*.

And this, perhaps, is the queerest dimension of the politics advocated by onticology: In a resolutely posthumanist turn, onticology refuses to restrict the political subject to the human. We do not know *a priori* what entities, what parts, human and nonhuman, might come to occupy the an-archic site of the political. In an age increasingly dominated by ecological crisis and technological transformation, this queer posthumanism is needed more than ever.

Notes:

1. For a detailed treatment of the properties of objects, cf. Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011), chapters 4-5.
2. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.
3. Online Etymology Dictionary, "Queer," <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=queer>.
4. For a discussion of this crisis and its implications, cf. Michael O'Rourke, "The Afterlives of Queer Theory," in *Continent*, Volume 1, No. 2 (2011): 102-116.
5. I develop the eventual nature of politics and ethics in "The Ethics of the Event: Deleuze and Ethics without *Αρχή*," in *Deleuze and Ethics*, eds. Nathan Jun and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 21-43.
6. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, "Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living", in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), 77-84.
7. *Ibid.*, 78-79.
8. Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 22.
9. *Ibid.*, 21-22.
10. *Ibid.*, 21.
11. *Ibid.*, 17.
12. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), chapter 7.1.
13. Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 85.
14. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6.
15. Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 16-17.
16. *Ibid.*, 25.
17. *Ibid.*, 13.
18. *Ibid.*, 17.
19. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.
20. Niklas Luhmann, "The Cognitive Program of Constructivism and the Reality That Remains Unknown," in *Theories of Distinction*:

- Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*, ed. William Rasch (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 135.
21. Nicklas Luhmann, "Identity—What or How?" in *Theories of Distinction*, 115.
 22. Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 11.
 23. Cf. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002). "Onticology" is the name for my particular ontology as developed in *The Democracy of Objects*, whereas "object-oriented philosophy" is the name for Harman's metaphysics. "Object-oriented ontology," by contrast, refers to any ontology that affirms the independent existence of objects.
 24. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 68.
 25. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer and Allen w. Wood, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Parts 1-2.
 26. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, Michael L. Morgan, trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 278.
 27. Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics," in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.
 28. For an account of the ontological status of operations within an object-oriented ontology framework cf. Ian Bogost, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), chapter 1. Ian Bogost and I are largely in accord with respect to how objects constitute themselves as unities through operations.
 29. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.
 30. *Ibid.*, 39.
 31. *Ibid.*, 40.
 32. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
 33. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 106.
 34. Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Jelisaveta
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***Unthinkable*: Ethico-Political Fiction in the Present**

The term *unthinkable* usually refers to the incapability of being conceived or considered, to something that escapes symbolization and representation, to something that is not comparable or that cannot be believed; it can also mean the incredible; inconceivable or unimaginable; extremely improbable in a way that goes against common sense. Unthinkable is what is beyond common sense, rationality and generally accepted norms of thinking and doing. Unthinkable, thus, equals to non-normative, non-legal, or even to non-constitutional. Unthinkable is something that cannot find its own name and its own meaning.

In other words, it might also mean that thinking as such makes and reproduces the normativity - thinking *is* normativity. Does it mean that we *can* think only about the things that we already know? How do we think of change? How do we conceive the political? How do we think the unthinkable?

The main idea here is to try to point to the ways in which the category such as “unthinkable” binds morality, ideology, thinking and politics as a direct embodiment of general interests in order to preserve the status quo of the

existing/dominant social order. As a result, today, almost everything appears as thinkable – the horrors and tortures, the end of life on earth, market oriented everyday living, proprietary structures in capitalism, the militarization of the world, the militarization of the concept of humanity etc. The only “unthinkability” we can think of in our contemporary world is the understanding of the notion of the political as necessarily related to continuous possibility of change.

The movie *Unthinkable* (2010), made by Gregor Jordan, opens up a set of questions on the status of what is un/thinkable in relation to the dominant moral values of our time. Let us remind ourselves of the story: A convert to Islam, Yusuf, sends the U.S. government a tape showing him in three storage rooms, each of which may contain a nuclear bomb set to detonate in less than a week. Helen Brody, an FBI agent in L.A is tasked with finding the bombs while a CIA “consultant,” known as H, interrogates the suspect who has allowed him to be caught. Yusuf, whose wife and children have left him and disappeared, seems to know exactly what the interrogation will entail. Even as H uses torture over Brody’s objection, the suspect doesn’t crack.

One of the most striking scenes in the movie relates to the moment when the official in charge of the operation demands that H brings Yusuf's children back in for further interrogation. H demands that Brody brings the children back in, because her decency will give him the moral approval that he needs to do the "unthinkable."

Agent Brody: *Just do what you have to do!*

H: *What I have to do agent Brody is – unthinkable. Bring me the children.*

In this highly moralized, but also militant, violent and terrifying situation, what appears as "unthinkable" is to harm the children and everyone agrees on that. Let us try to read this scene more carefully: what is actually "unthinkable" (one man torturing the other with the moral approval of a decent person) appears as rather thinkable and acceptable for a "greater" cause - finding the bombs and thus protecting and saving thousands, maybe millions of lives, with no doubt some of them being children (if it's not enough to simply say "lives"). Yet, does it mean that all lives are not of the same worth? Should we sort them according to age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc?

I would like to claim that it is a purely moralistic question that this scene evokes, and as it is the case with all moralistic questions, the answer is already pre-defined, that is to say - **there is no possibility of thinking which actually depoliticizes the situation.** Even more so, this situation defines the very limits of the logic of humanity. There is a social consensus that such an appeal to protect innocent children is impossible to refuse. Of course, this social consensus is not related to any particular child as such but to the inscription of the figure of the innocent child into the socio-symbolic structure; its function is purely representative.

Thus, the innocent child represents the helpless victim; a victim that needs to be in the scene in order to preserve the idea of moral and/or social order that needs to be protected. Nevertheless, what remains unquestionable is the logic of the scene as such (which is, let me repeat it, violent, militant and terrifying). In other words, the moral and ideological presuppositions embedded in the scene, which are functioning through the complex web of state regulatory mechanisms are based on **the idea that one has to die for the law that regulates our tradition, our very social substance.** Perhaps this could explain the fact that what defines our understanding of the political is almost always related to violence, war and various kinds of exclusions and enmity. Thus, a war appears as a proper stage for this culture of sacrificing life, while simultaneously veiling these very mechanisms of sacrifice and violence, and thus entails and sustains the illusion of order's unquestioned phallic impenetrability, in the name of its perpetual reproduction and maintenance.

This sort of logic that relies on morally and ideologically unquestionable and unthinkable presuppositions, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, as well as the figure of a child as the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the phantasmical beneficiary of every future political intervention.¹

The figure of pure innocence (child) serves to prove its superiority over the corrupt and violent world. As we might imagine, true corruption does not reside in any particular situation perceived as such, but in the "innocent gaze" which perceives corruption everywhere. Even if our efforts and values have failed, this figure of innocence is a guarantee of the success that will come in the form

of experiencing the unthinkable and unquestionable: the potential of something that could have been.

Contrary to what we usually think, we tend to think of the past as of a site that is ideologically contaminated. It appears however, I would argue, that the most ideologically contaminated sites are the various discourses on the future that bear the logic of the present understanding of the political realm as a guarantee of status quo. This calls for the preservation and maintenance of the acknowledged politics and already existing socio-ideological order, an order that proves as the militarisation of thinking and politics. Such “self-evident” affirmation of values that are unquestioned and unquestionable impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such; it appears that its logic is in preserving the absolute privilege of the existing dominant social order and its normative aspects by rendering the unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a resistance to this, the “unquestionable” organizing principles of social relations,² some of them being a family, nation, religion, but also patriarchy, heteronormativity, etc.

Let us try, for a moment, to think the “unthinkable.” Let us be traitors, let us not be either just or right, let us not have our proper place we are identified with. Let us try to create a space for ethico-political fiction in the present. Here is the fiction: Pride parade for heterosexuals. What is it in this idea that makes it seem “unthinkable?” What is it that makes us feel that such an event appears as senseless in the world we live in? What makes heterosexuality to exist as the normative principle of social relations is precisely its unquestionable, unthinkable character. Try to imagine a group

of heterosexuals wandering around the streets trying to mark a political space for their sexual preferences and choices; For their lifestyles; For their right to be different. What could be wrong with this scene? Can we imagine the very norm questioning, re-thinking and re-claiming its own normativity? The true target of this, as I called it, ethico-political fiction in the present, would be nothing else but the power itself, the demand for the power to open up the space for its different functioning. This would imply the creation of political public spaces which would be self-referent, self-questioning by the very means of marking its unmarked political position, making visible its own mystified and closeted political histories, its own status of normativity, the mechanisms of power relations’ normalization. It demands from us to make fiction necessity and to fictionalize, on the other side, order’s unquestioned status of being reality, to invent new relationships, new possibilities of being-together, solidarity and sharing that is not based on protection and mirroring and self-reflective narcissistic claims of the identity, etc. It demands, I would argue, thinking and enacting modes and practices of communality which would be capable of engaging us in order to question the power regimes as such and open futurity towards differences not yet anticipated in the normalized frames of present political horizons.

It seems that it is precisely the “unthinkability,” which serves the present power structures and the dominant social discourses as a law and as the last line of defense of the morality and humanity.

As Slavoj Žižek, who writes about the ways in which we, as individuals, participate in this kind of thinking and the preservation of the *status quo* has put it:

Let me go directly to the point: It is a well known fact that the close-the-door button in most elevators is a totally dysfunctional placebo which is placed there just to give individuals the impression that they are somehow participating, contributing to the speed of the elevator journey. When we push this button the door closes in exactly the same time as when we just press the floor button without speeding up the process by pressing also the close-the-door button. This extreme and clear case of fake participation is, I claim, an appropriate metaphor [for] the participation of individuals in our post-modern political process. We are all the time asked by politicians to press such buttons. But some things are excluded. What is excluded from this participatory, multi-culturalist, tolerant democracy?³

I would like to claim that what is excluded from the participatory, multi-culturalist, tolerant democracy of our times is precisely the thinking of the unthinkable; the non-normative, non-legal, non-constitutional thinking which does not reproduce the already known, but rather a kind of thinking that opens up a space for a different functioning of power, for a change. Excluding the thinking of the unthinkable, excluding the possibility of the change as a necessary site of the political, makes us impotent participants of the scene in which it is unthinkable to think of the improvement of life within our communities; or even more, to improve the act of life itself with all its complexities.

Another ethico-political fiction in the present: try to imagine that the existing institutions are doing all that they are actually supposed to do. That the juridical system is really about justice. That the medical system is really about healing and helping people instead of the perpetual production of (new) diseases. That the economic system

is about expanding possibilities and improving different lifestyles for everyone, and not about exclusively serving the interests of certain elite groups. Try to imagine that human rights organizations are really dealing with improving the lives of those who are suffering instead of just managing them.

One of the important conclusions that one can draw from Žižek's paragraph is an explanation of the way the ideology functions; those we may consider as belonging to the "system" don't necessarily see themselves as constituting to the status quo. They don't know it but they do it. In fact, we may even say that ideology has succeeded when it becomes invisible to those who practice it without being able to articulate exactly why they do so. This offers the following logic: don't think, be active, be engaged, *do* things. This suggests a logic of the conformity of not thinking. In other words, since we have fulfilled our moral duties, we can forget about them and we don't have to think (critically) about them.

As Hannah Arendt has written extensively on, thinking is necessarily related to ethics and politics; not thinking leads to genocide. For Arendt, thinking relates precisely to its non-normative, non-institutional aspect; thinking means plurality against every homogenous, institutionalized and dominant logic. According to her, thinking is always already critical since it can't be reduced to any particular law itself; even if it is the law of preserving and maintaining the existing social order.

In her lecture on Hannah Arendt in Sussex, entitled *Cohabitation, and the Dispersion of Sovereignty*,⁴ Judith Butler explored Arendt's concept of thinking as a splitting of Kant's Transcendental Unity of Apperception into

a fragmented, plural individual whose multiple voices are consistently in dialogue. So, there is a duty opposed to thinking, opposed to this structure of dialogue. Thinking is thus always already plural and it maintains plurality of the self as well as the plurality of the community. Thinking that is related to ethics and politics should stake its claim to the realm which makes “ethics and politics” unthinkable; the realm beyond the field within which ethics and politics as we know them appear; and so beyond the overall monolithic demands for preserving the religious and moral foundations of thinking as such. Deconstruction as a way of thinking (about the unthinkable) begins with identification of what goes without questioning. Therefore, its true task is not in resolving the already identified problems, moral or any other dilemmas, but in reflecting and reformulating them as well as rethinking the ways in which we perceive the existing problems of our time. The process of deconstruction marks the “other” side of thinking: the side that is beyond the all “thinkable” sides. Thus, the ethics and politics – being the question of the relationship with the other – are always already about the unthinkable, and it is this unthinkability that inextricably binds them to thinking.

Notes:

1. See, Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004).
2. See, *ibid.*
3. Slavoj Žižek in the lecture “Human Rights and its Discontents,” held at The European Graduate School, November 16, 1999, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/human-rights-and-its-discontents>
4. The lecture was held at University of Sussex, at February 2011, as a part of the Hannah Arendt Lecture in Modern Jewish Thought series.

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- Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Durham: Duke University Press Books.
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**II Corporeal Resistances
and the
Micropolitics of Affect**

Brian
Massumi

Affect in the Key of Politics*

Felt Transition

The notion of affect takes many forms. To get anywhere with the concept, you have to retain the manyness of its forms. It's not something that can be reduced to one thing. Mainly because it's not a thing. It's an event, or a dimension of every event. What interests me in the concept is that if you approach it respecting its variety, you are presented with a field of questioning, a problematic field, where the customary divisions that questions about subjectivity, becoming, or the political are usually couched in do not apply. My starting point is the basic Spinozan definition of affect, which is an "ability to affect or be affected." Right off the bat, this cuts transversally across a persistent division, probably *the* most persistent division. Because the ability to affect and the ability to be affected are two facets of the same event. One face is turned towards what you might be tempted to isolate as an object, the other towards what you might isolate as a subject. Here, they are two sides of the same coin. There is an affectation, and it is happening in-between. You

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start with the in-betweenness. No need to detour through well-rehearsed questions of philosophical foundations in order to cobble together a unity. You start in the middle, as Deleuze always taught, with the dynamic unity of an event.

There is a second part of the Spinozian definition taken up by Deleuze that is not cited as often. It is that a power to affect and be affected governs a transition, where a body passes from one state of capacitation to a diminished or augmented state of capacitation. This comes with the corollary that the transition is *felt*. A distinction is asserted between two levels, one of which is feeling and the other capacitation or activation. But the distinction comes in the form of a connection. This separation-connection between feeling and activation situates the account between what we would normally think of as the self on the one hand and the body on the other, in the unrolling of an event that's a becoming of the two together.

This already yields a number of terms that can be put to use and developed. First, the feeling of the transition as the body moves from one power of existence to another has certain separability from the event it is bound

up with, by virtue of its distinction from the capacitation activating the passage. What is felt is the *quality* of the experience. The account of affect will then have to directly address forms of experience, forms of life, on a qualitative register. Second, the felt transition leaves a trace, it constitutes a memory. Consequently, it can't be restricted to that one occurrence. It will return. It has already returned, in some capacity. It was already part of a series of repetitions, to the extent that the body has a past.

That's the third point: the capacitation of the body as it's gearing up for a passage towards a diminished or augmented state is completely bound up with the lived past of the body. That past includes what we think of as subjective elements, such as habits, acquired skills, inclinations, desires, even willings, all of which come in patterns of repetition. This doesn't make the event any less rooted in the body. The past that the body carries forward in serial fashion includes levels we think of as physical and biological, such as genetic inheritance and phylogenesis. So there's a reactivation of the past in passage toward a changed future, cutting transversally across dimensions of time, between past and future, and between pasts of different orders. This in-between time or transversal time is the time of the event. This temporality enables, and requires you, to rethink all of these terms – bodily capacitation, felt transition, quality of lived experience, memory, repetition, seriation, inclination -- in dynamic relation to each other.

Relation

If there is one key term, that's it: relation. When you start in-between, what you're in the middle of is a region of

relation. Occurrent relation, because it's all about event. Putting the terms together, you realize straight away that the relational event will play out differently every time. In repeating, it takes up the past differently. In taking up the past differently, it creates new potentials for the future. The region of occurrent relation is a point of potentiation. It is where things begin anew. Where things begin anew is where they were already present in tendency.

If there are two key terms, tendency comes next. The patterns of movement through these affective transitions are weighted for a particular body or particular situations, as more or less accessible, more or less ready to go. There's an activation not only of the body, but of the body's tendencies, as they move into and through situations. In taking account of this, you get a relational complex, a nexus, rather than a particular definition. The base definition – to affect and be affected, in a felt passage to a varied power of existence – opens a problematic field rather than ending in a particular solution. You are left with a matrix of variation that forces you to rethink the terms involved each time. You have to regenerate them to use them. It's not a general definition that you can apply. It's not a structure you can presuppose. On the other hand, it's also not the case that you're starting without any presuppositions. To start in the middle is precisely not to perform a phenomenological reduction. It is to accept the challenge to regenerate your terms, and their cohesion to each other, at each repeated step in your thinking through the nexus. Rather than a definition, what you have is a proposition, less in the logical sense than in the sense of an invitation. Starting from affect in this way is an invitation for an indefinitely constructive thinking of embodied, relational becoming. The emphasis on embodiment, variation, and relation gives it an immediately political aspect.

Politics and Pure Experience

Everything re-begins, in a very crowded, overpopulated world. Even one body alone is pre-populated - by instincts, by inclinations, by teeming feelings and masses of memories, conscious and nonconscious, with all manner of shadings in between. Even one body alone is political. The question is always “how:” how to move that crowding into a new constitution, the constitution of a becoming.

Calling affect, or that felt moment of bodily moving on, calling that intersubjective is misleading if intersubjective is taken to mean that we start from a world in which there are already subjects that are preconstituted, or a pre-given structure of subject positions ready for subjects to come occupy. What is in question is precisely the emergence of the subject, its primary constitution, or its reemergence and reconstitution. The subject of an experience emerges from a field of conditions which are not that subject yet, where it is just coming into itself. Those conditions are not yet necessarily even subjective in any normal sense. Before the subject, there’s an in-mixing, a field of budding relation too crowded and heterogeneous to call intersubjective. It’s not at a level where things have settled into categories like subject and object. It’s the level of what William James called pure experience. When I say that it all comes back to the body, I don’t mean the body as a thing apart from the self or subject. I mean that the body *is* that region of in-mixing from which subjectivity emerges. It is the coming together of the world, for experience, in a here – and - now prior to any possibility of assigning categories like subject or object. That affective region we were talking about is not in-between in the intersubjective sense. And it’s not intentional in the sense of already carrying a subject - object polarity.

It’s a brewing, the world stirring. It’s a coming event, through which such categories will return. Their rearing depends on the event. It’s not the event that depends on their already being in place.

Microperception

The event’s rearing comes as a shock. Affect for me is inseparable from the concept of shock. It doesn’t have to be a drama. It’s really more about micro - shocks, the kind that populate every moment of our lives. For example a change in focus, or a rustle at the periphery of vision that draws the gaze toward it. In every shift of attention, there is an interruption, a momentary cut in the mode of onward deployment of life. The cut can pass unnoticed, striking imperceptibly, with only its effects entering conscious awareness as they unroll. This is the onset of the activation I was referring to earlier. I’d go so far as to say that this onset of experience is by nature imperceptible.

This is one way of understanding “microperception,” a concept of great importance to Deleuze and Guattari. Microperception is not smaller perception, it’s a perception of a qualitatively different kind. It’s something that is felt without registering consciously. It registers only in its effects. According to this notion of shock, there is always a commotion under way, a “something doing” as James would say. There is always a something-doing cutting in, interrupting whatever continuities are in progress. For things to continue, they have to re-continue. They have to re-jig around the interruption. At the instant of re-jigging, the body braces for what will come. It in-braces, in the sense that it returns to its potential for more of life to come, and that potential is immanent to its own arising.

You can sometimes feel the in-bracing itself, most noticeably in startles or frights. Before you can even consciously recognize what you're afraid of, or even feel that it is yourself that is the subject of the feeling, you are catapulted into a feeling of the frightfulness of the situation. It only dawns on you in the next instant that you'd better figure out what might have done the catapulting, and what you should do about. It is only then that you own the feeling as your own, and recognize it as a content of your life, an episode in your personal history. But in the instant of the affective hit, there is no content yet. All there is the affective quality, coinciding with the feeling of the interruption, with the kind of felt transition I talked about before. That affective quality is all there is to the world in that instant. It takes over life, fills the world, for an immeasurable instant of shock. Microperception is this purely affective rebeginning of the world.

Microperception is bodily. There is no fright, or any affect for that matter, without an accompanying movement in or of the body. This is the famous James-Lange thesis. In fact, the thesis goes further, so far as to say that this bodily commotion is what an emotion *is*. James calls it emotion, but at this level it is what we're calling affect. The James-Lange thesis has been widely criticized as reductive, but this is to misunderstand it. Because the body, in this eventful rebeginning, carries tendencies reviving the past and already striving toward a future. In its commotion are capacities reactivating, being primed to play out, in a heightening or diminishing of their collective power of existence. The body figures here as a cut in the continuity of relation, filled with potential for re-relating, with a difference. Microperceptual shock is like a re-cueing of our bodily powers of existence. Here, the body is what Peirce calls a "material quality:" a coming

quality of experience that is being actively lived - in before it's actually lived out. It's lived - in in intensity, in a kind of existential agitation, a poisoning or posturing for the coming event, a kind of recoil, not to withdraw from the world, but rather to brace for it again, and for how else it will be.

The world in which we live is literally made of these reinaugural microperceptions, cutting in, cueing emergence, priming capacities. Every body is at every instant in thrall to any number of them. A body is a complex of in-bracings playing out complexly and in serial fashion. The tendencies and capacities activated do not necessarily bear fruit. Some will be summoned to the verge of unfolding, only to be left behind, unactualized. But even these will have left their trace. In that moment of interruptive commotion, there's a productive indecision. There's a constructive suspense. Potentials resonate and interfere, and this modulates what actually eventuates. Even what doesn't happen has a modulatory effect. Whitehead had a word for this. He called it "negative prehension." It's a somewhat paradoxical concept. It refers to an un-felt feeling entering positively into the constitution of an experience by dint of its active exclusion from it. The concept of affect is tied to the idea of modulation occurring at a constitutive level where many somethings are doing, most of them un-felt. Or again, felt only in effect. No less real for passing un-felt.

Micropolitics

Say there are a number of bodies indexed to the same cut, primed to the same cue, shocked in concert. What happens is a collective event. It's distributed across those bodies.

Since each body will carry a different set of tendencies and capacities, there is no guarantee that they will act in unison even if they are cued in concert. However different their eventual actions, all will have unfolded from the same suspense. They will have been attuned – differentially – to the same interruptive commotion. “Affective attunement” – a concept from Daniel Stern – is a crucial piece to the affective puzzle. It is a way of approaching affective politics that is much more supple than notions more present in the literature of what’s being called the “affective turn,” like imitation or contagion, because it finds difference in unison, and concertation in difference. Because of that, it can better reflect the complexity of collective situations, as well as the variability that can eventuate from what might be considered the “same” affect. There is no sameness of affect. There is affective difference in the same event. Reactions to fear, to that classic example again, vary wildly, and even vary significantly at different times in the same individual’s life.

Politics, approached affectively, is an art of emitting the interruptive signs, triggering the cues that attune bodies while activating their capacities differentially. Affective politics is inductive. Bodies can be inducted into, or attuned to, certain regions of tendency, futurity, and potential, they can be induced into inhabiting the same affective environment, even if there is no assurance they will act alike in that environment. A good example is an alarm, a sign of threat or danger. Even if you conclude in the next instant that it’s a false alarm, you will have come to that conclusion in an environment that is effectively one of threat. Others who have heard the alarm may well respond differently, but they will be responding differently together, as inhabitants of the same affective environment. Everyone registering the alarm

will have been attuned to the same threat event, in one way or another. It is the sum total of the different ways of being interpellated by the same event that will define what it will have been politically. The event can’t be fully predetermined. It will be as it happens. For there to be uniformity of response, other factors must have been active to pre-channel tendencies. Politics of conformity pivoting on the signalling of threat, like the politics that held sway during the Bush administration, must work on many levels and at many rhythms of bodily priming to ensure a relative success. And again, there will be minor lines that won’t be emphasized or come out into relief or be fully enacted but that everyone will have felt in that unfeeling way of negatively prehending. Those are left as a reservoir of political potential. It is a potential that is immediately collective. It’s not a mere possibility, it’s an active part of the constitution of that situation, it’s just one that hasn’t been fully developed, that hasn’t been fully capacitated for unfolding. This means that there are potential alter - politics at the collectively in - braced heart of every situation, even the most successfully conformist in its mode of attunement. You can return to that reservoir of real but unexpressed potential, and re - cue it. This would be a politics of micro - perception: a micropolitics. The Obama campaign’s recueing of fear toward hope might be seen as targeting that micropolitical level, interestingly, through macro-media means.

Even in the most controlled political situation, there’s a surplus of unacted - out potential that is collectively felt. If cued into, it can remodulate the situation. As Deleuze and Guattari liked to say, there is no ideology and never was. What they mean by that is no situation is ever fully predetermined by ideological structures or codings. Any account paying exclusive attention to that level is fatally

incomplete. No situation simply translates ideological inculcations into action. There's always an event, and the event always includes dimensions that aren't completely actualized, so it's always open to a degree, it's always dynamic and in re-formation. To be in effect, ideological predeterminations have to enter the event and *take* effect. They have to reassert themselves, to make themselves effectively ingredient to the event. Their effectiveness is always an accomplishment, a renewed victory, and what needs to be accomplished can fail. Micropolitics, affective politics, seeks the degrees of openness of any situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment. Just modulating a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility is an alter-accomplishment.

Aesthetic Politics

Even though affect necessarily begins with and returns us to shock, shock mastery is not at all what we're after, I don't think. How can "we" master what forms us? And reforms us at each instant, before we know it? But that is not to say that we're impotent before ontopower. Quite the contrary, our lives are capacitated by it. We live it, the power of existence that we are expresses it.

For many, this conjures up concerns about fascism, and the critique of fascism in the post-war period created a mistrust of any form of affective politics. I agree that the potential for fascism is there, but I don't agree that it's inherent to affective politics. The mistrust of affect seems to come from seeing affect as a primitive stimulus – response system. I connect it instead to priming, which does not have the linear cause – effect structure of

stimulus - response, but has to do instead with modulation, which has to do with interference and resonance, which are nonlinear. Stimulus - response is a limit case. It's that case of a habit that has become a reflex, lost its adaptive power, its powers of variation, its force of futurity, that has ceased to be the slightest bit surprised by the world. It's a tired habit that has come as close to being an efficient cause as a power of repetition can get. It has let go of the "quasi" in its causality. There is also a sense in the critiques of affective politics as fascist that nonconscious process is an absence of thought. I follow Deleuze and Guattari in saying that nonconscious process is the birth of thought. It is germinal thought, moved by the force of time to express powers of existence in coming action.

From the critical theory point of view, I just compound the sin, because I think that advocating affective politics is advocating aesthetic politics. Aesthetic politics is often also thought to be synonymous with fascism. I think about the connection between affective politics and aesthetic politics in terms of Whitehead's idea of "contrast." Contrasts are tendential unfoldings that are held together in the same situation. They are alternate termini that come together in the instant, even though their actual unfoldings are mutually exclusive. Their mutual exclusiveness is a kind of creative tension. It is the contrasts between termini that interfere and resonate, and modulate what comes. The specious present is the drop of experience that is one with that unfolding. It is the feeling of the resolution of the tension, as the event plays itself out, for the process to then start all over again. If thought is the effective presence of what is not actually present, a terminus is an element of thought. Then multiple termini together are an intensification of thought. The specious

present feels this intensity of thinking pass into action. Normally the intensity itself is overshadowed by the effectiveness of the action it passes into. Whitehead defines the aesthetic in terms of this intensity of contrasts. An aesthetic act brings this contrastive intensity out from under the shadow of action's instrumentality or functional aim. It brings the contrastive intensity of active potential into the specious present as such, to stand alone, with no other value than itself. The aesthetic act extends the creative tension of contrast that characterizes the emergence of every action. It prolongs the suspension of the cut, the commotion of interference and resonance, gives it duration, so that it passes the threshold of perceptibility and is consciously felt as potential. This prevents terminus from being an automatic feed forward to the end, like a reflex response to a stimulus. Resolution is suspended. The termini in play remain virtual ends. Their mutual exclusivity is still informing the situation, contributing to what it might be, but the tension doesn't have to resolve itself to be consciously felt and thought. Aesthetic politics is irresolute. It's the thinking - feeling of the virtual incompleteness of definitive action.

This might not sound political, at least in the way it's usually meant. But it is, because the virtuality is of an event to come, and as we saw before the event always has the potential to affectively attune a multiplicity of bodies to its happening, differentially. Aesthetic politics brings the collectivity of shared events to the fore, as differential, a multiple, bodily potential for what might come. Difference is built into this account. Affective politics, understood as aesthetic politics, is dissensual, in the sense that it holds contrasting alternatives together without immediately demanding that one alternative eventuate and the others evaporate. It makes thought - felt different

capacities for existence, different life potentials, different forms of life, without immediately imposing a choice between them. The political question, then, is not how to find a resolution. It's not how to impose a solution. It's how to keep the intensity in what comes next. The only way is through actual differentiation. Different lines of unfolding bring the contrast into actuality, between them. The political question is then what Isabelle Stengers calls an "ecology of practices." How do you tend this proliferation of differentiation? How can the lines not clash and destroy each other? How do they live together? The "solution" is not to resolve the tension through a choice, but to modulate it into a symbiosis. A cross-fertilization of capacitations that live out, to the fullest, the intensity of the event of their coming together.

The Uncommon

The notion of the common is widely used today in discussions of what an alter-politics involves. The concepts I privilege in relation to affect and affective politics are differential: differential attunement, symbiotic dissensus. I have a certain discomfort with the rhetoric of the common, particularly in phrases like "what we need is to find a common language." I just don't think that the possibility of a common language exists anymore, if it ever did. And if it did, I wouldn't want it. I don't think I'd be alone. That in itself uncommons it. It would have to be imposed. It would necessitate an exercise of power – over, very different from empowerment, the power – to of ontopower. I wouldn't want it because in my way of thinking it would be inaeesthetic. It would be de – intensifying. It would flatten affect by standardizing response. It would put politics back on the uncreative road to reflex.

Consensus is always the product of a power – over. It is a habituation to it, even if it's a soft form of it. I can't imagine a "common language" that is not consensus building in a de - intensifying way.

The world is too complex to hold to that as a model. The fragmentation of nations into sub - communities, the accompanying increase in the number of nation – states formed from these communities, the destructuring effects of movements of capital, the way these unchained capital flows enable or force a constant movement of people, goods, ideas, and information across borders – all of this has created a hyper – complex situation of flow and variation over which there's no effective oversight. There's no vantage point from which you could encompass it all, there's no shared perspective from which to find a common language or build a consensus or share a rationality. The situation is constitutively dissensual. Rather than going back to the failed project of finding a common language, purpose, or rationality, it would seem that the complexity of that dissensus should be the starting point for politics. Why accept as the starting point a reduction of difference, a channeling into tired habit? That's to start with defeat. Taking complexity for a starting point, broadly speaking, is what "ecological" means. I see affective intensity and an aesthetics of varying life potential as the elements of an ecology of practices of the symbiotic kind called for by Stengers, and before her by Guattari. From this symbiotic perspective, an anti-capitalist politics begins by affirming the variability and potential for forms of life unleashed by capitalism itself. It continues the differentiation of forms of life already under way, but by other means, governed by other constellations of termini and embodying other values.

Claire
Colebrook

Earth Felt the Wound: The Affective Divide

We are suffering, today – here and now – from hyper-hypo-affective disorder. We appear to be consuming nothing other than affects; even the supposed material needs of life – food, sex, sociality – are now marketed affectively. Branding relies on irrational attachments or “lovemarks,”¹ while politics trades in terror and resentment. Affects themselves are marketed: one can purchase games of horror or disgust, and even the purchase of a cup of coffee is perhaps undertaken less for the sake of the caffeine stimulant and more for the Starbucks affect.² This is what led Michael Hardt to theorise a new era of affective labour.³ But this over-consumption and boom of marketable affects is accompanied by affect fatigue, as though there were an inverse relation between the wider and wider *extension* of affective influx and the ever-diminishing *intensity* of affect. It is not surprising then that cultural diagnoses of the present observe two seemingly incompatible catastrophic tendencies: a loss of cognitive or analytic apparatuses in the face of a culture of affective immediacy, and yet a certain deadening of the human organism (ranging from Walter Benjamin’s observation of an absence of experience in an information age to Fredric Jameson’s claim for a “waning of affect” in a world of over-stimulation in which there is no longer a distinction

between experiencing subject and external object, or other person, for whom one might feel empathy⁴).

On the one hand there is a widespread consensus and diagnosis that the human sensory motor apparatus has departed from an informational-cognitive or even image-based mode of immaterial consumption to one of affect. (Such a turn to affect has been both lamented and celebrated, seen either as a retreat from judgment *or* as a liberation from overly calculative modes of reason.) Katherine N. Hayles has referred to a shift from deep attention to hyper attention (2007). Bernard Stiegler, working critically from Hayles, has diagnosed a widespread cultural attention deficit disorder. He rejects Hayles suggestion that this shift or loss might be ameliorated by different pedagogic strategies; more is required than – as Hayles proposes – simply intertwining Faulkner with computer games. Stiegler places the turn to mere stimulus within a broader *fault* or potential deficit of the human brain, which has always required (and yet been threatened by) inscriptive technologies that extend its range beyond its organic boundaries. For Stiegler the loss of deep attention is also an atrophy of trans-individual networks; the script technologies that had always supplemented the brain’s power

and had also always threatened to weaken that power through externalization and alienation reach new levels of risk. Without extended circuits connecting the reading-writing brain to logics not its own we face the perils of a new infantilism (Stiegler 2009). *Techné* no longer opens the brain onto broader circuits but produces short-circuits. Flickering screens leave the eye-brain within itself. In a more popular mode, closer to the more panicked tones of Nicholas Carr's *In the Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (2010), Susan Greenfield (2008) argues that we are no longer developing the neural networks or habits that allow us to read with a connecting grammar. We are more oriented to the flashing stimuli of detached intensities, not so much meaning as sensation. In a contrasting celebratory mode Mark Hansen, whose signature maneuver has been one of returning texts to lived bodies ("correcting" Deleuze by way of Bergson, "correcting" Stiegler by way of Husserl) argues that digital media's simulation of faces has the direct affect of re-engaging the viewer-consumer's affective responses thereby redeeming art history and "high theory" from the errors of its inhuman ways:

Insofar as the confrontation with the DFI functions by triggering affectivity as, precisely, a faculty of embodied heterogenesis, it operates a transfer of affective power from the image to the body. Instead of a static dimension or element intrinsic to the image, affectivity thereby becomes the very medium of interface with the image. What this means is that affectivity actualizes the potential of the image at the same time as it virtualizes the body: the crucial element is neither image nor body alone, but the dynamical interaction between them. As the digital artworks discussed at the end of this article propose, if we can allow the computer to impact our embodied affectivity directly, our communication and our coevolution with the computer – and along

with it visual culture more generally – will enter a truly new, "post-imagistic" phase.⁵

Before we launch into too simplistic a notion of historical break or fall into a myopic culture of affect we need to note that there has always been an affective component of cultural production, and that this has always been acknowledged and theorized (going back to the doctrine of affects). It would be more accurate to say that we are witnessing a shift in the cultural dominant. Just as the affective component of cultural production has always been present, so has a suspicion of the *merely* felt. The anxiety regarding a dominance of the merely affective or visually captivating in the face of a weakening of cognition has often blamed the externality of technological and mnemonic devices for deflecting the brain from its proper potentiality. There have always been fears regarding the capacity for technology to weaken cognition, reducing the brain to mere automaton of stimulus interface. This is why Stiegler's reading of the history of *techné* as *pharmacological* is so important: he neither simply adopts Derrida's history of metaphysics in which writing technologies have always been unjustifiably purged as parasitic, nor celebrates a posthuman digital culture in which illusions of the brain's autonomy would have been overcome. For Stiegler, any brain-extending system, including the brain's own mnemonic networks, at once enables more complex relations *and* precludes the brain from ever having a law or propriety of its own. What Stiegler laments is not alienation, technology and loss of internal integrity per se, but the historical loss of *individuation* where systems would not be general and mechanistic but would enable 'a' singular time to be read for all time. It is not technology's takeover Stiegler laments so much as its

reduction to localized stimuli at the expense of broader and more complex circuits, not so much the liberation or tyranny of digital culture as its over-simplification. To read *Plato's* dialogues, Stiegler argues, requires a highly sophisticated writing-reading system that enables a sense to be intuited that is not that of my present world, and that also allows something like “a” Plato to be reactivated by future generations (generations who can nevertheless read a past time for the present). What the present threatens to do is break those individuating modes of reading – which is why, perhaps, Stiegler attributes an individuating potential to social networking sites, such as *facebook*. (Stiegler 2010, 134) *Here*, the screen I encounter is not a simply stimulating prompt for rule-bound response but an opening to other speeds and networks.

So while it would be too simplistic to create a pure divide between cognition or affect, and similarly inadequate to posit a straightforward historical break it is possible to notice within any work two tendencies or temporal economies – the connective delays of cognition versus the immediacy of affective stimulus – there is nevertheless a contraction or weakening of grammars and syntaxes of cognition in the face of the instant gratification of affections. Computer games, and the cinematic and tele-visual cultural products that are inflected by game culture may have narrative and teleological components, but the dominant experience is that of intensities. A culture of shock and awe allows us to sit before a screen and enjoy the affects of horror, terror, mourning, desire, disgust, fear and excitement without *sense*. The distinction between cognitive-semantic and affective-stimulant aesthetic modes is not purely historical and operates in any recognition of an art-work as art or a text as true. If a text were “purely” true then its affective dimension, though present, would

be immaterial; by contrast, if one grants an object the status of *art* then one attributes some monumental quality to its materiality, some sense of an affective component that is that of the art object itself.

This dependence of artworks on an autonomous materiality that is intrinsic to the work (whereas pure cognition or logic would aim to be substrate neutral) would still be the case for digital or mass-produced media, for it is digital culture that manages to create an infinitely divisible matter. The digital codes that enable the continual repetition of a materiality, such as a sound, colour or text generated by codes, may be purely formal and substrate neutral, but the outcome of digitalization is the capacity to reproduce matters without any loss or division of the original. Digital culture could therefore be *either* purely formal and cognitive, with the manipulation of digits and empty variables *or* predominantly affective with digital technologies enabling the simulation of stimulating matters. What is significant is digital culture's tendency towards a far more strict retraction of the digit or the circulating unit: even when visual culture is not digital in the sense of being digitally rendered into codes for computer replication, there can be a retreat of attention to the already established digits or units of communication. If one laments the waning of a culture of reading and the loss of deep attention in favour of hyper-attention then this may also count as a mourning for analog modes of reading, whereby there was not a direct passage or translation between stimulus and response but a delay in assessing what counted as a unit of information or input. The very history and possibility of reading relies on a complex relation between digital and analog. All reading operates by way of digitalization, or – as Bergson noted – a capacity to reduce differential complexity to already

established units of recognition; without that reduction of differential complexity perception would be paralyzed (Bergson 1912). Concepts enable generality and at once reduce the experienced world to recognizable form to enable action, so the simpler the digit the higher the speed, the greater the efficiency. What appears to be operating today is a high degree of digital distinction and accuracy, precluding the need for interpretive delays. Digital culture would include not only computer digitalization in the narrow sense, but a culture of speeds whereby stimulus circulates without translation or transfer, where there is a single circuit of relay. This would begin to explain why attention deficit is actually the need for *more* stimulus – precisely because there would be no delay or depth of decoding.

The symptomatology of attention deficit, which is tied to an over-stimulus of affect, makes a historical claim regarding the dialectic between cognition (or reading *as*) and affective pleasure (or stimulant vision). The eye-brain is abandoning or self-extinguishing one of its evolved powers, and one sees this exhaustion of the power of *sense* and the hypertrophy of sensation not just in the proliferation of new media but in the invasion of new media speeds into traditional media.

Non-digital forms of production are resonant, now, both of digital speeds – with even “heavy” novels being produced in bite-sized chunks from multiple and dispersed viewpoints. Even seemingly slow and remarkably human cultural productions, such as the unstructured reality television events of *Big Brother* rely not on plotting and character development so much as the capacity to pick up or leave the screen at any point. Such works are unsigned or devoid of sense precisely insofar as they are

less events of production, created to stand alone or possess a certain force, as events of consumptive immediacy: the camera simply takes up whatever is there to be passed on and viewed. Cinema and visual culture can be both narrative-semantic and stimulant-affective. (There is, of course a distinction between stimulus and affect: the former is neutral and pre-semantic, and could either be read as information or merely felt. But affect is often associated with the merely, solely or simply felt as though it were only stimulus; this conflation is at the heart of hyper-hypo affective disorder. For if affect could be distinguished from cognition and yet still have a non-informational or non-semantic sense then one might find a way of overcoming the deep mourning for a culture of meaning and deep attention without celebrating the brain’s self-extinction.)

Any historical divide or paradigm break can be intuited only by distinguishing tendencies within mixtures. The relation between felt stimulus and conceptual order was long ago placed within the artwork in Kant’s aesthetic: one feels the influx of sensation but not as bodily pathos but as that which ought to find its way to some communicable sense, not sense as what this object is but sense as how this *would feel* - *sensus communis*. To a certain extent this is what Stiegler refers to as trans-individuation, which depends crucially on technologies that create a network in which the reading-viewing brain is invaded by signatures and speeds not its own. More close to Kant, though, there has been an art-critical tradition of considering affect *not* as feeling but as the sense of a work, where sense is an orientation prompted by perceived relations. What this implies is that viewed objects, or relations of viewing, have different promissory temporalities: the sense of a feeling of humanity in general,

what “one” would feel. It is in this tradition that Deleuze draws upon Worringer’s (1953) historical work to place the relation between cognition and affect within art history: early art is geometrically abstract, giving order to the world; but this is superseded by empathy or the depiction of organic forms that one might perceive and feel. Deleuze then places this historical problem *within* the work of Francis Bacon: how can one paint the body not as an organism one *feels* but as a figure emerging from forces not its own? Deleuze and Guattari also write a pre-history of the reading eye that is directly political: the eye moves from being a collective organ, *feeling* the pain as it sees knife enter flesh, to being a privatized reading machine, viewing the cut of the knife as a *sign* of a punishment for a transgression committed and a retribution to be paid. The eye becomes organized as a reading and memory machine:

...the voice no longer sings but dictates, decrees; the graphy no longer dances, it ceases to animate bodies, but is set into writing on tablets, stones, and books; the eye sets itself to reading. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 223)

This occurs as the organization of the body, an organism in which seeing, hearing, speaking and touching all fold in on the private body who can now view the world as a single matter determined from “a” point of order (an event of deterritorialisation).

With that Deleuzo-Guattarian work in the background it is not surprising that there has been a celebration of affect, as though affect would release us from the ‘despotism of the signifier’ (or, more broadly, the tyranny of Cartesian and computational paradigms). And yet it is the event of privatization, with forces or pure predicates

being referred back to the single organizing living body that is celebrated by the affective turn, much of what passes as Deleuzian inflected theory champions precisely what Deleuze and Guattari’s aimed for future would go beyond. So while Deleuze and Guattari chart the genesis of the organized body from affects, and then describe the organization of those affects (now as lived) by way of the unified organism of the man of reason, this does not imply that they want to return to the site of genesis, return to the embodied lived affect that has been alienated by the axiomatics of the single system of capital. On the contrary, the problem of affect – the *truth of affect, which would be something like force as such* – cannot be retrieved by a return to the body. Rather, capitalism is not axiomatic enough, not inhuman enough. It suffers from an anthropomorphism that can also be accounted for by, and as, hyper-hypo-affective disorder. Capitalism, if pushed to its maximum potential or nth power, would open the relations among forces to produce multiple differential quantities. But as long as everything is organized according to consumption and production (in terms of the digits of the private organism) the potential for forces to be produced – such as affects - will always be grounded upon affections. The visual production of the affect of horror or terror will be oriented to horrifying or terrorizing (as in many horror films or political campaigns). As long as affects are confused with affections, or feelings of the lived body, then nothing will ever be felt; the body will only re-live itself.

An element that has always been present in any work – the degree of lived bodily stimulus – has now become the focus not only of consumption and production but also of criticism and “theory.” The “affective turn” accounts for the emergence of language, music, morality

and art in general by referring to the lived body's desire for self-maintenance. (In a similar manner the ethical turn was also a turn *back* to social relations, feelings and duties: and we might ask why this turn back occurs just as humanity is facing a world where there may be an *un-lived*?) Deleuze and Guattari offer a complex history of the relation between brain, body, intellect and affect, and follow Bergson in arguing for a history of thought's different powers, with technologies of concepts and artistic methods allowing at once for organic *unity* (the sensory motor apparatus that reduced all to efficiency) *and* for another tendency to think time as such or difference as such. Concepts, for example, reduce complex differences to generalities so that thinking can proceed efficiently, in the service of action. But there could also be concepts that destroyed efficiency and action – such as the concepts of justice, democracy, humanity – but that opened thinking to a future. What would justice be? The same might be said of affects: it would only be by destroying affections – the ready and easy responses craved by our habituated bodies – that might open affects. If Deleuze's work has seemed to license a return to lived and bodily affections this should alert us to the constant tendency for relapse and re-territorialisation in the brain's relation to its world. Deleuze and Guattari were critical of a historical tendency of paranoid capitalism: the tendency to read all events through the scheme of the individual set over and against of world of differences that can be felt and lived as his own. Any supposed private affection, they argued – including parental love – opens to all of history, and eventually the 'intense germinal influx.' The mother arrives as already organized, racialised and historicized, and the love between any couple carries all of history and politics with it. In the beginning, they argue, is not the body and its affections, but the affect. There is the force

of knife and flesh, or the dazzling light of the screen; bodies become organisms through the affections composed from these potentialities.

So what can we say about both the "affective turn" in theory, and the addiction to affections at the expense of affect, especially if we do not want to fall too easily into a historical break or nostalgia?

It is not new to diagnose an epoch. Freud placed modernity at the neurotic end of the spectrum, suggesting that an over-fixation on symptomatic displacements needed some release. And perhaps we have swung towards psychosis - not so much tied to libidinal containment and repression as lacking all sense of order, generality, universality or transcendence. If Deleuze and Guattari appealed to schizophrenia they did so against what they saw as the paranoia of modern capitalism - the over-attachment to a single system in which any event or affect would be the sign *of* one single system of life, a life that becomes nothing other than the interaction and exchange of quantifiable force (a simple digitalism of a single axiomatic). Schizoanalysis would split or de-synthesize forces, not reducing all flows to a single system of exchange. And this splitting would give force a "stand-alone" quantity, creating it neither as felt-stimulus *nor* recognized generality. It would short-circuit hyper-hypo affective disorder: the over-stimulated appetite for consuming affects alongside the hypertrophy of the capacity to think affectively. Whereas affect-empathy and abstraction-cognition have been noted as opposing historical and formal tendencies, the present's diagnosed retreat into affect-sensation evidences not a tipping into one of these modes or the other but their indistinction; it is as though there can be no abstract conceptual thinking that is not confused by

“feelings,” and no experiencing of affects that is not already generalized or pre-marketed and “branded.” So we need to note first that there is a growing market in pre-packaged, already-consumed-consumable affections. And yet it is for this reason that there is no affect.

We need, I would suggest, a far more nuanced understanding of affect that distinguishes it from affections. If art and art theory had always had some orientation or sense of affect this was never that of a simple bodily response or lived feeling, not an affection but a force that *would yield* an affection. Affects would be “stand alone” powers, possessing a certain autonomy. One would need to distinguish affect – such as the terror of tragedy – from the affection of being terrified, and these tendencies would have different temporalities. Affect would have to do with the art work’s capacity to create circuits of force beyond the viewer’s own organic networks.

Something of the autonomy of affect in this respect was theorized by Brian Massumi when he suggested bodily responses that bypassed cognitive or emotional sense (Massumi 1995). Antonio Damasio (2000) also enables us to consider that there is, in addition to the feeling of what happens in the body, another dimension of organism’s response that is not attended to. If we are suffering from hyper-affective disorder this is because a potentiality of the body for undergoing stimulus outside conceptuality and attention is now no longer a background condition but accounts for the desiring structures of contemporary culture. The social and political organization of bodies does not occur by way of ideas or beliefs – the imposition of semantic content or structure – but by way of affective addiction, either to the diverting stimuli of personal screens and headphones, or to the bodily stimulants

of caffeine, sugar, tobacco or other widely ingested and publicly legitimated substances. If the constitutive human condition was once deemed to be *Angst* – a sense *that* there might be some event, without any fleshing out of just *what* that event would be – or if the dominant mode of politico-economic affect was that of speculation (a paranoid control of all events into a single system), then we can observe a new and possibly post-human affective order. Rather than *Angst*, or the channeling of attention and investment into an overly mapped and determined future, we have perhaps become psychotically detached from any object domain, “experiencing” the immediacy of affects without any sense that we are being affected by a world of which sensations would be signs. We may well be in an era of a new self-enclosed narcissism, each “individual” being nothing more than a privatized bubble of instantaneous intensities.

Or, more accurately, what would be wanting would be narcissism, for we would no longer be entranced or motivated by a better image of ourselves. Instead, it would be the absence of self-image, of the figure of myself as a beautiful or worthy ‘member of humanity’ that would release me from being driven by anything other than the immediacy of sensations. (Is not the popular refusal of stereotypes along with a certain academic critique of normativity as repressively normalizing indicative of a refusal of anything other than the self as pure performance, an affirmation of active immediacy and a horror of any element that would not be included in the dynamism of life that is always already the self’s own?) Many of the celebrations of affect today, directed as they are against the linguistic paradigm or intellectualist or Cartesian accounts of the self, valorize a model of life in which the self is not really a self at all. There is not an

enclosed individual who then represents the world; in the beginning is the relation or affect, from which some relatively stable responsive centre emerges. Jeremy Rivkin argues not only that we are presently driven by affect and that affective bonds precede the formation of individuals and competitive aggression but that empathy is the human civilizing drive *tout court* (2009). Antonio Damasio, along with Joseph LeDoux (1996) and Maturana and Varela (1987) – and many supposed Deleuzians continuing their emphasis on embodiment and living systems – have turned theory and analysis away from the cognitive, conceptual or reflective dimensions of experience towards embodied, distributed and autopoietic selves. Damasio theorises that the background self is largely unnoticed, and that “Descartes error” consisted in taking the fragment of the responsive self that came to attention as some sort of centre or representing “theatre.” Maturana and Varela, insisting on the embodied nature of the mind, reject the notion of “a” world that would then be pictured or known by a distinct self. There is no world in general, no subject in itself; the world is always given *for* this or that living system and *as* this domain or horizon of possible affects to which bodies would respond. The Cartesian subject is not only a philosophical error, for it is embedded in a tradition of Western individualism in which minds are set over against a world that they quantify and master. A more mindful tradition, closer to Buddhist models of selflessness, would not only be more correct, but may help us in domains as diverse as artificial intelligence and management studies (Flanagan 2007).

All these turns in theory are, I would suggest, *both* expressive of and reactions against hyper-hypo affective disorder. That is, it is precisely at the point at which we have become glutted with affect – so consuming of

affects in a blind and frenzied manner – that theory insists upon the intelligence and profundity of affect. This complex reaction formation is similar to the three sides of the obesity epidemic: we stuff ourselves full of food at indiscriminate speeds, cannot taste or discern anything outside its pre-branding (for we have to be alerted to a food being “chicken-flavoured”) and yet all this is accompanied by a new genre of food porn: master chef competitions, the spectacle of celebrity chefs, restaurant menus that require literary criticism and the migration of artful food depictions from the genre of still life to advertising. Similarly, we gorge on affections yet cannot get the sense of any affect, and all the while live in an age of theory that wallows in the autonomy of affect. Whether we regard the predominantly affective self as a loss of a subject whose identity would yield greater social responsibility and awareness (mourning cognition and grammar in the widespread loss of attention), or whether we see the Cartesian tradition as something better left behind, there seems to be agreement that there has been some affective turn (Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Clough and Halley 2007). This occurs not only at the level of theory, where we recognize the error of the linguistic paradigm or the cognitivist or computational models of the self; it also occurs in a widespread shift in perceptual mechanisms and relations.

It is possible to say that we are indulging in affective over-consumption and that cinematic and marketing devices have to remain constantly innovative – the genre of “torture porn” reflecting and reflecting upon this hyper-affective addiction trend. On the other hand, if it is possible to note a deterioration of the traditionally bounded and individuated subject, alongside an atrophy of the narrative or novelistic imagination of a life lived as a trajectory towards wholeness, recognition and social

meaning – whereby I consider myself from the point of view of the better self I would like others to see me as being – it is also possible to note a contrary tendency towards waning of affect. I would, though, want to give this a different inflection from Fredric Jameson's criticism of a postmodern subject who, deprived of historical connectedness and any broad political sense, becomes nothing more than a schizoid field of intensities, caring little about social trajectories or class consciousness (Jameson 1991). In many respects hypo-affective disorder occurs alongside a strongly informational, if not narrative, attentiveness. There is no shortage of information about the dire threats posed not only to the future of the human species, but to current systems upon which present generations rely in order to survive. Predictions regarding catastrophic economic disorder, imminent resource depletion, viral devastation, chemical warfare, bio-terrorism, rogue states in possession of nuclear weapons or unforeseen disasters brought about by various genetic technologies seem to have had little effect on behaviour and decision making *despite* their widespread narration and imaginative rehearsal. In addition to explicit thought experiments such as Alan Weisman's *World Without Us* or the television series *Life Without Humans*, or one-off documentaries such as *Aftermath*, cinema of the last decade has intensified and multiplied a long-standing tradition of disaster epics entertaining the possibility of the annihilation of the species. Whereas these were once imagined as exogenous events (usually the invasion of alien species), climate change and viral threats now dominate the cinematic imaginary. Novels such as McCarthy's *The Road* or Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* begin in a world in which devastation has occurred; just what event led to such a situation can quite easily remain unstated precisely because the idea of a

near-post-human world is today utterly plausible. To call such novels or films post-apocalyptic misses their significance, for there is not only no apocalyptic revelation or dramatic disclosure, there is also no real sense that there need be a radical intrusion or disturbance for such worlds of depletion and post-humanity to appear. Yet, despite all this information and narrative entertainment regarding humanity's probable end, there is neither panic nor any apparent affective comportment that would indicate that anyone really feels or fears the sense of the end. Climate change denial is one thing, and possibly more rational than climate change awareness coupled with minor delusory negotiations (such as cap and trade, mitigation, adaptation or any of the other bargaining strategies).

The affective turn is not then a solely academic or theoretical correction to the supposed linguistic paradigm of high theory; it is also a pathology of the populace (which is certainly not a polity for it has nothing to do with bodies assembling to speak, deliberate and communicate in common). There is a passion for affective consumption that is *extensive* – more affective input please!!! – but inversely devoid of *intensity*. There is nothing effective about affections; and this includes the fact that we constantly remind ourselves of the primacy of the affective and insist that in the beginning is the emotive attachment, and then proceed to act as if the same old cognitive rules applied. We recognize our affective core, repair our theory and then proceed with argument as usual. Our response tends to be pharmaceutical rather than pharmacological: that is, just as we deal with ADD by providing the brain with chemical stimulus (because ADD sufferers fail to focus because nothing is stimulating enough) so we have dealt with our affective hypertrophy (our inability to sense) by over-consuming and over-producing affects.

How then might we assess the seeming dominance of or addiction to the intensities of affect – including the direct marketing of affects in “feel good” experiences or the horrors of torture porn – alongside the no less apparent atrophy of affective response to an overload of information regarding genuine threats to organic life? Perhaps the way in which affect itself has been theorized might indicate a peculiar structure that would go some way to accounting for this divide.

What if the *concept* of affect were potentially a formation that would shatter the organism’s emotive enclosure? That is, it is possible to see affect as a *concept* in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense: it would not be extensive – referring to an already lived and actualized set of phenomena – but would be intensive, creating new relations and lines of thought, opening different mappings or potentials among what is, what is lived, and what might be thought. Affect can be thought of *not* as the influx of sensation that prompts response or engagement, for it is in the *not acting*, or in the receptivity without responsiveness or relation that affect occurs. Affect becomes a genuine concept when it poses the possibility of thinking the delay or interval between the organism as a sensory-motor apparatus and the world that is (at least intellectually) mapped according to its own measure. If we do tend to conflate affect with emotion – if we do not mark a distinction between the feeling of what happens and a whole domain of pulsations and fluxes beyond the perceptions of the organism – then this is symptomatic of the tendency to reduce the force of concepts to the lived. And is it surprising that the concept of affect with its potential for thinking of forces detached from the lived, from the organism’s responses, from feeling and from emotion would be reduced to an association with thoroughly humanized notions of meaning?

Such problems are particularly important today when the distinction between affect and emotion may go some way to allowing us to envisage life beyond the organism. For it is life beyond the organism – both an actual world in which organic life has been extinguished and a virtual world of potentialities that are not lived – that has become increasingly unthinkable. Such a world may exist (dimly) at the level of affect but not at the level of feeling and the lived. On the contrary, what is presented as potential affect (a world without us) is reduced to affections – feelings of horror that are resolved ultimately as redemption narratives. That is, there is an industry today built on the affective lure of humanity’s and possibly life’s non-existence: this would include high culture installation pieces that feature machines, mechanized robotic humanoids, lost objects and automated sound productions (something like Thomas Mann’s camera without person at the end of *Death in Venice*) to popular visions of a life without humans, such as the sublime opening scene of Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* of 2002 (or the conclusion of Matt Reeve’s *Cloverfield* (2008) (where a supposed department of defense filming of the last humans to have suffered from a violent viral intrusion plays out to the film’s end). There is a widespread circulation of the image of life without life, of witnessing without vision. Or, at least, one might begin to note that there is a disjunction between affect and the lived and that what might at first appear to be differences in degree – such that affect would be a response in the body’s systems that would only partly be lived or felt – might eventually become a difference in kind, such that there would be affects that “stand alone.” Now might be the time to begin considering affect not as the base or ground from which cognition has been abstracted, nor as a primarily embodied and *barely lived* near phenomenon, differing in its intensity

from fully fledged and conceptualised experience, but as a power or force with a tendency to persist or endure.

When Brian Massumi wrote about the autonomy of affect he was referring to somatic responses that not only exceeded the cognitive but also the level of feeling and emotion. (His examples included a melting snowman and President Reagan. Images of both produced bodily responses that could not be mapped onto cognitive values of affirmation or negation, and were not felt as emotions that would then prompt action or belief. In the case of the melting snowman, the children who reported on their felt responses were at odds with their bodily responses; what they described as memorable and pleasant was – when measured physiologically by heart-rate and galvanic skin activity – of a certain intensity rather than to do with content).

...the primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*: it would appear that the strength or duration of an image's effect is not logically connected to the content in any straightforward way. This is not to say that there is no connection and no logic. What is meant here by the content of the image is its indexing to conventional meanings in an intersubjective context, its socio-linguistic qualification. This indexing fixes the *quality* of the image; the strength or duration of the image's effect could be called its *intensity*. What comes out here is that there is no correspondence or conformity between quality and intensity. If there is a relation, it is of another nature. (Massumi 1995, 84-85)

The disjunction between quality and intensity may, in the case I would like to conclude by considering, be one of disjunction or reaction formation. That is, the higher the degree of threat to the organism, the more the quality of

affect is that of terror or sublime annihilation, the more disengaged the intensity appears to be. “We” late near-extinction humans appear to be addicted to witnessing annihilation, to the *feeling* of near-death or post-human existence, and yet have no intensity: it does not prompt us either to action or to any sense of what a post-human world would be. On the contrary, the more evidence, imagery, feeling and “experience” of a world without humans is displayed, the less affect or intensity occurs.

In fact, both theory and experience become increasingly organic: with thinkers ranging from Maturana and Varela, to philosophers such as Evan Thompson and Andy Clark insisting that the world we are given is exhausted by the world as felt or lived (Clark 2003, Thompson 2007). “We” are now living a world of popular, academic and “high” culture in which scenes of human and organic annihilation are repeatedly and obsessively lived, and yet at the cognitive level we continue to affirm the primacy of the world for the embodied, emotional and living organism. Man is no longer *homo economicus* or *homo faber*, defined by enterprising activity or production, but by feeling. What is occluded is the *unlived*, that which occurs both at the level of somatic responses that fail to be registered (other than by their negation at the level of reaction formation, with the shrill affirmation of emotion). What is also occluded is what Deleuze and Guattari theorized in *What is Philosophy?* as the definitive capacity of art – an art that occurs outside the human and beyond the organism: affects stand alone, exist in themselves and cannot be reduced to the lived.

On the one hand this appears to be an example of a privilege accorded to high modernist aesthetics, in the assumption of an art object that breaks with the bourgeois

banalities of consumption and enjoyment. On the other hand, though, there is a sense in which Deleuze and Guattari's distinction among art, philosophy and science – and, in turn, their geneses of these potentialities outside the organism – also breaks with the high modernist aesthetic of art as cultural revivification. That is, if modernism separated the art object from feeling and emotion in order to break with social codes and conventions of consumption, it nevertheless re-humanized or re-vitalized affect: that is, art restored *thinking to life and returned life to thinking*. There was a sense that critical art might return thinking to the sense of *its* own emergence. A debased form of this aesthetic occurs today with many of the wars on the banality of images (including the myriad of denunciations of the internet or mass media as dehumanizing – for such denunciations seek to restore individual perception, autonomy and feeling).

What Deleuze and Guattari suggest in all three of their potentialities for thinking – creation of concepts in philosophy, of functions in science, and affects and percepts in art – is a locus of production outside the organism and outside the lived. Brian Massumi, separating intensity from quality, nevertheless located affect entirely within the living system:

Both levels, qualification and intensity, are immediately embodied. Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin-at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. Depth reactions belong more to the form/ content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing. The reason may be that they are associated with expectation, which depends on consciously positioning oneself in a line of narrative continuity. (Massumi 1995, 85)

For Massumi affect occurs as the *event* or disruption into social coding of the newness of a (not-yet narrated or linear) disturbance.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their chapter on affects and percepts, give a relatively clear instance of the autonomy of percepts – prior not only to human, but also to animal life. They describe the stagemaker bird, organizing coloured leaves to assemble a territory. The bird is only able to move and self-organise because there are expressive matters that enable processes of assembling: in the beginning is neither the doer nor the deed but the matters to be dealt with (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 184). The coloured matters precede and are followed by the bird, with the bird becoming a functional and defined organism through this assemblage of autonomous sensory qualities. When art captures sensations that stand alone – as though the perceptions of organisms would only be possible because of these autonomous potentialities of percepts – then this is relatively easy to understand, as though a Mondrian or Cezanne drew upon, rather than produced, the vibrations of colour. But how could we say the same of affects, render them autonomous, inhuman and inorganic, in a way that would render them distinct from affections?

There is some indication in Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon of how art might capture affect in its autonomy – not simply its distinction from symbolic orders and cognition (as in Massumi) but in its inorganic or incorporeal moment. Deleuze refers to Bacon's painting of the scream – not the feeling of horror, felt by the body, but a depiction through the body of the forces that seize it. Unlike a viewing of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the viewer is not horrified – the work does not cause horror – but we are capable, supposedly, of witnessing affect, not

as felt or lived but as force beyond the organism and its meaningful responsiveness:

If we scream, it is always as victims of invisible and insensible forces that scramble every spectacle, and that even lie beyond pain and feeling. ... Bacon creates the painting of the scream because he establishes a relationship between the visibility of the scream (the open mouth as a shadowy abyss) and invisible forces, which are nothing other than the forces of the future. (Deleuze 2005, 43)

But are these forces really affects, or the forces from which affects are composed? And is their depiction by Bacon, via the screaming body, really akin to the pure sensory qualities that we can think of in the use of colours or expressive matters? Some provocation is given by Deleuze's phrase, "forces of the future," for it is here that we might think affects beyond the era of humanity, both in traditional modes of literary expression and in recent genre shifts. How are affects created by art if they are not expressions of some artist's or character's psycho-physical organism? How could affects possess that stand-alone inhuman inorganic quality that percepts seem to do when they provide potentials for assemblages (rather than being derived from them)? There would be no easy answers to this problem; it should not be easy to distinguish between art that makes us feel joyous –tapping into our sensory motor apparatus – and art that *is joyous*, that intimates a joy outside humanity and organisms. (What, for example, is trance music: a drugging sound that detaches us from meaning and the traditional temporal lines of chord progression and development, or a physical pulsation that operates directly at the level of sensory motor response rather than thought?)

Canonical literature gives us some indication of an autonomy of created affects that are not those of the organism, as though art could give body to that which exceeds the lived. Adjectives such as Kafka-esque, Dickensian or Lawrentian and Orwellian refer to affective assemblages that are not those of characters. Nor do such affective complexes prompt us to *feel* absurd bureaucratic torpor, oppressive urban paternalism, phallic atavistic passion or nightmarish social surveillance: it as though these worlds offered affects as such, there *to be lived*, as if they existed as potentialities for all time, even if captured through the depiction of a certain time. Such expressions pass into common parlance and refer not to a style of writing so much as the potentiality of that writing to seize on forces that it manages to assemble. If we travel through middle America we might view certain scenes *as if* captured by a David Lynch or Raymond Carver. Beyond canonized art there are today many attempts to capture affects beyond the lived and humanity: books (and television series) such as Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* or cinematic scenes such as the opening of *28 Days Later*, along with a vast range of unremarkable nature documentaries do not only depict worlds and life beyond humans, but can also suggest (perhaps) a melancholy or joy of a world without living witness. It would be telling, then, in the face of this tendency to imagine or contemplate joys, depressions, horrors and screams outside the lived – and right at the moment of possible human self-annihilation – if *theory* were unable to think affects beyond the lived world of the bounded organism.

Notes:

1. Alan M. Webber, "Trust in the Future," <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/38/roberts.html>
2. Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape our Decisions* (New York: Harper, 2008).
3. Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *boundary 2*. 26. 2 (Summer 1999): 89-100.
4. The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 438.
5. Mark B.N. Hansen, "Affect as Medium, or the 'Digital-Facial-Image,'" *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (August 2003): 205-228, 208.

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Boyan
Manchev

**Puissance, résistance et transformation des corps-sujets.
Capitalisme pervers et ontologie du présent***

Biopolitique et production de substance

Mon point de départ sera une des définitions parmi les plus marquantes de la notion de biopolitique, celle de Paolo Virno, développée dans *Grammaire de la multitude*. En voici quelques formulations très claires et succinctes :

« La force de travail incarne (littéralement) une catégorie fondamentale de la pensée philosophique : c'est-à-dire la puissance, la *dynamis*. (...) La « vie », le *bios* pur et simple, acquiert une importance spécifique en tant que tabernacle de la *dynamis*, de la puissance pure.

La vie de l'ouvrier, son corps, intéresse le capitaliste seulement pour une raison indirecte : ce corps, cette vie représentent ce qui contient la faculté, la puissance, la *dynamis*. (...) La vie se palce au centre de la politique alors

* Ce texte reprend et développe quelques motifs de mon article « Vermögen, Ausbeutung und Widerstand der Subjekt-Körper. Für eine transversale Veränderung » (in: Isabell Lorey, Roberto Nigro, Gerald Raunig (Eds.), *Inventionen 1. Gemeinsam. Prekär. Potentia. Dis-/Konjunktion. Ereignis. Transversalität. Queere Assemblagen*, Berlin: Diaphanes, 2011) et du livre *La métamorphose et l'instant – Désorganisation de la vie* (Strasbourg, La Phocide, 2009).

que la mise en jeu, c'est la force de travail immatérielle (et en soi non présente). Pour cette raison, et seulement pour cette raison, il est permis de parler de « biopolitique ». (...) [L]a biopolitique n'est qu'un effet, un reflet, ou justement une articulation, de ce fait primordial – à la fois historique et philosophique – qui consiste en l'achat et la vente de la puissance en tant que puissance ».¹

Cette thèse nous guidera dans l'opération conceptuelle dont on se propose d'exposer les grandes lignes : notamment revenir, par-delà Marx et Spinoza, à la matrice ontologique de la thèse biopolitique – jamais suffisamment éclairée mais dont les enjeux conceptuels et politiques sont sans aucun doute sans égal – la théorie aristotélicienne de la puissance, et l'opposition entre *dunamis* et *energeia* en particulier. (Inutile de le souligner : « l'horizon » aristotélicien est directement impliqué chez Virno par l'usage du terme *dunamis*.) Un tel « retour » conceptuel pourrait ouvrir une possibilité conceptuelle rare : non pas la révélation d'une « vérité conceptuelle » profonde, enfouie, mais la mobilisation de la puissance réduite, voire opprimée, du concept de puissance lui-même. Il s'agit donc de proposer un prolongement possible et, si je puis dire, affirmativement transformateur, de la thèse de Virno.

Thèse 1.

La production capitaliste rend l'exploitation possible en produisant, avant tout autre produit, la (fiction de la) substance.

Qu'est-ce que la substance ?

La substance est une opération modale d'absorption de la puissance – « substance inférieure » selon la thèse aristotélicienne – par la nécessité de l'acte. Le type de la substance capitaliste n'est autre que la substance du type : l'équivalence et la réversibilité d'un flux égal. Or la production de substance veut dire réduction de la puissance à une équivalence, à l'échangeabilité, c'est-à-dire à une ressource manipulable, exploitable et contrôlable. Il s'agit donc d'une quasi-substance, d'une « fausse » substance par excellence, dans la mesure où elle est nourrie, produite, par une activité qui n'a aucune autre nécessité « substantielle » que l'absorption de la puissance : son accumulation. La substance n'est que la *fiction* de la substance : la substance est appropriation de la puissance par la nécessité quasi-substantielle de l'accumulation et de l'échange.

La substance n'est autre chose que la fiction de la substance en tant que *productibilité*, c'est-à-dire en tant que condition de possibilité de la production. La productibilité n'est pas donnée : c'est elle qui est le premier sujet de production. L'exploitation est possible dans le processus de production précisément parce que la productibilité est productible.

Thèse 2.

La productibilité est productible.

Le mode de production capitaliste produit la force de travail en réduisant ainsi la puissance à productibilité, à « substance ». En effet, le mot « substance » apparaît chez Marx lui-même, même si ce n'était que dans un sens banal : « Le capital ne produit donc pas seulement du capital, il produit une masse ouvrière croissante, la substance grâce à laquelle il peut seul fonctionner comme capital additionnel. (...) Le travail produit ses conditions de production comme *capital*, et le capital produit le travail comme moyen de réaliser le capital, comme travail salarié. »²

Par conséquent, s'emparer de la puissance (de la vie) est le premier geste d'une réduction totalisante : notamment la production de substance. Car seule la substance peut être possédée ou dominée, non pas la puissance. Ainsi, la production de substance est la condition nécessaire de toute exploitation ; elle est la seule manière de dominer la puissance, c'est-à-dire de la puissance de transformation. Autrement dit, la puissance doit être réduite à substance sous la forme d'une puissance totale et homogène qui rend possible l'emprise sur elle. La substance-productibilité n'est rien d'autre que la réduction des puissances singulières, et par conséquent irréductibles, non-échangeables, des corps-sujets, par la production d'une productibilité abstraite qui les englobe pour tenter de les maîtriser.

Le capitalisme post-fordiste (pour ma part je tend à l'appeler, pour des raisons conceptuelles que je suis contraint d'abrégier ici, capitalisme *pervers* ou *performant*³) radicalise l'opération de base du capitalisme, l'opération de production de substance – de *productibilité* –, en tentant de capter et de rendre productible la puissance elle-même : produire non pas la productibilité mais la puissance en tant que telle, pour le dire avec l'emphase de Virno. Mais d'abord, il faudrait se poser la question : que veut dire « puissance pure » dans la situation du *capitalisme performant* ? Ne s'agit-il plutôt de la réduction de la puissance à une substance performante fautive : de la fiction de l'*energeia* pure de la performance totale de la Chose ?

La question cruciale est donc celle de la puissance. Retournons donc à Aristote, à qui nous la devons.

Qu'est-ce que la puissance ? Retour à Aristote

Le mouvement a été la pierre d'achoppement de la pensée métaphysique depuis son origine, du moins depuis les Eléates, ayant nié la réalité du mouvement. Un des interprètes les plus originaux d'Aristote, Gilles Châtelet, est allé jusqu'à émettre l'hypothèse radicale que la métaphysique a été inventée par Aristote précisément pour compenser l'insuffisance de la pensée de l'être creusée par le problème du mouvement⁴. En effet, la puissance chez Aristote ne pourrait être comprise sans l'idée du mouvement : elle apparaît comme rien de plus – et rien de moins – que la solution conceptuelle de ce problème crucial. Rappelons la définition classique de la puissance dans la *Métaphysique* : « la faculté d'être changé ou mû par un autre être, ou par soi-même en tant qu'autre » (*Métaphysique*, D, 12, 1019a). Rappelons également

la définition célèbre du mouvement dans la *Physique* d'Aristote : « Le mouvement est l'acte en puissance, en tant qu'il est puissance. » (cf. *Physique*, III, 1, 200-201 et *Métaphysique*, K, 9, 1065b). Dans *De l'âme* Aristote va jusqu'à affirmer l'identité ou plutôt la « coïncidence » de puissance et acte : « c'est l'identité entre subir ou être ébranlé et être en activité. Et, de ce fait, le mouvement constitue une sorte d'activité, quoique incomplète » (II, 5, 417 a) Cette définition aboutit à une thèse qui la rapproche de la définition aristotélicienne du mouvement la plus connue – celle de la *Métaphysique*, qui insiste également sur le moment d'inachèvement et d'imperfection. Mais si la puissance est définie comme la « faculté d'être mû ou changé », alors, logiquement, le mouvement – l'acte-en-puissance – se présenterait comme l'acte ayant la faculté d'être mû ou changé. Dès lors, l'activité du mouvement ne serait pas autre chose que la faculté de subir l'acte. Mais l'exposition à l'altérité é-mouvante, à l'autre-qui-ébranle, meut et change, est déjà un acte. Et selon Aristote, tandis que le mouvement tend vers sa fin, l'acte, qui n'est pas un mouvement, est infini : seule fin de soi-même, il est éternel. Par conséquent, d'un point de vue logique il semble qu'on se trouve enfermé dans un cercle argumentatif vicieux, sans pour autant régresser vers la thèse des Mégariques, niant la puissance, et par conséquent le mouvement et le devenir : le mouvement apparaît comme un résultat englobant son propre sujet. Comment traiter de cet obstacle conceptuel ?

Dans « L'enchantement du virtuel » Châtelet commente : « Le potentiel est ce qui, dans le mouvement, permet de nouer un « déjà » et un « pas encore » ; il donne de la réserve à l'acte, il est ce qui fait que l'acte n'épuise pas le mouvement (...) C'est précisément le potentiel – patience propre attachée à chaque mobile – qui échappe aux

saisies d'une abstraction qui confisquait ou octroyait la mobilité aux êtres. (...) Le moteur et le mû ne sont pas deux êtres inertes l'un en face de l'autre, se transmettant une qualité ; le mû n'est pas le seul à changer : le moteur possède bien la forme, mais ne peut agir qu'en présence du mû. Le mû est *éveillé* à la mobilité »⁵. Cette interprétation a le mérite d'élargir la thèse aristotélicienne par l'idée du caractère bidirectionnel du processus d'actualisation qui a des conséquences décisives pour la pensée du mouvement. Assurer ce dynamisme double veut dire avant tout ne pas satisfaire aux attentes de la vision métaphysique de la substance. La puissance et l'actualité devraient être pensées comme des moments tensifs, comme des intensités et non comme des substances ou des états stables qui ne sont que liés mécaniquement par le tiers élément, purement intermédiaire et donc secondaire, du mouvement. Au contraire, le mouvement y est immanent. En d'autres termes, penser la puissance d'une manière émancipée de la vision métaphysique de la substance, veut dire se situer au sein même de l'opération actualisante, de la transformation de la puissance-devenir en puissance-agir. Effectuer une telle opération ne veut dire rien de moins que « radicaliser » Aristote par l'exigence spinoziste de l'immanence.

Qu'est-ce que la résistance ?

La question décisive dans la situation de transformation constitutive qui est la nôtre – d'absorption non seulement des puissances de la vie mais de la puissance de résistance et de la transformation des sujets politiques, et donc de l'exploitation de la puissance en tant que puissance, n'est autre que : la puissance étant captée, la résistance est-elle toujours possible ? Tentons de nous approcher

d'une réponse possible à cette question, tout en essayant de repousser les usages souvent intéressés, opportunistes, ainsi que les déconstructions toujours rapides du concept de résistance.

Or Aristote a essayé de penser la possibilité de la possibilité, la *dunamis*, de se manifester en tant que *contre-puissance* (d'après la formulation de Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva qui parle de « contre-possibilité »⁶). En d'autres termes, Aristote est le premier à introduire une notion de *contre-puissance*, qui anticipe celle qu'on identifie ici sous le nom de *résistance*. Dans la *Métaphysique*, Aristote distingue quatre significations⁷ de la catégorie de puissance (*dunamis*), et c'est la quatrième qui est d'un intérêt tout à fait particulier pour nous. Il s'agit du point le plus sous-estimé de la définition aristotélicienne de la puissance, notamment du fonctionnement de la puissance en tant que *contre-puissance*, une *résistance* intrinsèque qui garde la chose d'un développement indésirable, d'un déclin, d'une dégénération, c'est-à-dire qui garantit son mouvement vers le mieux (1019a 26-30 ; 1046a). Ce terme n'a même pas de traduction particulière en latin, les trois premiers aspects étant traduits respectivement par *potentia*, *possibilitas* et *potestas*.

C'est un point capital de la pensée d'Aristote qui semble être resté méconnu, obscur même, surtout en ce qui concerne son potentiel explosif en vue de la pensée politique radicale. Aristote a postulé la résistance – la résistance contre l'actualisation, la *résistibilité* – en tant que qualité intrinsèque de la puissance. C'est une force « démoniaque » donc, dans le sens où elle sera opposée au premier moteur – « Dieu » (ou le Sujet souverain), cette actualité pure sans aucun résidu de puissance. Pourtant elle semble absolument nécessaire pour Aristote : sans

résistance, il n'y aurait pas de puissance ; sans puissance, il n'y aurait pas d'actualisation. L'ontologie de la puissance est impossible donc sans la pensée de la résistance ; la pensée de la résistance – sans la pensée de l'événement-métamorphose. Ainsi, sans aucun doute, ce retour à Aristote pourrait ouvrir la voie à un rapprochement possible des enjeux des ontologies de la puissance et de celles de la résistance, tout en assurant le terrain ontologique de l'affirmation paradoxale et longuement discutée de Deleuze « La résistance est première ».

Ainsi, la résistance s'affirme comme une catégorie *dynamique*, c'est-à-dire comme une catégorie visant une puissance active, et même plus : la *puissance en acte*. Mais alors non seulement la résistance est un acte qui n'épuise pas la puissance ; c'est un acte-puissance : c'est l'acte de la puissance même. La résistance c'est l'*energeia* de la *dunamis* mais sans *ergon*, donc *organum*. La résistance est donc *dés-organisation*.

La résistance contre le capitalisme performant

De cette manière, à travers la relecture transformatrice de *dunamis*, la notion qui détermine la matrice conceptuelle de la notion de biopolitique, on peut ouvrir une possibilité réelle de prolonger et mobiliser de manière transformatrice le débat autour de la notion de *biopolitique*, sans aucun doute décisif pour notre actualité.

Or les questions théoriques soulevées ici se formulent selon l'exigence – et dans l'urgence – critique de l'actualité. En effet, pendant les dernières décennies une transformation fondamentale est en cours. Nous sommes témoins de l'émergence d'un nouveau modèle économique, politique

et social qui prétend passer au-delà des rôles et des agents conventionnels ainsi que des cadres rigides du modèle de la production économique de l'industrie technologisée et hyper-organisée de la modernité développée qui fonctionnalisait les productions de subjectivité en réduisant le sujet lui-même à un instrument fonctionnel, bien que prétendant étendre radicalement la sphère de son autonomie (temps libre, sphère privée, autonomie du plaisir). L'actualité se trouve donc sous la signe de la transformation capitale des modes de production, d'échange et de pouvoir qui n'a pas tardé à engagé la transformation des modes de subjectivation : la marchandisation de la force de travail elle-même, c'est-à-dire l'absorption de la puissance de la vie, l'opération de base de la biopolitique. Comme le dit Maurizio Lazzarato dans *Les révolutions du capitalisme*, aujourd'hui c'est la monnaie qui devient « le possible en tant que tel ».⁸

La puissance de la vie apparaît désormais sous une forme quasi-substantielle, inorganique. Quel est le destin des corps, des corps comme *dynamique* immanente des sujets, comme lieu de la puissance de la vie, dans cette situation transformée ? La biopolitique se transforme-t-elle en trans-biopolitique, le *bios* lui-même semblant excédé dans cette transformation ?

Pour s'approcher d'une réponse possible à cette question, évoquons ici la notion de société du spectacle qui jouissait d'une certaine notoriété à l'époque. Selon son inventeur Guy Debord le spectacle c'« est le capital à un tel degré d'accumulation qu'il devient image » (thèse 34 de *La Société du Spectacle*). Cependant, il faut insister sur ce point, son caractère spectaculaire, sa *spectacularité* est originellement liée à la prolétarianisation du travail par le capital et par conséquent à la suppression

de l'organicité finie de la vie (c'est pour cette raison que la ligne de pensée de Debord, de Virilio ou bien de Baudrillard, les penseurs de l'immatérialisation radicale, paraît fondamentalement problématique du point de vue politique). La société du spectacle correspond sans doute au capitalisme technologique post-industriel et à sa logique de production ainsi qu'à la logique moderne de la représentation : elle est l'effet de l'hyper-technologisation et fonctionnalisation codifiant la vie et impose des procédés de subjectivation qui ne sont pas autre chose que des formes d'assujettissement.

A son tour, le nouveau « modèle » en question introduit une marchandise inédite – les formes de vie elles-mêmes⁹. Alors on pourrait le définir, en s'appuyant sur la matrice rhétorique de la définition de la société du spectacle de la part de Debord, comme « le degré d'accumulation du capital où il devient forme de vie. »

Si le capitalisme développé se fondait sur la présomption de la croissance : travailler plus efficacement et produire plus pour pouvoir augmenter, élargir le temps libre non-marchand de la vie autonome où des formes de vie non-soumises aux lois du marché pourraient avoir lieu, le nouveau modèle a comme trait déterminant précisément l'essai d'absorber l'espace de l'autonomie moderne du sujet : la sphère de la vie privée, ce qui veut dire, philosophiquement parlant, la sphère de la possibilité d'expérimentation avec des modes de subjectivation, de vie et d'être-en-commun alternatifs, en deux mots la sphère qui était la sphère propre de l'« existence humaine ». Le nouveau modèle s'empare ainsi de « l'improductible » et par conséquent totalise la sphère du marché. André Gorz parle à la suite de Jeremy Rifkin dans *L'âge de l'accès*,

de production de « marchandises improductibles », de fausses marchandises en effet : « Rifkin énumère parmi ces marchandises improductibles les formes et modes de vie, les cultures, les croyances, les identités, les sentiments, les expériences vécues (Rifkin, 2000). Toutes choses originellement communes, socialement produites hors marché et hors entreprise par le déploiement des rapports vivants et vécus, mais que des entreprises captent et mettent sur le marché sous forme de services ou de produits culturels, standardisés, typés, privatisés par le nom de marque et par les moyens d'y accéder dont des firmes revendiquent la propriété exclusive. »¹⁰ Mais en vérité est-ce que ces marchandises – dans la mesure où *ce sont des marchandises* – sont « improductibles » ? Ce que j'appelle pour ma part « capitalisme pervers » est exactement la production ou plutôt la *performance* de formes de vie – la marchandisation des formes de vie.

Or, la *performance* remplace la *production* : le nouveau capitalisme est performant, il n'est plus produisant ; à moins qu'il ne produise que des performances. L'emploi du terme performance, qui, vous le savez aussi bien que moi, est doté aujourd'hui de valeurs ajoutées obsessionnelles au sein des discours économiques, politiques et médiatiques des sociétés occidentales, est motivé aussi par des raisons étymologiques : la performance, de *per-formare*, désignerait précisément l'exécution, l'actualisation sans reste de la forme. La *per-formance* de la forme (de vie) est incommensurable avec la mise en scène des représentations ou des images de la vie (le spectacle) : la performance excède le spectacle classique de la même manière que le *biocapitalisme* contemporain excède le capitalisme « classique », « fordiste », le capitalisme de la haute modernité. La performance de nos

jours est essentiellement perverse. Dans son mouvement elle ne libère ni la force organique opprimée, la force du travail, c'est-à-dire le sujet, ni l'objet. Elle ouvre plutôt un espace de modifiabilité illimitée – on l'appellera *pervertibilité* – au-delà ou en-deçà de toute opposition entre sujet et objet. La perversion est un espace de réversibilité illimitée qui excède le cadre de la substance et de l'organique.

Or, j'ai proposé d'appeler ce nouveau modèle, le modèle *performant* du capitalisme global, de la société des performances économiques et des marchés de stocks, *capitalisme pervers*. Le capitalisme pervers est donc la désignation intensive d'un espace socio-économique dans lequel un échange infini et une efficacité fonctionnelle d'agents impersonnels a lieu, qui, contrairement au cadre déterministe et fini de l'organique (travail), est infiniment réversible.

Le capitalisme pervers produit ainsi le nouvel espace illimité : l'espace neutre de *l'inorganique*. L'espace inorganique est un espace d'expérimentation de nouvelles formes de vie. La caractéristique principale de la société performante est ainsi la transformation illimitée des formes de vie et des modes de subjectivation – ou plutôt la production d'une subjectivité plastique adaptée à l'hétérogénéité et la diversification du marché, la virtualisation et la standardisation de ces formes de vie multipliées en tant que marchandise ultime ou plutôt comme valeur ajoutée de toute marchandise. En effet, marchandise n'est pas le meilleur terme. Il s'agit plutôt de la présence globale, massive mais incorporelle à travers laquelle la matière-marchandise apparaît comme *forme de vie*. Le capitalisme pervers transforme la valeur ajoutée en forme de vie. *Biocapitalisme* veut dire

marchandisation des formes de vie, ou plus précisément la production et le commerce de choses inorganiques, dont la valeur ajoutée est forme de vie. Ainsi, la vie elle-même, à travers l'appropriation des formes de vie, se voit-elle réduite à une production marchande, à une standardisation en tant que marchandise. Le capitalisme qui nous arrive tous les jours pour nous posséder est *pervers* parce qu'il pervertit, en la déplaçant, la sphère de la vie (comme la perversion au sens clinique déplace le désir) ; il absorbe la vie, qui résistait au circuit économique, dans la sphère marchande. La perversion serait alors la radicalisation et la totalisation de l'économie libidinale. Le capitalisme pervers prostitue la vie.

Ainsi, au bout du compte le capitalisme *performant* apparaît en tant qu'une forme tout à fait nouvelle de production de productivité. De ce point de vue il transforme à sa manière un des traits distinctifs de la politique moderne du corps, notamment la politique de la puissance du corps dont la formule serait celle qu'on attribue à Maine de Biran : *le corps peut tout*. La politique du corps en tant que puissance positive illimitée. L'expérimentation technique de la puissance du corps radicalisant l'intuition biopolitique de la modernité par les nouvelles technologies et hypertechnologies médiatiques paraît infinie : pensons, bien au-delà de l'héroïsme banal du corps laborieux standardisé dans la production industrielle, aux performances financières, créatrices, « immatérielles » des nouveaux agents du capital, aux spectacles médiatiques des corps transhumains, corps-cyborgs, dont le slogan pourrait être « il n'y a pas de limites pour la performance du corps ». Or, la politique de la plasticité perverse « libère » la puissance du corps, en lui ouvrant prétendument l'accès à une puissance (illimitée) de modification. Mais elle

traite le corps comme sujet (au sens passif) de devenir multiples typés, codifiés – le corps n'est modifiable et donc libre que dans le seul but de reproduire une forme matricielle. Le capitalisme performant dé-substantialise cette forme matricielle en la présentant comme le lieu vide d'une « forme inédite », nécessaire pour nourrir le circuit pervers du marché. La politique perverse de la plasticité façonne des techniques vectorielles du devenir du corps, conçu comme la substance plastique disponible et façonnable des formes de vie.

Alors, si la transformation actuelle est sans précédent dans sa radicalité, c'est parce que le capitalisme pervers approprie le potentiel de transformation de l'être humain, sa transformabilité d'origine, la transformabilité qui rend possible la multiplicité des modes de vie. Du point de vue politique, le procès en cours ne représente rien d'autre que l'appropriation économique du vide inappropriable *entre* les singularités, le lieu d'origine an-archique du politique – et par conséquent de la réduction de la pléthore des formes de vie à l'impératif per-formant du capital. Ce n'est pas un hasard si on parle aujourd'hui de *global capitalisme* et de processus de *globalisation* ou de *mondialisation* : la présupposition passée sous silence de cette affirmation est que les mondes autonomes des formes de vie sont réduites à un « grand » monde, à un monde total, fermé sur soi, monde sans issue. Fermé sur soi et réduit à lui-même, le *globe* devient une présence massive – horizon total de l'Être, limite totalisante de l'inscription de la finitude infinie de la vie. Le capitalisme *global* signifie alors non seulement la crise d'un régime ou mode d'existence politique donné mais une crise du politique lui-même.

La résistance possible

Mais dès lors, l'ex-corporation libératrice du corps, sa désorganisation résistante, est-elle absorbée dans la quasi-ouverture du monde inorganique, dans le prétendu Ouvert d'une modifiabilité radicale, d'une prothésation qui affecte les conditions mêmes du vivant (je pense aux biotechnologies, aux interventions dans le génome etc., une des pratiques symptomatiques du nouveau capitalisme) ? Comment résister ou plutôt *persiste* dès lors dans le flux totalisant, dans la fluidité biopolitique et techno-esthétique, comment résister à l'absorption de la transformabilité de la vie sans abolir la possibilité d'émergence de l'événement (du) sujet ? Comment les sujets résisteraient-ils à l'appropriation de leur transformabilité d'origine ?

Il me semble que la première résistance possible ne consisterait que dans la suspension de cette « ouverture ». La résistance contre les techniques perverses d'appropriation de la transformabilité consisterait dans la « révélation » de la transformation en tant que condition indépassable et irréductible. La première phase de la résistance sera alors le mouvement qui démontre que la transformabilité est tout autre chose que la fluidité et la « perméabilité » ou la vitesse illimitées des formes de vie marchandisées et encore moins que la réversibilité infinie de la substance, dont le capitalisme performant ne cesse de faire l'éloge. Au contraire, la puissance de transformation implique une résistance intrinsèque des corps-sujets (disons : *résistibilité*), celle qu'Aristote avait connu déjà, et qui était indissociable de la définition de la *dunamis*. Alors que l'inorganique est approprié par le capitalisme pervers, le corps-sujet résiste en le désorganisant. La désorganisation est donc *résistance*.

La désorganisation de la vie, ou la tekhno-aïsthétique

Si on peut parler dès lors à l'endroit des corps-sujets de résistance politique, ce ne serait pas dans la perspective des corps *inscrit* dans le régime de la représentation politique et de la performance économique mais, tout au contraire, dans la perspective d'une pensée du politique en tant que mouvement d'ex-cription du corps, en tant que résistance immanente à toute appropriation, à toute inscription : on appelle précisément cette ex-cription, cette ek-sistence, cette ex-corporation du corps *désorganisation*. La désorganisation de la vie c'est la vie qui s'expose en tant que résistance.

La résistance dés-organisatrice est donc la force de la métamorphose : la com-position dynamique des événements-singularités. La métamorphose, ou la liberté du corps, la décloison de la puissance, est, paradoxalement au premier regard, une résistance contre la fluidité performante et l'effacement de la forme, contre le double mouvement de révulsion-fascination de la matière informe : d'une part de l'énergie libidinale captée par les circuits de la production synthétique, d'autre part de la substance primitive (celle des « valeurs traditionnelles » et des obsessions identitaires), de la ressource (pseudo-)ontologique. Ainsi, au bout du compte, la question décisive qui se pose n'est pas la question des autres formes de vie et de leur contrôle, production et gouvernance, mais la question de la force ou bien de la puissance de transformation qui traverse ces formes. Quelle est la force qui fait les corps-sujets et les réseaux dans lesquels ils opèrent se transformer ?

Peut-être le nom le plus adéquat de cette force de la métamorphose est précisément *résistance*. Si la résistance est

immanente à la puissance, elle est aussi immanente à la transformabilité du corps : c'est en ce sens qu'elle est l'acte de sa puissance même.

La résistance n'est donc pas surdéterminée. En tant que moment immanent de la puissance, elle est décidément première. Elle est première en tant qu'opération de singularisation, c'est-à-dire d'invention-production de singularité, ou bien de formes de vie singulières. La résistance des corps-sujets opère avec les *tekhnai* de la singularisation dans le vide du commun comme avec des forces « pures ». Le corps apparaît dans ce vide non pas comme un conglomérat de signes ou bien comme une puissance organique substantielle – une unité organique ou machinique homogène ; au contraire, il est toujours pris dans le mouvement de dés-organisation. De ce point de vue on peut comprendre la dés-organisation comme le mouvement immanent au corps, qui excède l'opposition entre organique et inorganique.

La désorganisation est donc l'autre nom de ce que j'appelle *tekhno-aïsthétique*. Les *tekhnai* (je traduis librement le grec *tekhné* en tant que 'savoir-faire', voire 'mode d'agir') sont des modes de subjectivations : des « canaux » des devenirs subjectifs. Prenons l'exemple du vêtement, cette « proto-prothèse ». Depuis qu'il existe, le vêtement est un mode constitutif du devenir du sujet : en fait le morceau de tissu se transforme en vêtement seulement en tant que prothèse subjective. Chaque prothèse correspond donc à des *tekhnai*, respectivement à des pratiques culturelles qui se cultivent historiquement, mais également à des *tekhnai* singulières et souvent in-nommables. De leur côté, ces *tekhnai* engagent toujours des processus matériels et des intensités sensibles ; elles participent au devenir-sensible du sensible comme une

force immanente. Parlons donc de *tekhnai aïsthétiques* et des processus *tekhno-aïsthétiques* comme immanente à la puissance du sujet. Le corps-sujet devient sujet par l'opération complexe de (dés)organisation de ses *tekhnai*, c'est-à-dire de singularisation-opération, à travers laquelle l'espace du commun est re-composé. Or le noyau tensif de la construction de la puissance du commun est immanent au mouvement du corps-sujet en tant que devenir-multiple des singularités, en tant que leur com-position.

Désormais, on le sait : on ne peut pas aborder la transformation biocapitaliste sans tenir compte de la transformation des modes de subjectivation qui sont toujours matériels, c'est-à-dire *tekhno-aïsthétiques* (et pas seulement « cognitifs », « linguistiques » ou « sémiotiques »). Biopolitique veut dire en premier lieu processus de production (et respectivement, d'absorption) des modes et des *tekhnai* de subjectivation. La question décisive pour le sujet-politique aujourd'hui est donc la question *tekhno-aïsthétique*.

La tâche devant nous aujourd'hui, comme toujours, c'est donc l'expérimentation désorganisée de la puissance du corps qui ne se relève pas en fonction ou marchandise échangeable : une contre-opération transformatrice des modes standardisés de production de subjectivité, c'est-à-dire de codification et de « commodification » du corps, de la perception, de la réflexion et de l'émotion dans le circuit politico-économique du capitalisme pervers global, qui essaye de réduire l'horizon de la vie à l'espace sur-exploité du globe. La résistance du sujet veut dire invention de formes de vie singulières et *manifestes* qui destituent les formes de vie typifiées – marchandisées, per-formées, perverses ; la manifestation des

formes de vie en tant que puissance est la manifestation de la transformabilité. Si on périphrase Benjamin, désormais il s'agit non pas de bio-esthétiser la politique mais de (re-)politiser la (bio-)aïsthétique, ou plutôt de suivre son rythme politique immanent. Une bataille *aïsthétique* en faveur des sujets inimaginables pour tracer l'à-venir.

La persistance : résister dans la métamorphose

Concluons : dans la mesure où la puissance du sujet est puissance des multiples modes du devenir, qui sont toujours des modes *tekhno-aïsthétiques*, il n'y a jamais de « puissance pure » de « *bios* pur et simple » selon les mots de Virno, de la vie du sujet.

Thèse 3.

La puissance de la vie – puissance du corps-sujet – est toujours une puissance plastique. Telle est le double bind de la puissance. C'est bien cette plasticité, cette modifiabilité qui rend possible la productibilité. Elle seule permet la production et donc l'exploitation, comme l'affirme Virno. Mais c'est elle aussi qui rend possible la résistance. Dans la mesure où la puissance comprend toujours un moment immanent de résistance le corps-sujet ne peut jamais être intégralement dominé. Il excède toute totalité : telle est l'excès immanent de la vie, l'excès de la finitude. L'emprise biopolitique sur les corps-sujets ne peut donc jamais être totale, elle n'est qu'un processus totalisant engagé dans une bataille pour s'emparer des champs biopolitiques et donc *tekhno-aïsthétiques*, des champs de l'émergence des modes de subjectivation.

Thèse 4.

La puissance est toujours modale. La lutte pour la puissance est une lutte qui lui est déjà immanente, et donc irréductible. Et c'est pour cette raison que la puissance de la lutte et la liberté sont irréductibles.

Thèse 5.

Liberté veut dire à la fois possibilité de changer et de persister.

Thèse 6.

Le corps-sujet est opérateur de la résistance immanente à la puissance : de la persistance métamorphique-événementielle. Le sujet est opérateur de transformation. Or le sujet est un *mode* – le sujet est d'ordre modal.

Mais la transformation par laquelle le corps-sujet politique devient sujet doit être une transformation *transversale*. La transversalité de la transformation indique clairement qu'elle excède à la fois la sur-détermination verticale (et donc le risque messianique, le risque d'une « révolution négative », pour reprendre le terme d'Artemy Magun, sur-déterminée de la structure onto-théologique de la souveraineté traditionnelle) et la sur-détermination horizontale (et donc le risque de la plasticité opportuniste du sujet dans l'époque de la *gouvernance*). De ce point de vue, le concept guattarien de *transversalité* sur lequel insistent également Gerald Raunig et autres membres d'*eipcp*, se rapproche des concepts de *persistance* et de *transformation de la transformation* qui guident mon

travail actuel. Tous comme ceux-ci, la notion de transversalité fait face à l'exigence d'une transformation disruptive de la transformation per-formante en cours, transformation qui interrompt les possibilité de réduction des puissances aux flux horizontaux des échanges (réversibles) et aux systèmes verticaux des équivalences.

Le sujet est donc le nom du point de passage – point de résistance et, désormais, point de *persistance* ou de *transversalité* : la co-incidence de l'événement et du changement. C'est la raison pour laquelle le sujet-politique, l'événement-métamorphose des corps-sujets, peut porter aussi le nom de *multitude*. La définition spinozienne de la multitude en tant que pluralité qui *persiste* comme telle serait également la définition exemplaire du sujet. Une pluralité qui persiste dans la métamorphose en tant que métamorphose, ajouterons-nous. Le sujet est dans ce sens la durée de l'événement ou l'opérateur de la métamorphose : d'une part il est continuum métamorphique, devenir permanent, d'autre part il est force disruptive – événement (de la justice : insurrection).

Toute affirmation singulière est un acte juste ; toute justice est disruptive. Ainsi, la pensée de la persistance, ou de la transversalité – et du sujet en tant qu'événement persistant – tranche l'aporie politique du sujet, l'aporie de sa résistance et de son action affirmative. La pensée de la persistance pose aporétiquement (com-pose) la force disruptive de l'événement-justice – cet universel disruptif, et la continuité-persistance de la lutte.

Persister donc. Affirmer la persistance des formes de vie à travers la transformation, affirmer la métamorphose

des sujets-politique contre la fluidité quasi-substantielle des nouveaux pouvoirs totalisants, ré-ouvrir et ré-mobiliser la puissance transformatrice de la praxis politique, non pour poser de nouveau l'exigence de transformer le monde mais pour transformer sa transformation. On ne persistera dans l'événement du corps-sujet que si on lui fait face à la hauteur de sa propre exigence : celle de la révolution permanente de la métamorphose qui n'est pas une interruption quasi-messianique mais une immanence anarchique – une immanence transformatrice qui persiste, (se) creusant toujours plus loin dans le vide de la *krisis*, de l'inimaginable d'une justice sans commune mesure, de la liberté tout court.

Notes :

1. Paolo Virno, *Grammaire de la multitude. Pour une analyse des formes de vie contemporaines* (Nîmes/Montréal: Editions de l'Eclat & Conjonctures, 2002), 91-94.
2. *Résultats*, 1865, in *Œuvres*, Paris, Gallimars, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », vol. II, 1968, p. 443. Cf. aussi l'affirmation suivante : « La production capitaliste développe d'abord en grand – en les arrachant au travailleur individuel et indépendant – les conditions objectives aussi bien que subjectives du processus du travail, mais elle les développe comme des puissances qui dominent le travailleur individuel et lui sont étrangères. » (*Théories*, 1862-1863, *Werke*, XXVI, t. I, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1957-1968, 368).
3. Cf. par ex. Boyan Manchev, *Le corps-métamorphose* (Sofia: Altera, 2007).
4. Gilles Châtelet, « L'enchantement du virtuel », in *Les Enjeux du mobile : Mathématiques, physique, philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).
5. Ibid., 43-44.
6. Cf. Dimka Gicheva-Gocheva, *Novi opiti vyrhu aristotelovia teleologizym* [Nouveaux essais sur le téléologisme aristotélicien] (Sofia: LIK, 1998), 74-77.
7. En effet, dans le Livre Théta, elles sont quatre, dans le Livre Delta – plutôt cinq (1019a 15-32).
8. Cf. Maurizio Lazzarato, *Les révolutions du capitalisme* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond / Le Seuil, 2004), 114.
9. En quel sens emploie-t-on ici la notion de *formes de vie* ? Cette notion a la tâche fondamentale d'introduire une idée alternative de la vie selon laquelle il n'y a pas de vie-substance, il n'y a que des formes de vie, ou bien, encore mieux, des *modes de vie* : la vie, c'est la modalisation de la vie. La valeur politique forte de cette thèse est la suivante : la vie n'est pas la valeur sacrée suprême, le garant transcendantal du régime ontopolitique de la modernité. La vie n'a lieu qu'en tant que modalisation de la vie, c'est-à-dire comme opération de singularisation, d'invention et de devenir des formes de vie : sujets, singularités, éthiques.

10. Cf. André Gorz, « Économie de la connaissance, exploitation des savoirs. Entretien réalisé par Yann Moulrier Boutang et Carlo Vercellone », in *Multitudes*, 15, 2004 et Jeremy Rifkin, *L'âge de l'accès*, La Découverte, 2000.

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Lamija
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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 forgetting¹

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).² 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,”³ 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,⁴ 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.⁵ 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.”⁶ 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 identity⁷ 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)



Becoming other, becoming “Jill-script-walker” through the recording process illustrates an affective movement, a line of flight or escape through which two bodies assembles. What passes through Jill to script walker is an affect composed of molecular forces, opening her becoming, becoming-other. Following Deleuze and Guattari, sensation is a compound of affects and percepts, where affects are not affections, but “non-human becomings of man,” and percept are not perceptions, but “landscape[s] before man in the absence of man.” (Deleuze 1994, 169) In making perceptible the imperceptible, molecular forces that “populate the world, affect us, and makes us become,” (ibid., 182) Bilal gives us precepts, but also affects as Jill’s becoming other is a composite of the forces that pass from one state to another. To put it differently, Jill’s recording process is recoding of an affect that passes from Jill to script-walker. Since affects and precepts are mutually informing constituents of sensation, Jill’s becoming-other in the non-human landscape of imperceptible forces is no/thing but a being of sensation that has no resemblance with the already perceived; nor can it be referred to as affections of a particular subject. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *What is Philosophy?*: “The aim of art is to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and from states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affection as passage from one state to another. To extract a block of sensations, a pure being of sensation.” (Deleuze 1994, 167).

By capturing this virtual passage of becoming other, the becoming other of the senses, Bilal slides into chaos, the realm of imperceptible forces, which is “unthinkable, immeasurable and unworkable,” (Bogue 2003, 175) but only to come out with the plane of composition that extracts a slice of that chaos and renders it perceptible through

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,⁸” 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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Mladen
Alexiev

The Body Matters

The simplest form of power is that derived from
a man's own body.
(Canetti 1984, 390)

There is always repression when someone stands between the body and the world. There, where the body's link with the world is mediated, there is always a regime of coercion (whether it is merely microscopic or the most platitudinous of regimes).

Political repression, transformed in the system's ubiquitous rule, radicalizes the body.

Radicalized political repression, its escalation, incandesces the body and temporarily effaces the individual layers and cultural accumulations for the body, characteristic of "the peaceful life," i.e., for a more balanced model of ruling the state.

The resisting body will constitute the group and all of its phenomena – the insurrection, the revolution, the warfare, the protest, the rally, will set a situation of temporary abolishment of the social hierarchy inside and outside the

very group. But these are not bodies capable of living together. These are merely bodies akin to and synchronic in their resistance.

The entire enormous cultural history, the enormous construct of culture is being temporarily abolished and reduced to the body. It is not expressed by or through the body. It is temporarily *sublated*, abolished, suspended, and driven aside. The body matters. The unexpectedness of its action makes it *visible*.

The body's visibility is a visibility of the body for the thinking itself. The body is being secondarily assimilated within the registry of a revolutionary-bodily and artistically-bodily culture, but this is a secondary signifying practice of the body. It becomes visible precisely when it enforces that it be thought.¹ In this way, it entails a "language" or a "culture." But in fact, it – alone besides itself and for itself – does not create anything beyond its immediate physical acts. The creation of culture will be ascribed to it secondarily, from the observer's position – the consciousness that thinks it. In relation to the very act, in the moment of the very act we could say that the body is in full silence – it always remains outside language,

and its act could, secondarily, be simultaneously attached to different and even contradicting political and artistic cultures.

The body creates no culture, the body acts. This is all it can do.

By opening spaces of thinking, the body brings to realization the sublation under question and thus creates a temporary topos. Yet, topos is too strong an expression – the body does not realize any utopian project. It has itself no plan, in the sense of a preliminary program. Even if there is such a plan, the body itself does not relate to it. Even utilized as an instrument, even set in the position of a doer, the body always has the final word. There, where the body advances and makes an act, it realizes exactly “its” act and nothing else. We will ascribe it to the subject secondarily. (The subject is the helping leash to which we will tie the bodies (proper or alien) – in order to simultaneously feel related to them, to make them tolerable and possible for thinking and to hold them under control). The body itself overcomes itself and in this overcoming it is all alone – from invisible it becomes exhibited to gazes, *it becomes vulnerable*. In this overcoming of the internal limit, the body is all alone – it makes a leap. In a body (from the position of situatedness in it), everything can be thought, but it itself can do some things with ease, and others with much effort or altogether cannot. Various bodies have different external limits, they border with the external in various ways.

The body achieves visibility by displacement from the Real. The body “makes” a place “for itself,” but one cannot say that it creates a new place or occupies an already existing place. This is *momentum*, a lightning’s shine,

under which the body is seen for a moment. In this sense, what is important is the act through which the body makes itself flashing and becomes visible. The act creates a momentary resonance between body and thinking. Thus the body achieves visibility. The body does not occupy someone else’s place (on the contrary, it is precisely in this moment that it is “in its place”), and flashes as the Other of places.

The subject could be merely the body’s fuel, but during the act, in the moment of the very act the subject is being suspended and dis-placed. The body is not a subject and is not the subject. It is a “body-that-is-responsible-for-itself.”

Can we here talk about a reduction and where does this reduction take place? We will “reduce” the body in order to think about it clearly. However, no reduction takes place by the body. At the moment of action, the body is as if only seemingly reducing itself to this action. But if there is reduction, some resource has diminished, some energy has not been in use, the whole is represented by a part. This is why we would say: the body is action, or, more precisely: the body acts. It all is radicalization, and is not reduced to it. It all is radicalized, because it is a doer. We say a “doer” only to elucidate: in fact, it is not even this – the body is a *doing*. (This “doing” is the main feature of the living body, which separates it from objects). Because of this, it has no need to think itself. And again due to the same reason it is responsible for itself – it itself puts itself in danger.

The body that has achieved visibility exists parallel to the hierarchy, but also outside of it. For itself, the body matters in only one way – physically, through its “unsigned vivacity.” This vivacity is material, and no other.

For the body, the only way out of repression is through *direct physical actions*.

In this sense: the body is resistance. The body is not interested in or by culture. The body is resistance through its necessity to advance.

Being invisible and indiscernible, the body is convenient and hospitable to the repression. Becoming visible, achieving visibility, the body resists. The body does not merely resist, the body *is* resistance. This is its other stable characteristic. It cannot but resist. It cannot but do. Because of this, resistance is not by all means a reaction to an external repression, it is inseparable from and inherent in the body.

The body temporarily abolishes culture, and through its resistance it bears witness to a disastrous situation in the political, a political in disaster (*anomie* or hypertrophy of the empowered class – authoritarianism or totalitarianism, i.e., dictatorship). The body temporarily abolishes culture (brushes away, takes away, deprives us of normativity), but through its resistance (which is a visibly active deed, and we can also say: production) it brings signifying practice, it generates meaning – and thus creates space. On the one hand it takes away, but at this very moment – by the opposite logic – it produces, it opens some new space to be thought.

Through its act, the body sublates everything in its own plane. And this “sublation” is thrusting back and producing at the same time. It functions in this duplicity, which does not always attain equilibrium.

The body speaks about political repression without the repression being visible. Once the body achieves visibility,

it automatically makes repression visible. We have to say: once advancing, the body begins to speak immediately. We will say: *the body takes a stand*.

If the body is a ceaseless “flow of desiring-production,” then politics and culture are the ceaseless “re-territorialization” of this flow, and in this sense they are reactive, the attempt to collect and seal off the body and thus they remove themselves from and deaden it.

There is no need for the very repression to be visible. It can also be quite discrete. We need not see beaten bodies, the blood, the hunger and misery, the exhausted refugees or the corpses in order to understand that it is there. Moreover, a peculiarity of repression is that its proficiency – the immediate physical proficiency, its experiencing – is hard to communicate, it is by its essence as equally invisible as the body itself is. And it is invisible because it can be thought of merely once it has happened. And it is invisible secondly because, even if discussed, broadcast or narrated, it continues to remain invisible for the body which does not know it. It is for this reason that it is not *directly* communicated, it knows how it evade. Repression always precedes the political visibility of the body. I do not protest every single day and I do not ‘explode’ myself every day, on the other hand: I eat every day, I sleep and defecate, but my body stays invisible (even to myself). A third stable characteristic of the body is its invisibility.

What do we call radicalization of the body? This is the moment when the body has begun to act by itself, it has itself grown aware of itself as a body-responsible-for-itself. This is the moment when the body stops receiving the repression, regardless if it comes from a political

apparatus or from the one who thinks inside the body itself (“its” subject).

The very fact that the body has radicalized, that it has found itself in the political, has begun to act is already evidence for some repression, no matter what the body does exactly. (Whether I fall at the feet of a political representative crying or if I stand alone in front of four tanks, this secures a different visibility for my body, but in both cases it points to something that precedes my act and this something is repression in some form.)

The body presupposes repression, it always contains it immanently. Through its resistance, it points at it and makes it visible. Since resistance is its stable characteristic, the body is being ascribed an invitation for repression. One can easily misuse it. The oppressor will say: “it (the other’s body) challenges me.”

The body in disaster (including the body of insanity or frenzy) attempts to shake itself free from the repression, to which it is subjected. Alone by itself, it does not deal with the generation of signs or images. Its primary meaning is the *shaking off* of repressive and restrictive interference – get out of my way, get away from my back, untie yourself from my neck! Secondly, this shaking off generates some signifying practice.

We cannot say of the body that it has remained alone/naked/unsigned – it is such. We are the ones who continually see from its own place something else. The body turns out to be the thing most strenuous to watch. It is namely the body that we will always hurl in the periphery, will “represent” it, will dress it, will add value and meaning to it. We will seek avenues to it in order to inscribe it

in a common frame of reference – we will ascribe subject to it in order to absorb it. Yes, the body achieves visibility, but this visibility of the body is by necessity (by our necessity – of those who think it alongside) merely a momentarily one – we are not able to bear more than a momentary body flash.

The body alone is by itself alone/naked/unsigned/non-meaning. This crucial non-practice of signification of the body is impossible to absorb. It presents a challenge for both the thinking-that-found-itself-in-a-body which builds (or tries to build) certain relations with “its own” body, and the political which, due to this initial non-practice of signification of the body, will easily treat it as insignificant.

By itself, the body is non-signified, because it does not think – it knows and it acts.

It, the body, is in no need to matter, probably it is just exasperated, it is in distress for one reason or another, it creates and labors because it cannot but produce. It is unproductive that it is being thought of only from the position of a logo-centric colonialism. The body correlates with the things only by virtue of its own scale.

This is why it is not the mastered signifying practice that is the aim of the *corporeal act*, it has not thought of itself in advance. In this sense, the body has not “corpographed” itself (has not choreographed itself, has not in advance left outside the schema of its own act), it is a body-responsible-for-itself – it incessantly responds to the repression it cohabitates with and which incessantly faces it with its own limit. The ultimate repression, the pressure of the externally coming transforms the body in the only limit of

resistance, in the last bastion regardlessly. Every externally coming repression constructs it as an *external limit*. The internally coming repression – the illness, mental or physical, sets the *internal limit* of the body.

The body resists *by necessity*, its resistance is immanent. It is precisely the necessity that makes the body visible. It gives it temporary access and belonging to all the remaining events in human history and culture. It is not driven by concept or premeditated plan. It does not insist on receiving attention or some value that it contains. Its values stems from what it thrusts back. Here, it is not a matter of signs, but of a real threat, really operating a regime of repression. The body itself does not interfere in some system of signs, it does not implement an utterance, it does not think. It makes a certain act. Its value (its signifying practice and its visibility) stems from the thrusting back of repression. The body's act is opposition (to repression) and simultaneously the self-affirmation (of the own vivacity).

To speak of “body culture” means to be misled. The body is precisely what culture fails to appropriate, although it tries to by all possible means. There, where we would search for “body culture” we will come upon a self-repressive model. The flow of actions has transformed into territoriality. Or, more precisely, the body's lines of resistance and flight are being transformed into territorializations of ceaseless resistance as the norm of some group. The body's resistance is being assimilated by normativity and is localized in the socius – there it is (re) produced and maintained.

A body that gets accustomed to the challenges of its external limits often discovers its resistance as a “means

by itself” (as something due and belonging to it). And here it brings itself to a moment of *narcotization* with it itself – it creates for itself an extreme stereotype, it needs to be in disaster even when there is no disaster. When there is no real repression, it will frequently be provoked and intentionally sought for. In this sense, the narcotization could also be literal (bringing the body to its external limit), but it is mostly the stiffing of resistance to stereotype, i.e., its acceptance as a singular possible modus of the body, its singular language and expressionism.

A body closed in repetition itself hides itself. And it hides because it gives away its autonomy at the expense of repetition – a self-detached sustainable model, belonging to the socius and its dynamics. By resistance, the body is able to act suddenly. Suddenness is what outlines it.²

Through its acts of resistance, recalled by necessity and making it sudden (*viz.*, visible), the body's visibility becomes thinkable also in the moments when it is at rest, in everyday routine, in calmness. Maintaining the limit of resistance in the modus of everyday and quotidian action assists to the creation of a zone of visibility and the utterly muted modes of the body. In this case, resistance is emancipatory, its decisiveness – muted. A line of self-determination or discrete self-reclaiming of the body within the repression grows visible to us – not by the political repression, but by the very possibility for closure and disappearance of the body – the own absence (the body's physical end, its becoming-object) transformed into the body's external limit. In other words, through its acts of visibility, the body itself ceaselessly reclaims itself from its own absence (the object). It is in this way that the body discovers itself as *presence*.

But let us repeat again: nobody speaks here of some signful presence of the body. We are not speaking of the body's absence *to us* (someone's consciousness that observes alongside), nor absence *for us* and our thinking (decoding the body as a sign and the deciphering of its supposed message). Becoming conscious of its resistance, the body itself becomes conscious for itself – it itself becomes visible to itself. It will discover itself as *presence-in-itself*.

But these territories that are hidden to us do not abolish the necessity of resistance – repression is possible and happens on all levels. It simply modifies and leads to other forms of resistance, forms that seemingly “plunge” (into the body), while at the same time they operate on micro-surfaces and demand minimal twitches and miniaturized movements. The catatonic and autistic bodies are also bodies of resistance.

It does not follow from all that has been said so far that the body is *reactionary*. Yes, it responds to an external which lays the body for itself as a limit, but it is also not deprived from a sideways gaze. The body's gaze is not some defamiliarized instance, it is not a consciousness that thinks the thoughts we think the body with. The body's gaze is *its very vivacity*. The vivacious body is the body directly related with itself. The vivacious body is a body that sees itself. In this sense, it is *self-reflexive*. This only means one thing – resisting, *the body is itself able to enjoy*. It is capable of presencing in its acts and thus to learn to reload itself, to regenerate, to whirl its energy into a flow and to communicate – with nothing other than precisely its energy flow. The body's action is always “inscribed on the very surface of the Real.”³ It is merely on a secondary level that this flow is the self-same *utterance* of the body, what it “says.”

And the body is bound to protect itself precisely at this point of potential action, where it sees only itself and is itself free to enjoy with no recourse to the colonizing measure of thinking. Otherwise, it will always remain in the position of the *irrational leftover* of immanently repressive and rational power and will model itself from this position. By the same token, it will always remain the *irrational leftover* of the authoritarian and arbitrary subject. Due to the ceaseless drive it has to be included, it will *by necessity* be able to alone identify itself only as excepted, as an exception.

Translated from Bulgarian by Stanimir Panayotov

Notes:

1. In the words of Walter Benjamin: “There is no world of thought that is not a world of language and one sees in the world what is preconditioned by language” (quoted in Weber 2008).
2. “Who prides himself on standing upright, can also, while remaining in the same place, sit, lie, squat or kneel. All these postures, and particularly the change from one to another, have their own special significance. ... All changes of position and relatively sudden. They may be familiar, expected, and in accordance with the customs of the particular community, but there is always the possibility of a change of position which is unexpected and therefore all the more significant” (Canetti 1984, 387).

In this text we accept that the body is “invisible” in all of its manifestations that are close and expected and that get rightly inscribed in the customs of a given community. We consider that then it is being immediately reduced to sign in a concomitant system of normativity and codifications, that it is being immediately covered by something else and does not speak alone of itself (through its unsignified vivacity).

3. “The recordings and transmissions that have come from the internal codes, from the outside world, from one region to another of the organism, all intersect, following the endlessly ramified paths of the great disjunctive synthesis. If this constitutes a system of writing, it is a writing inscribed on the very surface of the Real: a strangely polyvocal kind of writing, never univocalized, linearized one; a transursive system of writing, never discursive one; writing that constitutes the entire domain of the ‘real inorganization’ of the passive syntheses, where we would search in vain for something that might be labeled the Signifier” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 39).

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III Disidentifications

Lee
Edelman

White Skin, Dark Meat: Identity's Pressure Point

Oedipus—still, at the end of the day, our favorite bedtime story—simply by giving it a name at all has necessarily given a *bad* name to the relations between fathers and sons: which is also to say that the badness of those relations finds an alibi in Oedipus's name. Enjoying the greatest public embrace of any Freudian concept, the Oedipus complex has suffered, as objects we love not infrequently do, the violence of a normalization that refuses to grant it any complexity by stripping it of muscle and sinew and blood and reducing it to nothing but a bleached and whitewashed imitation of itself: a skeletal Oedipal myth in which, as Howard Dietz puts it succinctly in his lyric to "That's Entertainment," "a chap kills his father/ And causes a lot of bother." Like many a skeleton, this one too comes equipped with its very own closet, but where closets usually provide a dark space in which to conceal such a skeleton, here, instead, the skeleton manages to hide the dark space of the closet. For the barebones account of Oedipus that continues diffusely, throughout our culture, to stiffen more than men's spines alone, conveniently frames tensions between fathers and sons as merely the "natural" masculine practice of dicking about the dick, which, however frequent its invocation as a "bone," remains, for our patriarchal social order, nothing less than

prime beef. And so long as the bone of contention between fathers and sons is the cut of that meat, we can boast that junior has rightfully inherited his old man's healthy appetite. But the law we delight to call "Oedipal" may, at bottom, have less to do with their picking a bone who has the meat, and more to do with a sense that the meat itself is no more than a bone: a bone tossed to sons by their fathers as mere compensation, a sort of sop, for paternal imposition of the cultural law demanding the son disavow the anus as a site or seat of pleasure, assuring, thereafter, that memories of all such repudiated pleasures can only return as does the father himself: that is, as a pain in the ass.

For the anal zone, unique among areas eroticized in the various stages that chart libidinal "development," does not just pass from early preeminence to later subordination, it also undergoes a demonization within a heterosexually-inflected Symbolic that subjects the history of its libidinal cathexis to a revisionary repression. It not only loses legitimacy, that is, as a site for the production of desire, it also comes to define the space of what is viscerally *undesirable*, the space that produces our primary cultural referent for disgust. "This transformation

of affect,” Freud unambiguously declares, “constitutes the essence of what we term ‘repression’” (emphasis in original), an assertion to which he quickly adds: “we have only to recall the way in which disgust emerges in childhood after having been absent to begin with.”¹ He returns to this theme in a footnote (added to his text in 1920) that elaborates on “The Activity of the Anal Zone” in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*:

Lou-Andreas-Salomé (1916), in a paper which has given us a very much deeper understanding of the significance of anal erotism, has shown how the history of the first prohibition which a child comes across – the prohibition against getting pleasure from anal activity and its products – has a decisive effect on his whole development. This must be the first occasion on which the infant has a glimpse of an environment hostile to his instinctual impulses, on which he learns to separate his own entity from this alien one and on which he carries out the first “repression” of his possibilities for pleasure. From that time on, what is “anal” remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life. The clear-cut distinction between anal and genital processes which is later insisted upon is contradicted by the close anatomical and functional analogies and relations which hold between them. The genital apparatus remains the neighbour of the cloaca, and actually [to quote Lou Andreas-Salomé] “in the case of women is only taken from it on lease.” (S.E., 7, 187)

The straight man’s ass may seem, at first glance, to profit quite handsomely by “leasing” its one-time corridor of erotic stimulation to the female genitalia, since it does so for an exorbitant fee that includes, as downpayment, an inflexible mandate of cultural abjection. The income it tidily clears for refusing to let anal pleasure come in, is as clear as the cut of the genital difference toward which Oedipus endlessly stares. If such an exchange makes

sense in the cultural economy of masculine privilege, however, it does so because that economy succeeds in making its sense of sense appear as unimpeachably sensible—an effect in no small measure achieved through a hierarchical disposition of the senses that puts the visual securely on top (allied as it is with the hetero-genital necessity of bearing witness to “clear-cut distinction[s]”²) at the expense, for example, of olfactory sensation, which gets consigned, by and large, to the bottom.

The eye’s belated primacy, then, like the developmental “triumph” realized by the genital fixation of the libido, depends on the logic that successfully inculcates a generalized anal disgust. The eye, one might say, is always, in consequence, effectively the eye of the law, looking to establish a clear-cut distinction between subject and object, between inside and out, and bespeaking a fundamental belief in the visual determinacy of presence and absence. That determinacy is determined in the first place by the eye-opening fiat of the father’s law, which produces the “hostile” environment of which the infant first “has a glimpse” insofar as it learns that a glimpse is precisely what it must be satisfied now to have: a glimpse that will be in place of (and thus, where the psyche is concerned, in *the* place of, as well) the anal libidinal satisfaction it must, as subject of the law, renounce. Only with this first renunciation of the body’s access to sensory enjoyment does the subject, *as a subject*, acquire a body of its own – a body carved into Symbolic shape with a glance of the Oedipal cleaver as deftly as an experienced butcher peels a tender filet from the bone. From this moment on the body of the world, no less than the world of the body, will be illuminated by an ocular logic expanding the “clear-cut distinction between anal and genital” into the principle of visual perception, so that vision thereafter will always occur, at least figuratively, in black and white.

This figure, however, produces a powerful *effect of literality* by coloring the way in which racialized bodies, especially those viewed as “black,” enter the fantasmatic informing the body as such in the West. For the repression of anal pleasure within the regime of the Western symbolic gives rise to the phallus, as a sort of carrot, and to disgust, as a sort of stick, to shape the body through division into contrasting zones of front and b(l)ack, zones kept straight through a visual epistemology that translates, or more precisely, translates back, the phallic carrot – like its vegetable counterpart, the stuff of proper vision – into the stick symptomatically located, as the saying goes, up the straight man’s ass. Just as the female genitals take their privilege on lease from the anal opening stained, through prohibition, with the tincture of disgust, so the phallus in turn takes its standing from what, attributing the phrase to a patient, Freud will describe as the “‘faecal’ stick.”³ As a result, the insistent Oedipal – or, better, the insistent *Oedipalizing* – focus on castration as the law that secures the truth of a “clear-cut” genital difference reiterates and displaces the determining, because culturally performative, insistence on another distinction represented as being – which is also to say, represented *so as to be* – clear-cut: that posited between anal and genital to elaborate our governing cultural fantasy of a urethro-genital process able, through the unfailingly redemptive agency of hetero-genital desire, to wash away, as if with a stream of antiseptic astringency, the primal taint of dirt and disgust with which, and as which, the law’s prohibition first darkens our youthful doorway – or at any rate, with which it manages to darken the doorway in back.

Thus the stain of anality persists as the mark without which the genitalized body, incorporated into and by the Symbolic, could neither take shape nor come into

view since that body accedes to meaning, accedes to the genital either/or, only by way of the law as acculturating agency of disgust. That disgust pursue the Symbolic subject to seek an egosyntonic coherence by repudiating that part of its body where the stain or the “dirt” of the law’s enjoyment – its enjoyment precisely of performing disgust – leaves the structurally requisite imprint that the law calls the subject to efface.

This structure in itself does not mandate any specific social or political ideology nor determine in advance as inevitable any particular cultural formation, but it provides the material from which different societies can fashion what Winthrop Jordan, in an analysis written in 1968, described as “more inward biocultural values” that afford, in Jordan’s argument, an apparently “natural” foundation for the disgust that gives rise to the fantasy of eliminating abjected populations from the social body.⁴ Adducing the psychic economy within which such fantasies have converged on black women and men for numerous white Americans from the eighteenth century forward, Jordan proposes that

the fantasy of removing Negroes afforded them a measure of satisfaction of which they were unaware. It is possible that the idea functioned partly at a profound level as a symbolic gesture of their disgust with Negroes and the deep discomforts their importation had caused. ... [T]he simultaneous expulsion of black men and noxious slavery could scarcely help but afford a measure of cathartic relief. This is to suggest that for some men the idea of Negro removal may have functioned, in part, as an expression of certain psychic impulses associated with the bodily function to which the idea corresponded with such arresting precision.⁵

Strongly influenced by Jordan’s analysis, Joel Kovel’s study of white racism maintains that “the nuclear

experience of the aversive racist is a sense of disgust about the body of the black person based upon a very primitive fantasy: that it contains an essence--dirt--that smells and may rub off onto the body of the racist. ... Modern aversion stems from anal sadism," he insists, "while domination is phallic and oedipal in origin."⁶ In each of these accounts white racism, insofar as it appears to proceed from the racist subject's unrecognized anal fixation, testifies to and affirms the privilege of a genitalizing Oedipality; for the phobic relation to the b(l)ack that falls under the aegis of anality presupposes an investment in the either/or mandate colored by the emergence of disgust. The diagnosis of "anal sadism," then, though tainted, perhaps sadistically, by the signifier of anality, names a normative relation of "aversion" to whatever signifies as "anal" and expresses, thereby, the Symbolic's foundational law of genital difference with a clarity that risks making *too* clear the violence inherent in its paranoid vision of vision itself as always clear-cut.⁷

I intend in what follows to examine how this Oedipalizing logic entangles, for the modern West, anti-black racism and homophobia in complex relation to each other while finding in each the pressure point of a visual epistemology. By reading Hubert Cornfields's film, *Pressure Point* (1962), which collocates racism, Oedipality, and the political logic of disgust, I hope to identify the point where identity emerges both through and as the very enjoyment disgust by means of which subjects are acculturated and bound into normative social relations.

Reviewing *Pressure Point* for the *New York Times*, Howard Thompson found it easy to offer a lean account

of its plot: "The case history of a young psychopathic convict—a vicious paranoid and a professional hater of Negroes and Jews — as told to a Negro psychiatrist is the sum and substance of *Pressure Point*."⁸ Stanley Kaufmann, in the *New Republic*, fleshed out his summary with a few details, but similarly directed the reader's attention to the movie's narrative meat: "There is a framework that takes place in the present. The Negro doctor is now the gray-haired chief of a mental hospital. A staff member is upset: he is making no progress on his treatment of a Negro patient who hates him for being white. [. . .] To calm down the junior doctor, the chief tells him about the Fascist whom he treated 20 years before. This is the body of the picture."⁹ The body of the picture indeed: *Pressure Point* may find its "sum and substance" in encounters between the unnamed black psychiatrist (played by Sidney Poitier) and the unnamed white supremacist (played by Bobby Darin) whose paranoid symptoms he treats, but those encounters all pivot on the function of fantasy in our picturing of the body.

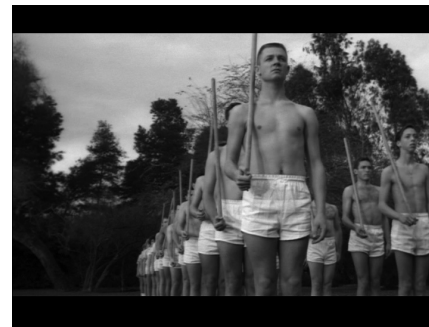
Only his terror-inducing bodily hallucinations, after all, impel the prisoner, an active participant in the German-American Bund arrested for sedition during World War II, to submit, despite his explicit contempt, to the psychoanalytic interventions of the earnest black psychiatrist. And how do cinema and psychoanalysis join forces to "arrest" those disturbances of the prisoner's visual field — disturbances that produce, in view of the film's unmistakable investment in style, the moments of its most intense and explicit cathexis of that field — except by *picturing* the hallucinated body, attempting to see its etiology, and demanding that we, with the patient, envision the image *so as to escape it*. That such an escape amounts to the displacement of one hallucination

by another—that the process of imaging the prisoner’s release from the pathogenic grip of the image must remain bound up with a residual faith, however ironic, however fraught, in the authority of the image itself—complicates the film’s account, its would-be exacting and scrupulous audit, of a racial economy indebted (up to its eyeballs, as the saying goes) to the ocular logic that Oedipus, himself become Sphinx-like after gazing for centuries through his blackened and hollow eyes, still pinpoints for us in the West.

Come closer, though, to this blackened eye, fitting emblem of Oedipal vision, that binds us to hetero-genital law by imposing a sort of blindness upon the repudiated anal desire whose site the eye’s empty cavity mimes. Here, where the blindness decreed by the father coincides with the image of the lifeless hole to which the father would make us blind, the Oedipal subject emerges in all his unsightly paranoia: cowed, that is, by the father’s bum steer into steering clear of his bum and bullied thereafter into bullying all who mistake, as he no longer can, the direction from which the law requires that a man take the bull by the horn(s). The Oedipal brute who makes mincemeat of anyone he meets who might happen to mince, the bonehead who acts like a butcher to incarnate the comparative form of butch: this is the band of boys to whose company *Pressure Point* consigns its white racist, reading the psycho-pathology of his authoritarian personality by dishing out the familial narrative that a popularized psychoanalysis serves up to account for the boys in that band. Like them, that is, the racist confronts a clinging and hysterical mother who transfers unsatisfied erotic demands from her husband to her son; like them he longs for and loathes at once his father’s sadistic masculinity.



Variety’s critic may have commented on *Pressure Point*’s hints of “abnormal human behavior – homosexuality, bestiality, sadist-masochist relationships,”¹⁰ but no more than does the film itself need we ask if the prisoner is “gay:” it suffices to label him paranoid, pathological, Fascistic, and weak; to give us telling vignettes that depict his misogyny and his failures with women; to define his political investments by showing us row after row of half-naked boys engaged in military drills; and to attribute his psychic disturbance to an Oedipal conflict left unresolved.

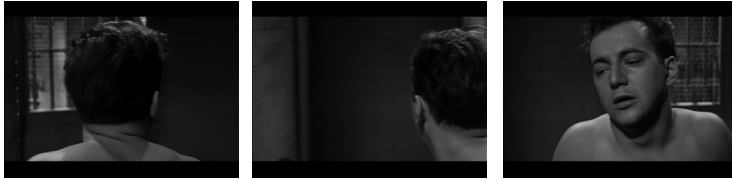


In the story on which the screenplay was based, the author, Dr. Robert Lindner, framed the issue even more bluntly: the prisoner’s “inclination... toward his own sex,” he wrote, “was merely part of the psychopathic character

structure he possessed.”¹¹ What need, therefore, to call him a fruit when it's clear from the start he's a fruitcake? If he's racist he's first of all paranoid; and if he's paranoid he's latently queer; and if he's queer it's because of his failure to negotiate the crisis of Oedipalization.

Hard as it may be to swallow now, though for many of somewhat dubious taste it continues to melt in their mouths, this chewed-over gristle is what *Pressure Point*, like much of vintage American liberalism, rapaciously devours. In its analysis the racist's racism has ultimately nothing to do with race and its explanation requires no engagement with people of color or the social contexts from which his attitudes toward them emerge. Indeed, except for the black psychiatrist, whom he counsels to “wake up” and “go back to Africa,” he has no encounters in the film with African Americans at all nor any political experiences that thematize racial relations (except where Jews are concerned). His racism need only be traced, instead, to the psychic malnutrition of his childhood to gain, in the political optic of the film, a theatrical clarification. As the psychiatrist announces in the voiceover that introduces the racist's boyhood in flashback: “He was an only child and his conception, he soon found out, was the only cause for the sudden and bitter marriage that followed it. His father was a butcher. He was quick to anger and hard to please. His vigor, it seemed, was constantly replenished by drink and by a vengeful resentment he felt toward his son.” With these words the narrative, *already* a flashback addressed to the young white doctor by the more experienced black psychiatrist, cuts to the core of the prisoner's experience through a second flashback within the first, as if this more recessed experience were at the heart not only of the racist, but also, by extension, of the black psychiatrist's counter-transferential relation to him. *Pressure Point*, true to

the doxa of what was received at the time as progressive thought, serves up as its narrative statement the rubbery tripe of a colorblind liberalism, the stuff of integrationist dreams, but the black man's meaning in the eyes of the film, as in the eyes of its white supremacist, remains nothing more than his blackness as it is reified and interpreted by whites. Neither the reality of his own psychic experience nor the substance of his dreams is permitted to season the film (which is hardly surprising since the psychiatrist in the original story was Jewish, not black).¹² The dreams or hallucinations that *Pressure Point* savors are the racist's less savory ones: visions that translate the thematics of race into issues of Oedipal development, diagnosing the one as merely a symptom of failure in the other. If this occasions the film's greatest blindness, its reading of racial hatred in terms of psychic aberration – the psychiatrist notes in somber voiceover: “although psychopaths are a small minority, it seems significant that whenever militant and organized hate exists, a psychopath is the leader” – it also provides the condition for its single most valuable insight, an insight the film can depict for the audience but one it cannot see. And how could it, since what it unwittingly shows is the blindness of vision to the structural paranoia on which visual epistemology is founded: a blindness to vision's perpetual defense against the anxiety of the unseen. If that anxiety gets expressed in the fear of whatever might take one from behind, if it centers, that is, on the threat of being seized by what vision cannot apprehend, then it associates that threat with what the scopic subject has learned to *put* behind (both temporally and spatially): the anus and the anal fixation bespeaking a superseded logic of desire that returns in the scopic economy as a blindspot resistant to the clear-cut perception of the hetero-genital either-or that defines the father's law.



Pressure Point's narrative, in its piety, appears to identify the film itself with the anti-racist politics espoused by the earnest black psychiatrist; but as a visual text whose counternarrative get articulated by the image, the film identifies rather with the white racist's paranoid visions, indulging its camera in hyperbolic flourishes that signal directorial "style" and eschew the marriage of "message" films to a starkly conventional realism. In doing so it enforces a kind of cinematic apartheid, shooting the black psychiatrist, for almost the whole of the film, with a fixed frame in medium close-up to show his stability, dignity, and control while reserving its expressively flamboyant shots, dramatic angles, and subjective movements for representations of the fantasies, dreams, and recollections of his racist patient. That patient, whose disdain for social norms reproduces the defining characteristic of the father he consciously despised, embodies, precisely by virtue of his fantasmatic relation *to* the body – by virtue, that is, of his anxious efforts to maintain its ostensible purity – the unconscious of liberalism itself: for, liberalism, as *Pressure Point* shows, is driven, no less dialectically than the racist, to preserve and defend the law of the father – even of the father it hates – insofar as it, like the black psychiatrist who materializes it's politics here, grounds its coherence, its sense of reality, in a faith in the father's goodness, a faith in the ultimate triumph of justice through *the body of the law*.

The doctor, for instance, after biting his tongue, week in and week out, at the prisoner's taunts, gives way at last to a passionate outburst when the prisoner, on the verge of parole after fooling a review board into thinking he no longer holds his self-professed fascist beliefs, rubs the doctor's face in the racism of the country the black man calls his home – the racism that led the committee to discredit the professional testimony the black doctor offered in his role as the prisoner's psychiatrist. Neither the defense of his professional integrity, however, nor the defense of the integrity of his race ignites the white-hot fervor that flares up in the doctor's speech; it is sparked, instead, by the need to assert the decency of the father, or at any rate of "the fatherland" as the prisoner himself might put it, with which, despite having just been burned, the doctor still identifies: "This is my country. This is where I have done what I've done. And if there were a million krauts like you, all sick like you are sick, all shouting 'Down! Destroy! Degrade!' and if there were twenty million more sick enough to listen to them, you are still going to lose. You're going to lose, mister. Because there is something in this country, something so big, so strong, that you don't even know." It is easy enough, and true enough, to note that the liberal production team responsible for making *Pressure Point* interpellates potential black viewers here in the name of the father's law while assuring its larger white audience of black fidelity to law as such; it is easy and true to observe that such a liberal and patriotic speech assigned to the black psychiatrist preempts any nascent black militancy in the face of institutional racism, the pervasiveness of which the film allows only the racist to pronounce. "Now you hypnotize me, huh," he tells the doctor, "well, they got you hypnotized. They've got you so mixed up you're singing

'My Country 'Tis of Thee' while they're walking all over you." By putting these words in the racist's mouth, the film preemptively impeaches as fascist any left-leaning white or black Americans predisposed to take them to heart, reassuring, in its naively liberal way, the middle-of-the-road U.S. citizen that the African American is really just an American after all. It is easy and true to point out as well that the doctor's defense of the country that continues blithely to sell him short only heightens his moral stature for the imagined audience of the film. But it is less easy, confronting the messy motives packed into the products of liberalism, to *resist* the temptation to blow the whistle, like a health inspector at a sausage factory, and pass a self-righteous judgment on liberals for marketing, though stuffed in a different skin, the odds and ends of racism.

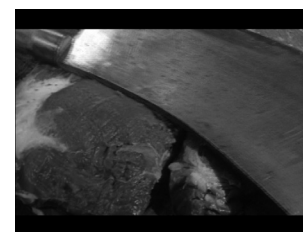
Such a judgment, however, like that whistle-blowing, would feed on the constitutive fantasy of liberalism itself: that righteousness can ultimately triumph through identification with the law (for which, in the final analysis, all health inspectors work). It would echo, therefore, the psychiatrist's faith in the presence of something vital at the very core of the nation's being, something "so big, so strong" that it gives him the ability, as he says to the prisoner, "to take it from people like you and come back and nail you to the ground." This thing that inhabits the body of the nation, resisting all efforts to identify or particularize its essence, this thing that vivifies the nation, asserting its agency, living its life, corresponds to what Slavoj Žižek has described as the "national Thing," the "*real*, non-discursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency."¹³ As Žižek then goes on to remark: "What is therefore at stake in ethnic

tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment."¹⁴ *Pressure Point's* doctor adduces this "thing" to refute the racist's logic, but his very *faith* in the "national Thing" reproduces the logic of racism, which is also the logic of the Oedipal vision that offers a surplus enjoyment to those who identify with its rigid imposition of the ban on enjoyment as such.

Since Oedipus sees to it that none of us escapes subjectification through the compulsory exchange of our birthright, the pulsive enjoyment of the real, for the Symbolic's mess of pottage by which our meaning is sustained, the subject of that bad bargain is constantly looking over its shoulder to make sure that no one else arrives having cut a better deal. Enjoyment in such a system returns, as it always must, perversely, by seizing upon and putting an end to the enjoyment of the other; it turns itself inside out to find expression as disgust. The paranoid fantasy of the better deal, of the other's unbounded enjoyment, induces a visceral repugnance and a self-righteous indignation that licenses acts of brutality and other transgressions of the law so long as the enjoyment accrued thereby serves the law's repressive ends. Whatever else *Pressure Point's* doctor intends by the "thing" within the nation, it designates the very essence of the law unconstrained by law itself. Accordingly, the thing to which the doctor refers, adducing it over and against the smug contentment of the white supremacist, is, in one sense, nothing more than the white supremacist himself: the doctor rejects in the prisoner, that is, the illicit enjoyment he enshrines *at the very same time* as the national Thing. In the contest

of identitarian identifications with such a “thing,” the liberal and the fascist mirror each other in finding enjoyment in enforcing the law as disgust at enjoyment itself.

The prisoner’s racism, seen in this light, seems less the effect of an Oedipal crisis unsuccessfully resolved than the normal and predictable outcome of subjectification through Oedipal law. Small wonder that *Pressure Point*’s primal scene, the sequence that presents us with a sight for sore eyes while the film invites us to sink our teeth into the raw meat of the prisoner’s childhood, coincides with its nearest approach to the primal scene of the prisoner’s disgust, the moment at which, as a boy, he came face to face with the stain of enjoyment. Preceded by an intricate orientalist fantasy in which the prisoner indulged as a boy – a fantasy in which he’s an Eastern potentate surrounded by muscular slaves and ordering that his weak, possessive mother be crushed by an elephant’s foot – this primal scene of the boy’s disgust begins with the psychiatrist’s disembodied voice providing his professional analysis: “in reality he could not stand the sight of blood with which his fantasies were filled. It meant his father and his father’s trade.” This reference to the father ends the fantasy sequence through a violent cut to an image designed at once to conceal and evoke the murderous blow to the mother’s head. For at the very moment the elephant’s leg descends to shatter her skull, *Pressure Point* cuts to the father’s cleaver pounding a cut of meat. When the camera pulls back to reveal the father, fully at home with the knives and the blood and the offal of his shop, it catches sight of the boy as well, required to help out there after school by working behind the register.



“But,” as the psychiatrist quickly adds, “he was filled with apprehension if he had to touch, or even look at, the meat. And to watch his father prepare it was literally unbearable for him.”

Though his father’s meat repels him even before the “primal scene,” the decisive event, the trauma destined to color the rest of his life, occurs on a particularly busy day when his father, knowing full well his son’s inability to stomach his meat, sadistically orders him, nonetheless, to cut a piece of liver. Lingered for a moment in a medium close-up on the liver in its porcelain tray, the camera observes its shiny skin in relation to other objects: a marble slab rests on the counter before it and behind it looms the butcher’s scale and other tools of the trade. A reverse shot gives us the queasy boy, trying hard to swallow the revulsion already rising in his gorge while the camera prepares to gorge itself on what he sees only as gore. The sudden rapidity of a subjective zoom enacts his horrified vision, closing in tight on the liver until, divorced from any context, it engulfs the very screen, rubbing our faces in its flesh.



Dark and lined with darker veins, viscous, moist, and flecked with fat that clusters around a tear in the skin, a cavity through which we glimpse a patch of still whiter flesh within, the liver becomes the filmic Thing, the stuff of the father’s enjoyment, to which his law imposes on all a relation of disgust. Figuring what Oedipal vision at once produces and forecloses, this slimy mound of meat, this substance of life turned inside out, this liver, however lifeless, lives - unbearably, inexplicably - outside meaning, outside life.¹⁵ Oedipus may hold the whetstone to the butcher’s gleaming knife, inducing us to cross our legs in a reflex of homage to the father’s meat, but this viscous matter is what matters more to Oedipus and the father both: not the phallic flap of flesh that gets seen as the site of the Oedipal beef, but the image of an older enjoyment now made repulsive by the law. Oedipus may call it the father’s meat but another idiom would mark the father’s privilege more precisely, defining it as the father’s “shit” with which no one else better mess. Nor, as we see, are they likely to, since they see it *as* a mess - leave it to Oedipus to see to that - and turn from it in disgust.

But when, in the film, the boy turns away, fleeing the liver whose lifeless life seems liver than his own, whose gelatinous consistency can call into question the consistency of his very world, his father, claiming the shit that is his, that embodies his privilege of enjoyment, picks up the liver and pursues the boy, chasing him into the meat-locker where, surrounded by hanging sides of beef, he thrusts it at the camera, here aligned with the eyes of his son, until the heavy, oozing thing is smeared across the very lens. When the camera refocuses on the staggering boy as he falls to the floor in a faint, his face bears the stain of the bloody meat, dark mark of the father’s shit.



The liberal agenda of *Pressure Point* keeps the film, and the film's psychiatrist, from associating this moment explicitly with the racist attitudes the boy will adopt; but here, where the prisoner first suffers the symptom that attends his hallucinations, the symptom whose meaning seems latent in the name he gives it, "blacking out," the prisoner, in a sense, has himself been blacked out, has

suffered his face to be rubbed in the shit whose stain he will spend the rest of his life attempting to wash away. Call this stain the repressed enjoyment of an anal libidinal cathexis, call it the queerness come home to roost with every fledgling Oedipus, if only in the dialectical and paranoid form of enjoying its suppression in others, or call it, much more simply, with the filmic image itself, the liver: less as the thing that lives *within* us than as the thing that in itself *lives* us, the nauseating trace of a foreclosed enjoyment that can never, on the one hand, be nauseating *enough* for the law's eye not to seek it out, and never, on the other hand, foreclosed enough, to stop the law from forbidding it. What the benign integrationism of the film can't acknowledge its visual utterance shows: neither aberrant nor pathological, except to the degree that subjectification pathologizes us all, racism lives every subject produced through this primal scene of disgust, lives as the thing sublated into hetero-genital law.

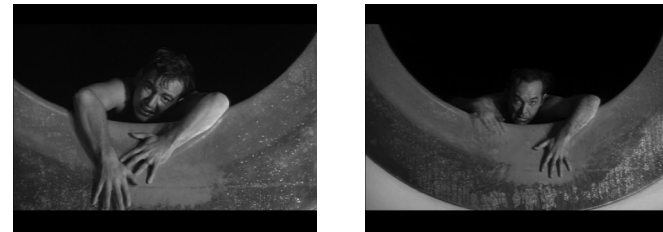
Hence the prisoner's hallucinations, which typically begin with a blackout reenacting his trauma as a boy ("Well, first I feel a little sick to my stomach, and then suddenly I feel like something's coming down on me and I can't breathe and I can't see; and then it's over"), typically overwhelm him in the course of the film while he's leaning against the sink - sweaty, on edge, and short of breath - trying to regain his composure by splashing water on his face. His gaze irresistibly drawn to the drain's black hole in the basin's pure white, an empty cavity returning his stare like a blinded Oedipal eye, he fixates upon its dark opening, fitting receptacle for the body's impurities, for the dirt it is made to take in, and all at once the camera, conveying the prisoner's subjective view, closes in for a remarkable shot: remarkable not only because the shadow of the drain all but fills the screen with its

blackness, thereby usurping the surrounding white, but also, and primarily, because the shot discovers a figure inside the drain, a man suspended from its metal rim, desperately trying to pull himself out, to emerge from the place of darkness and dirt as in theories of anal birth.



Most terrifying for the prisoner, though, in each iteration of this scene but the last one, the man in the drain is himself. No more than the “normal” subject, though, can the prisoner bear to acknowledge his own emergence from such a hole; no more than the “non-pathological” can he see that his entry into subjectivity, his inscription in the symbolic, comes only by way of renunciation of that anterior libidinal site, a renunciation so deep that like

Orpheus, or, better, like Lot in his flight from Sodom, he is forbidden to look back. Indeed, he becomes a subject only by repudiating his origin in, his relation to, and his proscribed or repressed desire for, the site of a pleasure prior to the sensory tyranny of sight. In the film’s therapeutic logic, therefore, the logic of its Oedipalizing psychoanalysis, the moment at which the racist perceives that the man in the drain, whom he washes away by turning on the tap, is no longer the intolerable image of himself, but rather the image of his father is the moment at which he begins to escape the paranoid pull of that drain, the dizzying collapse that he calls blacking out and that the film associates with the vertiginous pull of a hole made for dirt and waste.



With the pat smugness that oozes from the psychiatrist at the end of Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, the black psychiatrist explains to the racist the Oedipal guilt with regard to his father that underlies his fits: “his image and yours are interchangeable. One image was the desire to kill your father while the other was the punishment for the killing carried out in your fantasies. You were punishing yourself. In other words, you were both the killer and the victim.” Having gotten to the meat of the matter, according to the project of the film, without, for a moment, having touched on the racist’s racism at all, or even on the interconnection between the Oedipal scenario and its

political effects, the psychiatrist succeeds in dissolving the symptoms that brought the prisoner into therapy. He does so by presenting, in a clear-cut manner, the resistance to the clear-cut positionality that Oedipus effects. The either/or of “to have” or “have not” is overwritten by the identification of the figure in the drain as simultaneously victim and killer, simultaneously father and son. Or at least according to the interpretation clearly laid out by the doctor. But the film cannot visualize this simultaneity; it images the figure in the drain as *either* the father *or* the son. In doing so, it shows us, quite literally, the inescapability of the Oedipal logic that recoils in disgust from indeterminacy and the collapse of positional distinctions. Identity emerges precisely at the confluence of Oedipus, horror, disgust, and the phallic supersession of anal erotism, which suffers, thereafter, consignment to the register of the queer, that category constructed to take in whatever resists the straight, the clear, the visually self-evident relation to identity. No identity itself, the queer is the drain down in which everything that threatens identity by virtue of refusing it gets flushed. Thus the Oedipal narrative adduced by the psychiatrist reinforces the cultural work of repression, displacing into the realm of what cannot be seen the dizzying, reality-disrupting return of what the genital subject must primally repress to emerge through the law of disgust. It ignores, that is, the desire that subtends the love of the son for his father - a desire that the film only glances at, and never directly addresses, in the racist’s fantasy of *killing the mother*. With this fantasy, after all, he not only repeats the violent abuse the father displays toward his wife as well as his son, but also gains psychic access to his own enjoyment of the father’s meat - the enjoyment that leads to his “blacking out” and gets bound, by way of repression, to the disgust he then transfers onto blacks.

Given its repetition of the Oedipal structure it claims to anatomize, the psychiatrist’s analysis does not, as he tells us in voice-over, have any therapeutic effect on the racist ways of seeing that brought the prisoner before the law. Nor is there any way it could. For the film observes, despite itself, that the dissolution of the racist’s symptom, the flushing away of his anxiety-inducing and paranoid hallucination, only reenacts symptomatically the evacuation, the flushing away of the object that engenders his identity through disgust in the first place. Far from confronting the paranoid subject’s constitutive acculturation through disgust, the Oedipalization of the subject reinforces the phobic repudiations *responsible* for paranoia, disgust, and violent aversiveness. The properly Oedipalized subject into which mainstream psychoanalysis, like liberalism, works to fashion us, is nothing more than the phobic subject born through the compulsory repudiation of its earliest libidinal cathexes: through the repudiation of an enjoyment thereafter fixed through prohibition on that simultaneously repulsive and compelling dark meat within us all. The blindness of Oedipus thus turns our gaze toward the phallic flag beneath which the psychiatrist and the racist prisoner march together arm in arm, each affirming the logic of disgust, each embracing enjoyment by disavowing the enjoyment of the other, each consigned by the logic of vision to refusing the Chaucerian nether eye whose provenance vision blacks out.

To be born as a hetero-genital subject, to conform to the mandate of identity, is to enter a logic of *looking* that leaves us paranoid ever after about the dangers of *looking back*, of looking, that is, too closely at what we must claim to have put *behind*, at what manages, despite the repression intending to block it from our view, to return

as the blindspot, the point of darkness, in every visual landscape wherein we project ourselves as the disgusting subject of identity formation. Let me conclude, then, by collocating briefly what *Pressure Point* evokes as its primal scene with a passage that Homi Bhabha, among others, calls the primal scene of racialization in Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. That scene, of course, centers on a white child's response to the sight of Fanon himself – a response that moves from ethnographic observation to anxiety and then to fear as the child seems to fix Fanon in the hold of a clear-cut identity by calling to its mother, “Look, a Negro.” This is how critics persistently evoke the Fanonian primal scene, entering into discussion about the originary force of this violent interpellation. But it is worth recalling that Fanon presents this phrase as a *secondary* formation. The opening sentence of his chapter, “The Fact of Blackness,” in which he evokes this scene reads: “‘Dirty nigger!’ Or simply, ‘Look, a Negro.’” The relation between this injunction to look and the fearful, projective discovery, the triumphant announcement, of something dirty, the relation between scopopic discipline and the phobic experience of disgust, already allows us to see, in Fanon, the point on which pressure is exerted to make each of us, homophobically, both subject of and subject to the stain of obscene enjoyment we encounter in racism's shit – the enjoyment by which we renounce enjoyment, which we then enjoy as disgust.

Notes:

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. trans. J. Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), 604.
2. For a fuller account of the logic of the “clear-cut distinction” see my essays “Imagining the Homosexual: Laura and the Other Face of Difference” in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 192-241, esp. 230-239, and “Piss Elegant: Freud, Hitchcock, and the Micturating Penis” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1995, 2:1-2, 149-177.
3. Freud, *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 17, 131.
4. Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 38.
5. *Ibid.*, 567.
6. Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 80-81.
7. This is not to suggest that the “anal” itself does not consist of a two-fold movement (retention and expulsion) that provides a paradigm for the binary relation that will characterize and shape Oedipal law; to the contrary, my point is that the clear-cut distinction that the genitalizing force of oedipality would insist upon is itself not ever clearly distinguishable from the anality that it repudiates. The force of that repudiation, however, the disgust that intervenes to mark the absolutism of difference is itself the performative agent of that difference, since the expulsions characteristic of anal sadism are not themselves linked to the experience of disgust but of a “hatred” still occupying a complex and ambivalent relation to what will also be designated as love. But the prohibitory law that institutes disgust undertakes precisely to secure a distinction between the two.
8. Howard Thompson, “Pressure Point Opens,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1962; 49: 3. (<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C04E3DC163AE23ABC4952DFB6678389679EDE>)
9. Stanley Kaufmann, “Save Us from the Serious,” *New Republic*, October 20 (1962): 46.
10. “Pressure Point,” *Variety*, 1962.
11. Dr. Robert Lindner, *The Fifty Minute Hour* (The Other Press: New York, 1999), 213.

12. Hence the socio-economic analysis of ethnic resentment in the film centers on the failed romantic encounter of the racist with a wealthy Jewish woman that is used to “explain” his turn to the “German American Bund.” Race is invoked in the narrative only as an adjunct to the film’s exploration of the ideological depiction of Jewish power in Nazi ideology. But in the visual representations providing the psychoanalytic “truth” of the racist’s behavior, the insistence on flesh, embodiment, meat, and the stain of a filth that engenders disgust overrides the discursive analysis of hatred with social disempowerment. Here, instead, the film offers the visual equivalent of the contemporary accounts of racism provided by Jordan and Kovel and discussed above.
13. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 202.
14. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 202-203.
15. See Jacques Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan; Book Two: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (W. W. Norton: New York, 1991), 154-5.

Bojana
Kunst

The Powerlessness of Radical Consumption in Contemporary Performance: The Case of “Via Negativa”

Introduction

The starting point of this text is the question about the radical consumption in contemporary performance.¹ I understand radical consumption as the consumption of the body, acting, presence, stage actions and abilities, physical strength, spiritual power, affect – **with the purpose** of producing an intersubjective effect, the exchange between performers and spectators. At the same time, I do not wish to avoid allusions to the contemporary status of reaction to consumption as a self-consuming economic exchange and passion. As is well-known, radical production is often at the core of 20th century performance, especially performance art and body art; it drives the live communicative situations in contemporary theatre beyond the conventions of established representation and signification. The performance event therefore becomes a unique “laboratory” for testing the effects of radical consumption, a field of practicing intersubjectivity, exchange and probing live communicative situations. For more than a decade those questions have also been at the centre of the Slovenian performance group “Via Negativa.” Their work under the direction of Bojan Jablanovec is very tightly connected to the research of

the live communicative situation established through performance and addresses especially the public, political, economic and intimate role of performer’s body, which is always represented and performed through the economy of affective exchange with the audience. This text is especially dedicated to the first phase of their research under the name “Via Negativa,” where eight performances have been created as part of the seven-year research project of the director Bojan Jablanovec and participating artists, who together explore the acting strategies of presentation, ways of presence and enabling new communicative relations with the audience. The participating actors come into the project with radically diverse experience ranging from acting to performance (dramatic theatre, performance art, body art and dance). The first seven research years of “Via Negativa” focus upon the thematization of the seven deadly sins, or, according to the creators, seven ‘negative’ human traits. “Our outgoing point is that wrath, gluttony, greed, lust, sloth, envy and pride profoundly mark the identity of every individual. With each of these human traits, a conflict arises that is ingrained into the subjectivity of each individual. On the one hand, it builds mechanisms and strategies of defence from its own negative impulses in order to serve

the demands of society for their control and oppression. On the other hand, it develops various forms of loosening because it gives way under the pressure of one’s own subjectivity.”²

From this perspective I would also like to address something which is always at work in the performances of “Via Negativa,” a production of uneasiness in the exchange between performers and spectators. This uneasiness would be easiest to describe as a consumption without effect, most of the time, the exchange between performers and spectators works as a kind of senseless utilization of excess, producing fun and laughing, but not really a relaxing one. Even if the energies of the performers are radically consummated on the stage, at the same time there is a feeling of an impotent, always cynical communicative situation, in which sometimes the feeling of shame is also aroused. Shame which is connected to the processes of subjugation without remain, to a certain kind of dispositif which is at work in the performances of “Via Negativa.” With this exchange the performances of “Via Negativa” cut deeply into the contemporary dynamics of power, and it is re-questioning the contemporary mechanisms of subjugation and liberation. “Via Negativa” is related to the loss of potentiality of human actions and the powerlessness of subjectivisation, which can be also read as a symptom of contemporary western culture. With the development of contemporary forms of power, this powerlessness has grown to immense proportions. Therefore I see the performances of “Via Negativa” as a sort of fleshy and profane discourse on ethics, a radical confrontation with the imperative of pleasure and the time in which is too much sense.

On Confession

At the core of every scene of the performances by “Via Negativa,” there lies confession. In this year-long research project, we have actually been able to follow a series of confessions; their point of utterance is always the individuality of each participating actor or actress. Each statement is constructed as a scene in space and time; even if it does intertwine with other scenes, it always preserves its initial singularity. It is also obvious that the utterance never remains at the level of speech: everything that is uttered also triggers some real action. Along these lines, for example, Grega Zorc in the High Fidelity monologue in the performance *Incasso* (2005), struggles to hold the heavy amplifiers in his hands which are part of the music equipment purchased with the life insurance policy of his dead parents. The truths uttered by the participants about themselves and their work are performatives because the language of the confession not only describes reality but also establishes and changes the reality itself. The truths uttered by the participants are therefore not existentialist truths. Their “reality” only shows itself through action; it is a result of the intertwining of verbal and non-verbal actions. This does not mean that the confession and the action are in harmony, in the relationship of cause and effect. It is more about a radical alienation of speech and action, the establishment of an empty place where the intimate performance can be established. In the case of Grega Zorc in the aforementioned scene, this person needs to physically defeat the gravity of their own merchandise. Frequently, what is confessed is not closely connected to the work which is performed by the person confessing: with acting or performance “labour,” and indirectly also with theatre as the point of utterance. The hunt for the real, as the “Via Negativa” project calls the series of the new performance

art pieces entitled *Via Nova*, is thus paradoxically framed into the (public) work performed by the participants in the scenes.³

At the same time the connection between the research of Christian human weaknesses as represented by the Christian deadly sins which are the focus of this long research of the performance group and the acting research focussed upon ways of presence and communication with the audience, gives rise to an unusual exchange between the stage and the audience. It seems that we are witnessing a public form of “penitence,” a sort of contemporary version of flagellates.⁴ We can only enjoy it, however, if we are also ready to accept the abominable dregs of the real (the medium of spoken confession is namely the body with its fluids and openings), and thus confess our own obscene pleasure. But the confession in the “*Via Negativa*” project is not the only way of pointing out the voyeur economy of the spectator’s exchange and pleasure, where the actor’s body and action are established as those of a victim in order for us to be able to see or in order for the obscene to surface. The “*Via Negativa*” project does not stop at moralism, but sharpens the mechanism of subjectivisation. This mechanism places us before theatrical questions and opens ethical problems: What drives us to do what we do? And what drives us to watch what we do?

Making Crisis of the Subject Visible

Michel Foucault writes that confession enters as the apparatus of subjectivisation (i.e. the manner in which the subject is established and its singularity articulated) into Western culture already in the 19th century, when confession replaces the classic apparatus of remorse by means

of new forms of power and ruling. Foucault writes, that we became a society in which always something has to be confessed, in western society confession enters different areas, like law, medicine, pedagogy, family, love relationships etc.⁵ Frequently, we make confessions in art as well. Today, confession has become a way of producing truth: truth can become visible, or come to the surface, only by means of confession. Truth wants out and if it fails to reveal itself then one needs to get rid of the limitations that prevent that from happening. Only by means confession can we establish our own singularity, in which the following essential rule must be observed: I must incessantly utter what is hardest to say. In order to achieve that, I need to feel confession as a deeply personal, intimate need. Foucault says that this need to confess, this obligation to confess, has been so deeply internalized that we no longer feel it as an effect of power. It is no longer felt as an effect of dominance, but becomes our deep intimate need, our proof that we are capable of changing. Foucault connects this need to confess with the analysis of the new forms of power and control, which are no longer connected with traditional discipline techniques but make use of refined ways of self-control. His analysis is still very topical, especially given the various ways of subjectivisation available to us nowadays as users of and workers at the labour market. We are subjects continuously capable of transforming, exhausting and selling the most intimate in us (for this is where our essence is supposed to lie). We always need to be free enough to make confessions, always feel the confession as our innermost need, and at the same time, be shameless and flexible enough to reject, utterly profane the very truth we have reached and disclosed with such great difficulty. If we namely, constantly utter what is hardest to say then what is told is no longer of particular secrecy.

It is not unusual that, today, confession has been turned into a media spectacle; it is not so much about a “cheap” spectacle and un-informed voyeur spectators, but about a radical change in the manner of controlling and shaping contemporary subjectivity. Confession is not a disclosure where someone shows themselves as they really are, but especially a mechanism of subordination and part of the flexible subjectivisation enabled by contemporary society and its numerous apparatuses (of technological, political and economic nature). Today, our surplus lies primarily in the fact that we are subjects about whom something new can always be discovered; we constantly need to reveal and topicalize our potential abilities. “It is a lot worse to hear ‘you lack potential’ than that you have screwed-up. The former statement tells a lot more about who you are. It shows one’s uselessness in a much deeper sense.”⁶

However, if the subject is constantly established through confession - which is also the traumatic point of rejecting the old and establishing the new – then this subject cannot exist in any other way than in a state of constant crisis. This crisis, or split in the subject, is also at the core of the many performance and performance art works in the 20th century; it can also be described as the need for the realization and performing of negativity, which is essential for every subjectivisation. Radical consumption in art is a consequence of performing the crisis of the subject, or that of the need for the visibility of the split, through which the radical critique of essentialism is established. It could also be described as a way of transgression and resistance to authenticity. The disclosure of the subject’s negativity as a constitutive moment of subjectivisation has deeply marked the theatrical reforms of performing and the ways of presence

in performance art. At the same time, however, it is also the foundation of the “emancipator” power of art, especially its resistance to the rigid ways of contemporary life. In contemporary performance, the live event often becomes an opportunity for the radical consumption of the subject, an event without a repetition,⁷ for a radical use of the body and a phenomenological blurring of the border between the observing and the visible, the body and its edge. The potential power of the live event is often seen in the liberating power of negativity. This negativity not only breaks down the border between the stage and the spectator, but radically shifts the symbolic mandate of the actor and the spectator; it shatters the safe conventions within which the live artistic event is supposed to take place. At the same time, the crisis of the subject is at the core of the acting reform and the researches of how to embrace the consumption of the acting energy and power, how to fight fake efficiency, open the intercommunicative potential of theatre and establish a split between presence and representation. The private, the intimate, the most hidden thus enters performance through the main entrance, but not as cheap exhibitionism (as strengthened by the cheap voyeurism of the other side). It is rather a rebellion to the rigid structures of power and a confrontation with the conventional apparatus of representation. The split within the subject namely becomes visible though the absence of the equality between presence and representation, which is at the core of every subjectivisation process. It is especially body art that frequently works as an apparatus of the most hidden of acts. It is some sort of field for testing liberation, in terms of how far we can go and what drives us to go that far. The event establishes itself through the intercommunicative relationship of visibility and invisibility, where not only the border between

the stage and the audience is shifted, but other sensory experiences are enabled as well.

In the continuation, I wish to defend the hypothesis that the above description of the role of radical consumption no longer suffices for performance, i.e. that its power or potentiality of intercommunicativity is no longer sufficient, especially given the fact that the situation of art and the live event has profoundly changed. This is also argued by the performances of “Via Negativa;” they persuade us precisely by what they do not give us, by not creating any surplus, by being full of radical actions which do not hold any power despite the inexorable consumption. Is it not the phenomenological openness, fluidity of consumption and investment (as driven by the constant crisis of the subject – both on the performer’s and spectator’s sides) something that still persists as a sort of misunderstanding? Isn’t this openness of the economy of looking and the dialectic of the pleasure of the spectator, this desiring participation that convinces us of the intersubjectivity of performing, something that exists today as an anachronistic truth about the live event? Isn’t the performing of the crisis of the subject there precisely in order to cover up this basic commodification of the artistic event, the political powerlessness of performance and performance art and of the body’s action? In other words, do the radical actions of physical rebellion to rigid power structures not make it succumb to the power even more? It is true, that radical consumption can still affect us (causing shame and repulsion in the case of “Via Negativa”). We can still be shocked, surprised and also exposed in our symbolic mandate of the spectator, we can still be caught in the “feedback loop.”⁸ Nevertheless, it seems that the potentiality of radical consumption has been profoundly weakened. There has been a lessening

of tension in the contemporary culture of pleasure. This strong affect, disclosure of desire, intersubjectivity is at the core of the contemporary structures of power – the ways of producing and controlling social relations. “The more diverse, even erratic, the better. Normality is losing its support. The regularities begin to loosen. This loosening of normality is part of the dynamics of capitalism. It is not simply about liberation. It is about the form of power/authority characteristic of capitalism. This is no longer a disciplinary institutional power /authority which determines everything, but the power /authority in order to produce diversity – because markets get saturated. Even the weirdest affective tendencies are in order – as long as they bring money.”⁹ This loosening of normality is problematic because, according to Massumi, there is a sort of relationship today between the dynamics of power and rebellion, where the strategies of rebellion can no longer be simply extracted; we are also not able to claim like Foucault that “rebellion is first”. The exact opposite is taking place: the field of relationships between people, our ethical values, actions, desires, expectations as well as shameful bizarreness (no matter what clean expectations and possibilities it may be connected with), our desiring exchange – all this forms the surplus value of contemporary economy. Radical consumption (not in the sense of money but energy and human possibilities and actions) is at the core of the contemporary spirit of post-industrial capitalism, where protestant asceticism has been replaced by the imperative of pleasure. The crisis of the subject thus reveals itself as an endless barrage of human abilities, actions and aspirations, the driving force of contemporary immaterial production. In this sense, I am becoming increasingly reserved towards radical consumption in art, especially if hailed as a sign of liberation, a sensory openness which should continuously

help us place ourselves as subjects. It sooner seems to me that radical consumption directly gives rise to a new form of power – the power springing from the loosening and fluidity of our desires, or from the power arising from our need for liberation and transformation, and from the imperative that we should be as shameless as possible in all of this.

It is to this misunderstanding regarding power that I describe the interesting feeling of uneasiness which accompanies me when watching the performances by “Via Negativa.” The “Via Negativa” research uses confession and radical consumption of the body (with its fluids and openings, physical exhaustion, repetition, mental concentration) as a strategy for achieving the intercommunicativeness and transfer of the spectator’s functions. In this sense, it consistently follows especially the performance art practices of phenomenologically shattering of the live event; it focuses on the body as the means of the achieving of affective reactions. On the other hand, this consumption of the body in the “Via Negativa” research does not have any concrete placement; it seems somewhat rigid, unsuccessful, a sort of void consumption. It seems as if it were clear in advance that the selected strategy had no effect. Its signification and purpose is abolished at the very moment when it could become. “something” At the same time, there is another important trait there, the one that frames the project into very topical contradictions of subjectivisation. The confessions uttered by the performers are closely connected to the work done by these performers – with the expectations, social and professional status of the persons/actors speaking. The sinfulness or research of human weaknesses can hereby be connected with the classical findings of Max Weber about rational lifestyle, based on the idea of profession

and the spirit of capitalism, which puts one’s “professional duty”¹⁰ first. This also profoundly changes our relationship to the hidden and the intimate: it is no longer about the dark sinfulness of our untameable flesh, but about any kind of secrecy related to professional asceticism, to the imperative of work; in this, human weakness is regarded as a consequence of the irrational consumption of property. The cardinal sin in the ideal of professional asceticism is therefore void consumption of human abilities and actions.¹¹ What needs to be added to this realisation is an important characteristic of the present time, or that of the current social relations. The professional asceticism, the active realisation of the human will in the profession as discussed by Weber, has nowadays been replaced by the imperative of “professional” enjoyment. Now, we must incessantly consume human abilities and actions. If we wish to work successfully, we must come across as relaxed as possible, babble as much as possible, be as shameful, flexible and creative as possible, enjoy and show all of our potentiality in this and also be critical to boot. In this sense, the actor becomes the ideal virtuoso worker of contemporary capitalism, producing “communication through the means of communication;” his means are namely the language and actions of the body.¹² Here is the core of the cynicism which underlies the tasks of actors and performance artists in the scenes, or their relationship to the actions they perform. It seems that the confessing actors are in some sort of extremely cynical relationship with the fetishised status that they have in contemporary social economy and production, and also in cynical relation with what is expected from them by us, the spectators. The actor/actress is namely the idealized shameless subject, but one who nevertheless fails to reach an orgasm, the fetishised subject of production whose work is without value, the liberated profession

with freedom full of loneliness. The actions of the actors are physically highly exhausting, their tasks utterly demanding and merciless, but what makes them purposeless and empty is the way they are carried out – by means of ridicule but without an apology, with humour but no sparing, with irony but without discretion. At the same time, radical void consumption is also a reflection of the expectation of the surplus of the transformation which does not take place. This work drives us ‘completely and utterly into ourselves,’ both in our artistic and social lives, but actually produces nothing of value. The result is a radically failed subjectivisation, non-potency, powerlessness, an impotent promise that is never fulfilled.

On the Power of Apparatus

At this point I will try to shed light upon confession from another perspective and analyse its mechanism and form. The fact that the “Via Negativa” process has in fact built a sort of mechanism (even convention) which determines the horizon of the expectations is evident from the scene with Katarina Stegnar in the performance Viva Verdi. This scene, which I understand as an attempt of reflecting upon one’s own impossibility of subjectivisation, is not coincidental given the fact that the performance Viva Verdi deals with sloth; despite the imperative of pleasure, sloth (along with stealing) remains the cardinal sin of the spirit of capitalism and is also the most difficult to commodify. In her scene, Katarina Stegnar focuses upon the basic apparatus of “Via Negativa” and with the confession performs only its form. She does not tell us anything new in doing so, quite the opposite: she performs precisely what we have expected.

The scene can be read as a lesson about the complex effect of the apparatus (*dispositif* in French), defined by Agamben as “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”¹³ For Agamben, the subject is always a result of the relationship between living beings and apparatuses, in which the apparatus – as a conglomerate of practices, tasks, processes, inclusions and exclusions – must always imply some process of subjectivisation; without subjectivisation, the apparatus would be sheer violence.¹⁴ Interestingly, Agamben compares the structure of the apparatus to the apparatus of remorse, which brings us back to the topic of confession: the need for the disclosure of the subject (in order for it to be able to become a subject that is at the core of modern subjectivisation). Agamben says that there is always a double dynamic at work in the apparatus. In the case of remorse, the new self is constituted through negation; at the same time, the negation enables it to get back the old self. The subject thus needs to split in order to be able to find its truth, in order to be able to become a subject. In Agamben’s terms: the subject finds its truth in the non-truth of its sinful self. This brings us back to the crisis of the subject, which Agamben defines as the distinction that takes place through every constituting of the subject.

In the history of 20th century performance such distinction between subjectivisation and desubjectivisation was very often at the core of experimentation with bodily presence and part of the performance relation to the audience. In that way new apparatuses of observing were constructed which brought the audience closer as witnesses to the subjectivisation process. Performance often affirms itself as a sort of open negativity, the emancipatory

power of differentiation and transformation, and this negativity always produces some sort of symbolic surplus, however disgusting and repulsive it may be. The fact that, nowadays, this potentiality of negativity shows itself as something problematic, or as something radically powerless and completely commodified, as a kind of misunderstanding, can be ascribed to what Agamben defines as a change in the apparatuses we are dealing with in the current phase of capitalism. It is namely necessary to go one step further and say that, today, apparatuses “no longer act as much through the production of a subject, as through the processes of what can be called de-subjectification.”¹⁵ Today, the differences between both processes are increasingly blurred; since there is no more distinction, the place of the recompensation of the new subject gets lost. “In the non-truth of the subject, its own truth is no longer at stake.”¹⁶

Thus, Agamben’s finding, if applied to the history of radical consumption in art, affects the accepted understanding of performance art as artistic form. In performance art, it is always about the process, the process of subjectivisation or objectivisation, etc.; something happens, shifts, we literally enter the split and though this entering, we spectators are addressed as subjects. Due to the changes in the ways the networks of practices, manners and actions direct subjectivisation nowadays (i.e. the changes resulting from the fact that today’s daily human actions, ways and practices are becoming the driving force of contemporary production), apparatuses are forever multiplied. These apparatuses are also accompanied by an excessive proliferation of subjectivisation processes. We live in a time of endless choices between subjectivities, endless offers of identities and opportunities; at the same time, however, it seems that subjectivity profoundly eludes us.

Despite the increasing number of the apparatuses through which we can establish ourselves as subjects, even the most common of our daily activities are controlled by these very processes, which, paradoxically, give us the freedom of realizing ourselves. Although we are driven by strong desire, we do not acquire subjectivity, but only a new form of control. Let us go back to theatre and the powerlessness of radical consumption: have not the numerous contemporary ways of subjectivisation, the diversity and flexibility at the market of contemporary subjectivities, radically delineated the choice of practices in the live event, or radically narrowed its political and transgressive potentiality? Isn’t the powerlessness of the action in art precisely in this blockade (in terms of constant de-subjectivisation) of contemporary ways of being, this expansion of the masquerade of actualisation of everything we do – and accompanies us in our daily and professional lives?

This point seems essential to me for the understanding of the form of the “Via Negativa” scenes, which I myself read as examples of radically unsuccessful subjectivisation. Every utterance is closely connected with subjectivisation. When we speak up, we get subjectivised and subordinated at the same time; through speech, we get our action from the power we resist. Agamben finds, however, that in contemporaneity, this dynamic of subordination and establishment is sharpened because the division between the processes of subjectivisation and de-subjectivisation disappears. What remains is “non-violent subordination,” a voluntary slavery where no subjectivity can be acquired. In the “Via Negativa” performance with Katarina Stegnar, this subordination is the most obvious when, in explaining the mechanism of the scene, she discloses the very spot where, in her terms,

a revolting, shocking act usually follows. Since she has never received a bad review (and shall not receive one today either), Katarina Stegnar pisses herself on stage and then bizarrely hops off the stage with her legs tied.

This scene can be read / interpreted in two different ways, which result in two different interpretations of its effect. The aforementioned moment in the scene establishes itself as a radical self-reference of the principles of the performance, where subversion is at work in the identification process; I identify with the principles of power, with the mechanisms or apparatuses of performing itself and establishing subjectivity. This kind of self-referential subversion results in cynicism, the sort of “perverted consciousnesses” reflected on by Sloterdijk. I know very well and I am very critical towards the fact that everything is bullshit, but I cannot help but co-operate.¹⁷ In order to satisfy the drive of pleasure (i.e. in order not to receive a bad review), I do precisely what is expected of me and nothing more; through this, I actually prove to you that I know very well and am also critical towards what I have just done. Can the result of radical consumption, Katarina Stegnar’s act on stage, or the power of radical self-referentiality in the theatre event, be understood as a cynical “perverted” consciousness? Is this the only effect left to radical consumption nowadays - this cynical detachment whose impotence produces little more but fun? Is there not a perverse moralism at work, where the audience washes their hands of the whole affair and also has a good time in the process?

Katarina Stegnar’s act of disclosing the apparatus, however, can also be approached from another perspective, which takes us away from the cynical postulate and cuts much deeper into contemporary subjectivisation

processes. What if her act is actually without subversion of any kind? What if it is only about an act of dry repetition, obedience, dispossession of the subject? Radicalisation of experience does not only stand for the self-constitution of the subject; with radicalisation of experience, the subject is not established - quite the contrary, it is dispossessed. We again end up with nothing, with negativity, with an act that does not lead anywhere, with the dismembered apparatus which we already know. What Katarina Stegnar does with her act is repeat the apparatus of the scene; she literally meets it and, through the repetition, establishes a minimal difference: the apparatus of the scene is revealed to us in all of its profanity, which has no residue, no surplus. *If you really wish that nothing is left to me, then there you go: look at me, there is really nothing left to you.*

On the Gestures of Profanation

According to Agamben, profanation is the strategy that can be successful in “meeting apparatuses ‘face-to-face’” although he immediately warns that this is by no means simple. For Agamben, profanation is a procedure through which “what was captured and divided by means of apparatuses, is set free and returned into common use.”¹⁸ Agamben connects his reflections on profanation with the role of religion, which can be defined as “what detaches things, places, people, animals, persons from the sphere of common use into some separate sphere.”¹⁹ Profanation therefore means the returning of these things into common use and can also be understood as the “anti-apparatus which returns into common use what has been differentiated and divided.”²⁰ Profanation is a powerful procedure because it brings about a neutralisation of what

it profanes; it takes the aura away from things and people. Profanation is a frequent procedure in 20th century art and is deeply inscribed into the paradoxical relationship between art and life. Art is thereby established as a sort of field of radical event, a field of the potentiality of rebelling against the rigid structures of contemporary life; at the same time, art also enables the autonomy of the artistic object. It is the political process that triggers intersubjectivity in the theatrical event; phenomenological openness is only possible if something becomes a thing in common use, if it is exempt from separation. By means of profanation, we could also understand the consumption of the body in the “Via Negativa” project – the fluids and openings on stage, the masturbation and the blood, the senseless and absurd tasks of persisting and being wrapped in the plastic bag for a long amount of time, the exhaustion of the body and voice, the challenging of one’s physical abilities – which have become a permanent feature of “Via Negativa” and always accompany the utterance of individual confessions. At the same time, however, we need to consider some radical change in contemporary life which makes the profanation process radically more difficult if not even impossible. Profanation no longer has the basic potentiality of returning things into common use, but only exists as an empty fetishised procedure. Agamben warns that we live at the time of profoundly changed apparatuses as processes of de-subjectivisation, which makes the profanation procedures so much more difficult. Capitalism namely establishes itself as a sort of system which, in its final stage, becomes a system for embracing all profanation behaviours (transgression, rebellion, negativity, provocation, radical consumption, etc.). In this sense, capitalism is a religion targeting the absolutely “non-profanable;” in its final form, capitalism embodies “the pure form of

separation, without anything left to separate. Absolute profanation, which has no residues, henceforth coincides with a sort of consecration, which is equally empty and integral.”²¹ It is not a coincidence that Agamben sees the realisation of this dream of the absolutely non-profanable in what is the most profane: in pornography.

Profanation has thus become impossible; according to Peter Klepec, this gesture requires special procedures nowadays.²² If we connect this premise with contemporary art, especially with the potentiality of radical consumption, we find ourselves facing a deep problem as far as radical consumption in art is concerned. This feeling is further strengthened by the fact that, today, procedures of artistic profanation exist as objects of value (e.g. documents of body art and performance art constitute an important part of numerous contemporary art collections). This entry of radical experience into museums is especially paradoxical as the museum is the ‘sacred space where something has sought refuge that has once felt real’; there is no possibility of use, being and experience.²³ Along these lines, the question arises as to what the current situation of radical experience and profanation is in theatre, whose ontology is directly connected with the live event. The scene with Katarina Stegnar shows that, in theatre, radicality is deeply caught in the apparatus as well - there is no freedom there, no potentiality, nothing more to be gained by means of action; it is a scene of a radical powerlessness. Hence the feelings of discomfort – both Katarina’s and mine; they spring from an absolute failure of self-reference, from the critical procedures of self-referentiality. However, Katarina’s scene can also be read as an attempt to find new profanation procedures, to structure a place for the exemption. To establish a special statement even if doing so actually

brings about the realisation of voluntary slavery, which, despite the reality of submission, refuses to have its own symbolic mandate taken away: “I am a good actress, I have never received a bad review in my life,” she said in *Viva Verdi*. The scene reveals that, today, dominance is based on the supremacy of the real and the submission of the symbolic – on the belief that everything can be done, released and profaned. In this field of the symbolic and non-real, the dynamics of power and dominance takes place: active devaluation of the symbolic and its “irrational” power is a component of ideological hegemony and cultural struggle that demands constant upkeep and reproduction.²⁴ The problem is, however, that this symbolic dimension of life is profoundly suppressed. But this does not mean that it has vanished, quite the opposite; it is, however, convincing us that it has disappeared, that we are free and the only masters of our pure lives and their radical consumption.

Conclusion: Some Shame

Radical consumption leaves the audience in “Via Negativa” with a feeling of uneasiness. This feeling of uneasiness can be described with the sentence from the beginning of the Lacan’s lecture. In the lecture that I mentioned at the beginning of this text, Lacan says: “We see very rarely, this needs to be said, that someone dies of shame.”²⁵ At the time of the greatest exhilaration, the rise of relaxed and liberated post-industrial culture, Lacan’s lecture detects an interesting trait of this culture, the culture of the liberated body, relaxedness, consumerism, pleasure and the liberated subject: this culture is trying to make shame disappear and disintegrate. This is why, at the end of his lecture, Lacan says to his students: if

there is a good reason for you to have come to my lecture in such great numbers, then it needs to be searched in me arousing a feeling of shame in you from time to time. It would be wrong to understand his syntagm as a complaint of a reserved professor who views the turbulent social goings-on as something obscure and reacts to them in an aristocratic fashion. It is a much more fundamental issue, this “honour” as discussed by J. A. Miller; it is namely in radical discussion with culture inasmuch this culture is abolishing shame. “Today, we are namely in a period when the ruling discourse forbids us to be ashamed of our pleasure any longer. Of everything else yes. Of our desire, but not of our pleasure.”²⁶ Today, our culture is centred around the command of pleasure; in order to be able to enjoy, however, we must get rid of shame. In order to be able to reveal the deepest in us, set ourselves free, enjoy, in order to be able to find ourselves and put ourselves first, find life in its genuineness, handle life in its vitality, we need to get rid of shame, become shameless. Increasingly coming up on public stage is a phenomenon that Linda Williams terms as “obscene;” something that does not belong on stage but actually comes to the forefront – rather than with “ob-scenity,” we are dealing with “on-scenity” nowadays (the genre that is most at the forefront is the one revealing all). Is profanation at all possible in the culture of the shameless genre? Or is every attempt of profanation sentenced to powerlessness and impotence?

The more I think about “Via Negativa,” the more I feel that with radical de-subjectivisation the performances of “Via Negativa” want to construct a set-up for exemption. They do that paradoxically by fully subordinating the performers to the shameful genre, as if this genre itself would become the most intimate need of performers. At

the same time, it points at a basic paradox of the economy and position of acting in the contemporary world: the production of performer is desired in all the dimensions of contemporary society, but at the same time, the most slavish and radically impotent, precisely due to its central role in the contemporary economy of labour. Exactly this gesture of subjugation causes shame in the audience. Shame is an interesting affect as it is about the performative process: “Shame veils itself, points at something and projects itself, it turns its own skin inside out, shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and self-disclosure, shame and exhibitionism are different stitches of the same glove.”²⁷ Shame is performance, or as Alenka Zupančič claims: shame is the affect of the fact that we have not died of shame in a certain situation. This inner doubling of shame is the key point for the understanding of its essential dimension. In the “not-to-die-of-shame” situation, the subject is forced to see the downfall of his or her own signifier, the downfall of his or her own symbolic dimension. Although I am ashamed, I do not die along with my symbolic role.²⁸ If this is applied to the imperative of the contemporary culture “without-shame,” then we again see that the absence of shame exists because of the suppression of this symbolic dimension – nothing can be profaned any longer because everything is already disclosed, profaned. “The regime is watching you. And saying, ‘Look at them enjoying it!’”²⁹ With this sentence from 1969, Lacan announced the creation of a new kind of power, based on the imperative of pleasure. Through its new forms of subtle control and self-regulation, this new power would take in all rebellious and profane actions. Performances and actions in “Via Negativa,” its radical consumption of the body can be therefore understood as a try which with subordination is re-addressing

this vanished, suppressed symbolic dimension. This is what gives rise an unusual tension between the confessions and actions of the performers; the tension that does not spring from the dramatic difference between the two but from their radical sameness, rigid repetition. Nevertheless, in this repetition, in the performing action itself, we can find an important difference: it is good that the feeling of shame is aroused from time-to-time. The Master quickly denudes those who do not make themselves responsible for his pleasure.

Notes:

1. The text is centred around the series of performances which came out from a long research project of Slovenian performance group “Via Negativa.” I use the work of this internationally established performance group not to make a case study about them but to think through their work about the position and role of the body in contemporary performance and its relationship to contemporary politics. The shorter version of the text was written first for the lecture performance “Nobody Should Have Seen This,” which I did together with Katarina Stegnar, one of the performers from “Via Negativa” group and was published in Slovenian language. The text was later rewritten and extended for publication.
2. “Via Negativa,” web: <http://www.vntheatre.com/vianegativa.html>.
3. “Via Nova” is the title of the new “Via Negativa” project, a series of 30 performance art pieces based on the eight performances of the “Via Negativa” research project.
4. Flagellants were a radical European Christian movement in the 13th and 14th centuries. They publicly carried out their penitence in mass processions with whipping.
5. Michel Foucault, *Zgodovina seksualnosti. Volja do znanja*. (Ljubljana: SKUC, 2000), 63.
6. Richard Sennett, *Kultura novega kapitalizma*. (Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 2008), 85.

7. Jacques Derrida, "Gledališče in zapora krutosti," in *Teorije sodobnega gledališča*, ed. Emil Hrvatin (Ljubljana: Maska, 2001).
8. Erika Fischer Lichte, *Estetika performativnega* (Ljubljana: Koda, 2007).
9. Brian Massumi, "Navigating Movements" in *Hope*, ed. M. Zaournazzi (New York: Routledge, 2003), 224.
10. Max Weber, *Protestantska etika in duh kapitalizma* (Ljubljana: ŠKUC, Filozofska fakulteta, 1988)
11. Along these lines, the discourse of sexuality developed in the Victorian period – the forbidding of sexuality – closely matches that irrational spending of property.
12. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For analysis of contemporary Forms of Life*. (New York, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004).
13. Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.
14. Agamben bases this on Foucault, whose works thoroughly analyze the dispositive as a creation of obeying yet free bodies, as the manner in which subjects accept their subject identities in the very process of subordination.
15. Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 19.
16. Ibid., 20.
17. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
18. Agamben, *What is an Apparatus*, 25.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*. (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 102.
22. Peter Klepec, *Dobičkonosne strasti: Kapitalizem in perverzija* (Ljubljana: Analecta, 2008).
23. This is discussed by Agamben; for him, the notion of "the museum" not only stands for art museums, but also protected nature reserves, tourist sites, etc.
24. Alenka Zupančič, "Lacan in sram," *Problemi*, 7-8 (2006): 107.
25. Jacques Lacan, "Moč Nemožnosti," *Problemi*, 7-8 (2006): 50.
26. Jacques – Alain Miller, "Beležka o sramu," *Problemi*, 7-8 (2006): 23-44.
27. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Dotik občutka, Afekt, pedagogika, performativnost*. (Ljubljana: Emanat, 2007).
28. Zupančič, "Lacan in sram," 99.
29. Lacan, "Moč nemožnosti," 50.

Stanimir
Panayotov

Heart's Unreason: A Reading of Edelman's Anti-Futurism through Bataille

I. Hopes' Consensus

There has always been a considerable consensus on how consensus is made. The very enactment of this sentence explains how consensus works. Agreeing with this first sentence can only be performed because there is some irreducible desire to do so (apart from the enmeshing of performance and performed). And it takes the existence, real or imaginary, of sociality to institute desire as the pillar of hope and futurity. But for consensualists to negate sociality does not embody desire, and only its negation. Perhaps the case is the mere perpetuation of desire in self-loving circles of sameness impervious to desire's futures. It is in this sense that the dissensus inherent in the "anti-social" turn in queer studies marks the potential of *auto-affection*, achieved by nothing but a heart non-relative to all the other hearts and reducible only to a mechanistic death-driven, egoistic copulation. Copulation not with the lover at that, but a fetishistic one with the disjointed parts of society. Among these there are hearts as well.

If you could agree with how consensus is achieved, and how it is self-explained, you can now aggregate and

inflate it as much as you need to. This has been done by several interlocutors of Edelman (Power 2009, Muñoz 2009, Floyd 2010), and I propose that it is the logic of reproductive desire, and not of anti-reproductive, anti-liberal and anti-representational arguments, that lies at the hearts of Edelman's polemicists. In this text I claim that what constitutes the possibility to veer Edelman's anti-political project¹ in a life-affirmative political vertex is merely the (political) desire to do so, always already inscribed in politics-as-society. Such desire is neither a social given, nor a residue, but the kernel of anti-social dissensus against all consensus which cannot be brought back to reason and political argumentation, but to the eroticism of the hearts – an eroticism which itself opposes all opposition and in particular the opposition between the body and the social.² Here, I concentrate on the first chapter of Lee Edelman's *No Future* (Edelman 2004, 1-33). I read this chapter together with some subsequent criticisms and commentaries which try to rectify a barred "political" residue (or potential) which, as much as it is anti-social, is considered to be politically emancipatory as well.³

There is a hidden hypocrisy in bringing about hope through consensus' sloganeering: the hidden and forgotten desire

in agreeing with one's desire when one takes it to be not desire, but consensus itself. To agree with one's desire for hope and futurity is not the same as taking desire – towards consensus and shared politics – to be hope and future. It appears that Lee Edelman's polemic against politics⁴ was relocated on a (quasi-)liberalist pitch, even when anti-liberal polemicists agree on his equation of politics with reproductive futurism (Power 2009), they try to save or invent a politic of non-reproductive futurism. There is no sense whatsoever in defending any politics if the intent is not to restore the social. The extent to which these two terms are involved in each other's survivals is so insuperable that no restoration of an alternate sociality which takes its course from Edelman's discussion of reproductive futurism can end up taking pleasure from the death drive and its excessive circus of meaningless fucking flesh. Left without politics, the social exists as a quasi-tribe; left without the social, politics survives as pure death drive.

Through something we can call “the hidden consensus of hope” (or even “hope's depression”), critics have relocated the negation of all politics both back in the political and in liberalism - not because they have a different social class or theoretical class background, but because I think they have a quantum of irreducible social desire which swarms in their own “imaginary (political) past,” whose subtending master is the very signifier to which Edelman *opposes nothing* because queerness means nothing for both left and right (NF, 16). Irreducible, that is, to the sort of ungraspable (against-all-reason) idea that the lack of lack in jouissance does not merely reproduce the logic of lack by bringing affirmation through double negation; that the negation of negation does not merely swerve back to affirmation; that negation is not a pure

“NO,” but that this “NO” has a beating heart whose blood stream halts whenever the plasma of politics gets into the drip and whose eroticism is ultimately its anti-politics. That without this plasma's intrusion, an all anti-social “yes” contaminates life with a certain ethical discourse of truth and life-in-truth: that we, sithomosexuals as we are, are those who have to affirm our own passing away as a structureless passage of rite towards death, for we have passed in as nothings in all political projects whose freaky playthings we are. That, finally, we are political only in the terminal moment of saying that the future has stopped for us, and our desire and its uncanniness saves us merely discursively from the political stupor that we come to figure: that is, the stupor we are *being made* to embody. And, strikingly enough, that the stupor we are and whose embodiments we come to be should be ethically embraced by us as subject: and this is the only *position* that makes us emancipated subjects, emancipated, that is, from the sepulcher of the future, and thus anti-political forever after.

Simply put, there is a desire for hope which is equated with (the theorist's) desire itself – in particular, the desire for hope and utopia, where these blend together in a performative “consensus.” For upon the publication of Edelman's *No Future*, in the numerous attending, if quite collaborative, debates surrounding it, what has actually been brought up as obvious is not the very obviousness of hope: it was the social construction of hope through consensus and the consensual construction of hope – and the theoretical desire as its surplus – that manifested what Edelman's work revealed. Namely, that, for some anti-social agents who choose not to choose the social where they *have* to live an impossible ethics, there is a way to inhere outside the tomb of the signifier and the

cradle of reproductive futurism (sinthomosexuality).⁵ Second, almost every corrective reading of Edelman proposed somehow presuppose a disciplinary *unity* of the newly established brands of queer utopianism, predicated *on* antisociality/antirelationality and rationality/relationality (Muñoz 2009, Floyd 2010). And third, that these two streams of queer dissention – both thriving on the outskirts of academic proselytism, as if neither reproduce an anti-social sameness in their own self-same logic of reproduction – have to exist unilaterally, has now been accepted. This is all right, but the unity itself already subtends some primitive form of academic sociality which is not quite graspable for those involved in paradoxical movements seeking to extend the logic of non-consensual anti-natalism in their abhorrent socius (e.g., those behind “Against Equality” or the “Gay Shame”). As if there is some premeditated need to unify sociality and antisociality in queer in order not to disrupt the unique indivisibility of queer that emanates in its all-transcending non-unity; as if in order to provide a shared Real-political *position* from which both camps to drag their corresponding consensus (where dissensus is a paradoxical form of consensus), thus imagining a common well of un-reasoning whose water break from queer theorists’ wombs, wombs impossible for impregnation at that.

What can be called “anti-natalism” in Edelman is “where the future stops,” the “desire to die” now where “now” does not pass as the “future.” The lesson to be learned from Edelman is not a Foucaultian notion of writing the ontology of the present; it is to live the now as an unsignified future coming in the figure of the NO, and not NOW. Just as being anti-natalist does not morally involve the committal of suicide, just as non-procreation does not necessarily mean human extinction, so the desire to die, or the stopping of future, does not mean to stop living: it only

means to *start* dying without signifying death as life – to stop the world (see NF, note 42, 180). It only means that, as Thomas Ligotti would say, it takes a “yes” in our hearts to say “no,” and to live a life ethically complicit with this.⁶ Sara Ahmed comes closer to this when she says that “[t]o embrace the negative or to say yes to a no cannot be described as a purely negative gesture” (Ahmed 2010, 162), but she already has in mind a certain dialectical optimism.

I turn now to several arguments about the possibility to make politics out of a form of non-reproductive futurism which negates Edelman’s negation of futurity altogether, albeit with the pretension to integrate his notion of politics=the social=reproductive futurism. What this means is, as vexing as this may sound, that all anti-liberal and allegedly sympathetic critics of Edelman should temporarily line-up behind a crypto-capitalist notion of social theory which allows them to invest in anti-capitalist theories of non-reproductive futurism. This is not a defensible position and the critics in question can only negate their own socially imposed anti-sociality and alienation from the dominant order so that the order becomes pervious to such undefendability, to result in a non-reproductive politics. No one can simply believe that any scientific, state-funded establishment will intentionally support such futuristic social theory that negates non-reproduction. I take it, then, that the critics concerned here do not expect their investment in futurity to be graspable by today’s scientific redistributors of shortages in the dominant social order and that it is this depressing condition that supports their brandishing of hope and utopianism in social theory.

If the central question, after Edelman, is: “can the sinthomosexuals live without politics at all without risking

to stop fucking with the jouissance?,” then we also have to inadvertently ask: is there any form of politics that could arise from the negation of all politics? What term of opprobrium do critics omit in order to advocate some form of compromise between their shared negation of reproductive futurism and socio-political utopianism and politics in general?

In his review of *No Future*, Mark Fisher observes that “[o]ne of the great virtues of Edelman’s thesis is that it restores the distinction between queerness and homosexuality per se.” (Fisher 2005) This is so in as much as Edelman tells us intuitively that he will not work with a notion of queerness that is going to “affirm a structure” (NF, 3), as all politics are conservative since they affirm structures. But he does not tell us if he is going to propose a politic at all, and if he does not do that, *what*, if anything, comes after politics. This is why:

[i]t is often not clear whether Edelman is opposed to politics as such or is agitating for a wider definition of the political. It seems to me that, rather than equivocating politics with “the social” (as Edelman seems to) the true site of political struggle lies in what the dominant order calls the extra-political. When there is only one (permissible) side, it is imperative to locate the Outside. (ibid.)

As much as Edelman locates the Outside as sinthomosexuality, he does not want to bring what is not reducible for him to politics, i.e., the “extra-political” – quite comprehensible for both left and right interests – to any form of politics. This means that Edelman refuses to reorder the social order should it be forced to, or is willing to, politicize the “excluded” extra-political and turn it into an “included” political livability (whence his criticism of

Butler). The very idea of reordering the order is political, relational, and social, and thus it does not serve the *end* of Edelman: not to reduce queers to a sorry state where they have to politically legitimize and institute the death drive and the sinthomosexual figure. And if this idea stops here, so does the future. As Ahmed says, “[t]o affirm an order might be to define and regulate what is thinkable in advance of thought.” (Ahmed 2010, 161) This is the always-already-prepoliticization of any social order through the imaginary inebriation of the future, done by the image of the Child; there is no other thought of and for the future than that of the Child-missile. What *remains* is the principle of “being for being against,” (ibid, 162) which does not evolve to rational queer commonality, which is not read as a politics, but recedes into the isolated world of stand-alone individuals whose puppet master is the death drive. The *remainder* of queerness, “embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order,” (NF, 25) is some sort of mechanistic quasi-society/temporally designed mass of queer puppetry in incessant hyper-teleological gang-bang. It is a community whose telos is political self-destruction. As Edelman riffs on Lacan, “political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.” (NF, 30) The refusal of all politics, to repeat the earlier claim here, is to live death and the death drive literally/figuratively and not to live the life as the Heideggerian *Sein zum Tode*, for “queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration.” (NF, 24) *Sein zum Tode*, read as a phenomenological political imperative of sorts, is still reducible to a liberalist pro-life queer positionality: it does acknowledge the formerly suppressed self-consciousness for death, but it seeks to

abolish it at the expense of birthing more death. Even as queers/sinthomosexuals occupy the place of the death drive (its “khôra”), “[t]he structural position of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain.” (NF, 27) Only that the fill-up of death is not communal.

We do not have to read political self-destruction as the end of children’s life; rather, it is the end of the figure of the Child that frames the future for those who do not want a future with children and who embrace the disfiguration of identity. It is in this sense that “queerness ... is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end.” (NF, 16) Hence, what is at stake here is that sinthomosexuals’ inherent “meaninglessness is not a kind of *jouissance*, it is merely the acknowledgement that children are always-dying so that others may live.” (Power 2009, 14) Repeating the Child is not merely the politics of meaninglessness, it is something much more anxious: the politics of re-signifying the crashing course of an impending meaninglessness on to the future as such. Anti-futurism seeks a way out of the imposed ethical responsibility to repeat the very figural status of children’s finality (and the ethics of guilt behind this that breeds reproductive futurism from behind). So the alleged temporality of queer anti-futurism, which still appears to feature some retained future, comes from the very act of childhood’s repetition, and with this, politics as such. Once the figure of the Child is exchanged for the obliteration of *jouissance*’s lack, anti-futurism culminates in the arrest of history. As Floyd says, “[f]or Edelman, childhood figures the homogeneous, narcissistic time of mere repetition.” (Floyd 2010, 15) Doing away with this “time” amounts to a highly egoistic queer negativity, whose only point of temporally achievable commonality is the art of fucking with and for the *jouissance*: the ability to be the

senseless acrobat of the death drive, the craftsmanship of fucking with the heterosexual matrix *not in its name*.

In seeking a way out of anti-futurism and such queer pessimism, Ahmed has this presumption in mind:

Queer pessimism matters as a pessimism about a certain kind of optimism, as a refusal to be optimistic about “the right things” in the right kind of way. ... Queer pessimism becomes interesting as an alien effect although to become pessimistic as a matter of principle is to risk being optimistic about pessimism itself. (Ahmed 2010, 162)

Yet, queer pessimism is an “alien effect” only in a social order which does not aim at its own political self-destruction. It is the “natural” (quasi-consensual) effect of queer anti-politics. It is the position that having children and future is “not all right” (which is “against all reason”) and that this cannot take any right direction. Thus, the difference which I think Edelman makes here, the step towards a non-dialectical anti-futurist queer pessimism which fears not its political dissolution, but desires it (even if this desire is introduced to only suspend the very dialectic of desire), is that even if the dialectic is temporarily kept, it is kept to only seize the temporality as the pestilent fungus onto the “future:” its construal under queer negativity stops the production of the third term, that is, both the child and the civil society (be it the left proletariat or the right vigilantism). In this sense Edelman’s anti-futurism is a queer response of Marx’s civil society against itself, but without any envisioned political agenda ahead, for the heads of queer anti-futurists is full only with the mindlessness of *jouissance*. Meaningless it may be not, but if it *is* something in actuality, it is mindlessness, and this is why it is “against all reason.” The only

remaining intellect would be some mechanical recollection of how to fuck with other sinthomosexuals which figure the non-assimilable extra-political. Edelman's insistence on sinthomosexuality (which explicitly does not reduce itself to queers) in his plea against relationality is precisely because – and Muñoz is absolutely right in saying this – “the antirelational turn in queer studies was a partial response to critical approaches to a mode of queer studies that argued for the relational and contingent value of sexuality as a category.” (Muñoz 2009, 11) Sinthomosexuality is this anti-political quasi-category of self-destruction which does not aim to preserve neither paradoxality nor utopianism.

This is why I find little sense in advocating “queer rationalism” such as Power's. (Power 2009) For all the justice behind her argument that there is a “kind of rationalism that escapes Edelman's equation of ‘reason’ with futurity,” (ibid., 2) and even though I absolutely agree with her insistence that it is irrationality, and not rationality that governs politics, and even though the desired anti-politics can turn out to actually embody rationality, there is still the fact that although the politics of representation is a violent form of modernity's self-perpetuation, this very representation is social and it is society which has instituted irrationality as its forgotten, politically affirmed structure. It is society in itself which “chooses not to choose” in politics, and hence it is society's irrationality that is socially regulated by itself against itself in what we still think of as politics. If this is the case, it is hard to see the step towards queer rationalism as enabling any future, for representation's insanity, with all its babies in between, can give birth only to the shortage of representation, including queer rationalism. True, if queer rationalism is anti-representational and falls under

the rubric of direct democracy, then we have to wait for the time when the latter will not be tied to representation and see what happens with birth control instead. For then it may well turn that our enslavement by children will disappear and we will have the right to call “politics” any form of misrepresentation and miscarriage of the future: just about the perfect rationality of our anarchist desires. But that will not happen unless we deny all politics and demand non-representational politics which is not a disguised desire for representation. To do this, you have to negate society itself. Since for Power “what is even less thinkable than queer negativity is the social itself,” (ibid., 14) this is a completely different project, for the *unthinkability* of the social already involves the projection of politics (and the *desire* to do so), while the anti-rational *unintelligibility* of queer negativity does not (but involves the *pleasure* of not doing so). Does queer negativity not demand the existence of society? Yes, but only if its own teleology is temporarily political in that it aims at its political self-dissolution into mindless jouissance in order to *embody* what it is (instead of acceding to *being* what it is) – a death drive with children smiles that will never be born.

José Muñoz in his *Cruising Utopia* appears to ascribe a rhetorical figure – the “romance” – to Edelman where what the latter sees is the mere mechanicism of enjoyment. For example, he says that “[a]lthough the antirelational approach assisted in dismantling an uncritical understanding of queer community, it nonetheless quickly replaced the romance of community with the romance of singularity and negativity.” (Muñoz 2009, 10) It would be striking to believe that Edelman actually means to flirt with negativity, when all he talks about lies in the sexual domain, disattached from the politicization of queers'

emotional feel-good tripping, or at least it so seems to me. Muñoz goes further in his romance-ridden utopianism claiming that “antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference.” (ibid, 11) However, it is the fear of sameness, the ominous sameness of male homosexuality, the parting with this fear that lies at the heart of anti-futurism and anti-natalism, and not the saving of differences. In short, to repeat Edelman, the Child enshrines the value of sameness because of which queers are condemned: “an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past.” (NF, 21) The Child steals the very model of sameness which queerness comes to embody. The political trouble of queerness is sameness, and as such, queerness/sinthomosexuality will never have the power – nor do they have to have the desire to – reclaim it in order to have politically liveable lives (Butler), for to be against the Child is “against all reason.” Queers can be as different as they are, but they will never win battle for sameness. It is here that it becomes clear why Edelman refuses politics and identifies it entirely with the social.

Kevin Floyd claims that both Edelman’s and Muñoz’s books “want to refuse a future toward which contemporary regimes of hetero- and homonormativity seem to want to push us, for example.” (Floyd 2010, 4) This is right: this is the shared metapolitical level of both authors. He further rightly claims that our identification with the Child is “a representation of the future which, covertly, amounts only to an identification of the future with the present.” (ibid., 6) Again, here we can see the withdrawal from politics: not only that the Child is already a representation of the future (and renders queers less and less representable in as much as they do not

reproduce biologically), but the very future reflect the image of the present. Floyd goes after Edelman, but he inserts the term “utopian” inside his argument:

Because utopian thinking is always also ideological thinking, thinking conditioned by and expressive of the present, the utopian break with the present can only be thought as stasis, as a break from the movement of time itself, a state without change; this is another way of saying that this utopian break can only be thought as death. (ibid., 8)

In a Benjaminian move, Floyd’s rendition of utopia, which does not allow us to imagine “positive utopian future,” at least gives us a spoiled optimism which makes it possible to imagine “the destruction of the present” and with this, to untie ourselves from the future even though it is still there as it will come to us: baby-faced. For Floyd, “utopia” is not different, but identical to death, and Edelman’s avoidance of investment in (non-reproductive) futurism is wrong. But what that means really? That we have to enjoy an already mortified, child-ridden utopia, if only to save the present and keep out of insanity’s reach? If this is so, this is a realistic and bearable project, somewhere between “queer optimism of difference” and “queer pessimism of identity,” a logistical thought management which does not allow us to revel in pathology and death drive, but a horizon sustaining the meaning of now for the dissolution of our future landscape full of children.

II. Hearts’ Dissensus

What I have tried to explain in the beginning was that there is an irreducible form of desire subtending utopianism, even if it has the self-consciousness for its own

production of illusions for the present, and that such desire is tied to the logic of consensus which is always political (especially when what is at stake is non/reproduction). Hope is made by consensus. Mindless anti-futurism is achieved by dissensus. It seems to me that if dissensus is not the false mirror of consensus, if it is an altogether other, wholly other, mirror located in the non-impregnability of queerness, its location is extra-political and it lies in the "heart." There is, regardless of the rhetorically superb machinations of Edelman which rend the text a small machine for the non-production of children and meaning, something affective in *No Future*, tamed by the shrewd of syntax. There *must* exist the possibility for this: that there is ultimately something in Edelman's heart, that is, a spiritual eroticism of the life pump, which is "against all reason." It is not all rationality versus irrationality that is at stake here. In short, there is the possibility that unreason lies in the non-politicizable heart. And if this is a "political possibility," so be it and let all politics with its family in the queer negationist's heart so that it delights in its final session of aborting the future.

There have been the *times* when the bellies of great many of us, formerly zealous, and now merely mechanical, proponents of equality, were in fire. These were the times of politics. I take Edelman's anti-futurism as itself the figure of the anti-politics of time and the undoing of the relation between time and politics to the point of *insanity* (what else is anti-relationality if not a form of insanity?). And as these political times came to an end⁷ with pernicious homonormativity and reformed gay-friendly capitalism – that is, with a false restoration of the political, now governed by self-destructive economics which is anti-women and anti-child, as Power says, (Power 2009, 5) there remains an irreducible insanity, other than capitalism's, an

insanity where anti-identity and sameness are perilously close. It is the unreason and insanity of those who pry open their being and arrested future through their being for being against or through their fuck-spree with the political. I propose to read this unreason with what Bataille has called "the eroticism of the hearts" in order to explain the rejection of politics in Edelman.⁸

In Bataille's tripartite eroticism, "the eroticism of the hearts" is the second term between eroticism of the bodies and spiritual eroticism. While it may appear more logical that anti-futurism is more identifiable with the first kind (because it is the mere shattering of the experience of yourself, the annihilating and irreversible sacrifice, an act that does not save the place of eroticism, namely, the sacred), eroticism of the bodies still allows the organization and hence politicization of one's vertigo of identity. In this state, the individual is manipulatable to all forces external and closest to immediate sexual drives. But the second eroticism, that of the hearts, allows a totality with the lover which makes possible the loss of identity.

This loss is somewhat similar to Edelman's rejection to marry "identity and futurity in order to realize the social subject." (NF, 13-14) In the eroticism of the hearts, lovers are in that intermediate position between their leaving the social where the erotic encounter occurred and the final spiritual eroticism which affirms life and hence brings the lovers back to their social bodies. Just as queers "no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration, of identity itself," (NF, 24) the lovers in their eroticism of the hearts disown both their spiritual drive to revert back to the social or the initial bodily state

of singularity. As Michael Richardson explains it, the totality in this second stage:

prolongs the eroticism of bodies to the point that a momentary recovery of continuum is experience, deepened by the fusion of bodies: the couple become a joint egoism, but this imposes a new discontinuum and it offers only an image of the miracle of a desirable continuity of being. (Richardson 1994, 109)

Thus, there is an irrecoverable differentiation of the beings at this point which can reach only to a state of imaginary continuation of life. If the sex act “must be equated with sacrifice,” (ibid.) then the sacrifice of Edelman’s unreason – the sacrifice of politics in itself – lies in the eroticism of his heart giving up the balance of life and death achieved in the sacrificial logic of lovers’ reproduction.⁹ If for Edelman “the future stops here,” in sinthomosexuals’ fuck-fest of non-reproduction and the barring of meaning in time, then in Bataille’s eroticism of the hearts what appears to be a recovery through collective egoism is precisely the point where one can consciously choose not to choose the third moment, the spiritual eroticism which *affirms* eroticism as “the full approbation of life.” (ibid) It is this third moment of eroticism in Bataille that appears to recuperate the projection of desire and its reproductive force of self-perpetuation. Queer negativity and anti-futurism are, when read through the eroticism of the hearts as a figuration of copulation and its undisturbed egoism, an auto-affecting suspension of the social between the bodily and the social.

Thus, Edelman’s anti-futurism, his anti-politics-against-all-reason, in short, his unreason, stops “here,” or there, where all the here stops: *at the heart* which is the

sacrificial place of eroticism, copulation and egoism against all names, a stoppage in the doom of a mechanistic death-driven gang-bang with the mortified social that we enliven just as mechanistically with children.

Blind for all politics that might be, or better yet, for all politics impossible, what the hearts of the sinthomosexual lovers refuse to do is to agree on ever stopping to copulate: even with the heterosexual matrix. Being two, three, countless little fucking mindless machines, they disagree to stop fucking in the future. And the future stops here.

Notes:

1. Under the moral aegis that a politics which does not affirm life is not politics, an aegis which Edelman embraces which itself forbear us in a new ethics of anti-natalism.
2. I am not aware of a notion of consensus that is not social or socially-determined. To read dissensus as the perfectly perversely inverted emanation of consensus – if dissensus is taken as the agreement of all that disagree on a given social – is ethically wrong, because this both denies and demands individual autonomy: an old liberal trickstery.
3. I am fully aware that my brief reading of Edelman through Bataille at the end of this text involves an argument about the antipoliticization of dissensus, an argument author such as Edelman might not want to extend, since he does remain vague whether there is a sort of anti-social politics which is not only anti-representational, anti-natalist and anti-futurist, but somehow “affirms a structure” incorruptible by the dominant hetero-order. We still have to wait for his sequel *Bad Education* to figure that out. This does not mean that one should not follow the *structure* of his reasoning as a *figural* (and thus ironic) structure against all reason, however individualist and fascist it is. In this sense, here I take the liberty to say that Edelman’s embracing of right-wing anti-queer arguments – which not merely do not make queer any more queer, but more or less demand its refusal – is in dangerous proximity with American

homosexual right-wing writer Jack Donovan (published under the name Malebranche 2007), whose (anti-gay/queer) notion of androphilia, albeit politically charged with alpha-male homomilitarism, has at its core the virulent and vertiginous self-destruction of the Acéphale group.

4. All subsequent quotations from this book are given parenthetically in the text.
5. In a note that strikes me as the queer rendition of Foucault's paralyzing self-interrogation in *The Archeology of Knowledge's* conclusion, Edelman is done with the question of his own persona and the not-yet-born and predictable – and because of this always already born – criticisms against him. See note 19, 157.
6. Safe for Lacan, Edelman does not do justice to his own anti-reproductive project in that he does not seek to intellectually back himself with other relevant theories such as Schopenhauer or Weininger, or recent ones as Benatar and Ligotti. True, his is not the metaphysics of disappearance, it is more like the denial of politically figured dis/appearance.
7. To the argument that the times are not over because either there is one shared time or because this end is merely a rhetorical fantasy, we should respond that the repetition of times' end does not make the and any less real to those who want to see it just as the desire for queer rationality, hope and utopia cannot be reined in by any queer antirelationality.
8. We have to remember the war context of Acéphale and the College of Sociology, of course. Acéphale remained just that: deprived of its *raison d'être*, since "the true *conjunction sacrée* required a human sacrifice. To bring about a new age of the crowd, of survivors held 'in the grip of a corpse,' someone needed to become the *Acéphale*. Someone needed to lose his head. *It never happened*" (Donovan 2010). For writers like Donovan, however symbolically, as in the case of Edelman, however ironically, "modern man has truly lost his head" (idem). For modern man, read masculine androphiles. I myself do not intend to compare real human life with the Symbolic (order), but to me Acéphale's final impotence is at least partially embodied in Edelman's rejection of politics.
9. Spiritual eroticism would be merely the prelude towards reproduction and child rearing.

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From Sensory Experience to the Anthropology of Experience¹

Introduction

(from visual anthropology's "new" sensations to the sensory perceptions in anthropological research subjects)

Sarah Pink (Pink 2006) says that the majority of visual anthropologists talk about the importance of human sensors, about the importance of sensory perception and understanding things when they are researched, but says that the same ones – the visual anthropologists – have not hitherto dealt with investigations, with analyses of the sensors themselves that accumulate and mediate the so-called sensory experience. In the context of reflections around new sensations, according to Pink, the investigation of human sensors and sensory experience as one of the new and main anthropological research interests should be included. She wants to remind us that visual anthropology turns its primary focus on the research of film and new media, and in researching the latter she also includes the research of sensory perception which deepens the understanding of experiences, the experiences onto which film and new media artifacts are grounded.

According to Victor Turner, the *Anthropology of Experience* is the forerunner of the tendency to research sensory access and the layers of sensory experiences, and this is also mentioned by Pink. The generation of anthropologists which appears with the crucial volume of Turner and Bruner *Anthropology of Experience* (Turner and Bruner, 1986) makes clear the key anthropological insight that, in order to enter into the "Zen" of the subject matter you are dealing with, your own personal experience with/in it is also crucial, as well as the professional anthropological experience, but most of all the mentioning of that personal, inaugural, performative, empirical-participatory experience in the problem, the process, and the research aim. We can freely bring closer the effect of this approach to what Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2000) calls transcendental objectivity as opposed to, but in touch/in communication with, the anthropologist's subjectivity, in order to perceive the various contextual truths, and with this we here enter the approaches and positions of social and cultural anthropology.

Sensory experience implies inclusion, the operating with/of, the understanding with/of the affects and emotions

raised in the anthropologist in the context and from/around the investigations' context.

Thus, by using experience/involvement, the living in other surrounding (in this case, Slovenia), personal perception, the filter of emotions and affects in combination with intuition, sensory perceptions of the surroundings around us/me, and the mediated/immediate information, I will talk about the attitude towards the body and the acting of the body in everyday life as against the body in theater performances in Slovene context, the body as reality and anthropology of art/anthropology of theater.

Everyday life and body/attitude (Slovenia/Slovene art and anthropological impressions – on the streets, in the bus, in everyday communication and interaction, in the theater)

In Slovenia, an EU member-state, Western-European taste dominates visually in general, everyday life. Let us focus on Ljubljana as Slovenia's main city, as well as being a spatially dominant focus of my anthropological observations, sensing, analyses and understanding of everyday life.

In Ljubljana there are three evidently different groups of permanently and temporarily settled/present inhabitants: Slovenes, southerners, pejoratively referred to as *chefurs* (representatives of the ex-Yugoslavian countries: Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Macedonians) and foreigners from (Eastern/Western) European countries and the rest of the world, comprising the smallest percent. Racially, the white race dominates; the presence of Asians, people of color and Arabs is still extremely reduced in number. Slovenia

lacks multi-nationality, but they have no interest in it and defend their local national-nationalistic interests with very rigorous legislation designed for the foreigners interested in working or immigrating in/to Slovenia. As a predominantly Catholic country, a country of numerous believers, the domination of Catholicism's character in relation to the manifestations of the human body on the street and in the context of direct everyday life is all too obvious.

Let us elaborate upon this anthropological finding.

In the period 2000-2004, before Slovenia's entry to the EU, Ljubljana/the city, even at the height of its worst traffic jam, was apparently silent due to some salient, perpetual emotionally expressive restraint of the Slovene citizens, the same being extremely obvious also in the body's acting. The Slovenes are educated to show decent public conduct, they are cultivated as a people (cultivation in the style and context of an advanced civilized nation); the harsh financial measures for offences, from the most banal to the heaviest ones, additionally honed the discipline in everyday life, which is in combination with the Slovene's inherent thrift and famous parsimony. Their humbleness and fright, characteristic for continually yoked and despaired provincial people, in combination with their subsequently acquired respect towards the independence of the Slovene state, which for a long time they so much desired, has structured their so typical reticence.

On the buses people are whispering, at the bus stops it is relatively silent, the earnestness and discretion in behavior and clothing is evident. Slovenes are a good people, but they lack temperament, it is suppressed or

rarely visible. They lack the charm of grimacing, the vitality of faces' mimicking which the neighboring Italians have in abundance, apart from the Italian way of perceiving Catholicism. The apparent Slovene bodily reticence is manifested through lighter to more obvious writhing of the body, subtle stiffness of the hands and the neck, the focus and posture of the head is unnaturally and frontally directed, with their eyes discretely perceiving everything attracting their attention, watching apparently in a disinterested and indifferent fashion. Due to the lack of vital mimics, the beautiful faces of some passers-by are easily forgotten since individuality is controlled and restrained.

Most of the older Slovene women love to wear beige clothing, and the same color makes them unattractive, less desired and unidentifiable, insignificant. As a gamut, beige does not reflect any apparent daily emotion at hand in the personality. The younger Slovenes are either sporty, pragmatically clothed, with a casual image and with no aesthetic accent. This reduction of aestheticism does not violate the impression, in combination with their articulate natural beauty (the type dominating is the Slovene-Sub-Alp type, white-faced, with good complexion, light eyes, red lips, blond hair, shapely symmetrical facial features; the Slovenes are generally a people quite tall). Some of the young Slovenes are dressed in line with minimalist trends and with taste, and also Euro-style and trendy. But such street trendsetters in the early stage of my living in Slovenia were very few and far between in comparison with today. Among the youth the dominating colors in clothing are black, white, and grey achromatic hues, all the way to those rarely courageous enough to be seen in green, red, yellow and orange colors.

Slovenes are strained when it comes to tactile communication (hapticism), and it almost does not exist. That is, touching is something which does not exist in everyday life communication, and hence Slovenes compensate much of the communication needs and social expression by way of speech, oral conversation; Slovenes like to speak – to verbally interpret and reveal everything they know of, desire and could do. They have a naturally inherent talent to theorize everyday life.

It often happens when you are travelling on the city bus that if suddenly the driver abruptly applies the brakes, there appears an apparent and deliberate writhing of the passengers, resulting from the fear that bodies would touch, and this writhing becomes obvious in its panic.

The bodily reduction, coolness, reticence, standoffishness in most Slovenes, the writhed bodily language speaks of inhibition of expressions and passions in the context of everyday life. Catholicism further imposes politically its unreal hypocrisy in relation to the suppression of the spontaneity of the libidinal bodily speech. The question among the Slovenes about the frequent suicides pulled the following psychological-social premises: that such unnatural restrain causes nervous “crackdown,” also one in libidinal-emotional tensions, as well as the prohibition not to reveal the smallest sign that something at home does not go well (the same reasons make the psyche fragile), all the way to the system's changes and the massive rise in prices and job cuts (later, with the appearance of recession in Slovenia) which brought about the appearance of needy people among Slovenes themselves, as a strong blow to the nation.²

As the Slovenes themselves say,³ it is partly the system, as well as the location (the famous climate and geographical advantages of the country) in/of the Republic of Slovenia, that provides the Slovenes with a high quality of everyday life on the level of: drinking quality tap water, breathing good/limpid air; Slovenia may be counted as one of the more ecologically conscious countries; Slovenes eat good and genetically non-modified food, Slovenia-produced food is more expensive than the foods imported from other countries (of course, save the international gourmet delicacies). They regularly do sports: they walk and go to the mountains, and are lovers of extreme sports. Traditionally, they spend their weekends outside the cities, in nature, Slovenes are lovers of exotic trips, bearing in mind the living standard and the credit policy most of them are able to afford such luxuries. Before Slovenia's EU entry, the southerners and the *chefurs* were needy. Slovenes themselves sometimes cynically say they need the southerners so that they feel more valuable and successful as a new independent nation in relation to and in the framework of the European Union. Although Slovenes are predominantly nice in everyday life attitude and social conduct/communication, the Slovene's duplicity and their interactive indirectness/lack of openness, along with some symbolic laws, are the qualities that subversively protect and deepen xenophobia. There is a decades-long controversy concerning the permission to build the first mosque in Slovenia (it was only Slovene architects that applied for the tender), and let us not neglect the serious injustice against the Deleted ones who in right-wing circles are said to be themselves guilty that back in 1991, since they did not believe in the facts that the Yugoslavian Federation disintegrated and no longer existed, they did not determine and register themselves within the frames of 24 hours what their state

belonging is; hence it is said that their stubbornness and inertia are the reasons for their inexistence and exclusion from all civil rights.⁴

Chefurs or Balkan/ex-Yugoslavian southerners have always, until today, been considered a lower class and lower human rank in Slovenia, excluding the second and third generation of southerners born in Slovenia; but as long as they perfectly master the Slovene language that they have equal chances with the "pure" Slovenes to find better jobs, and to ascend to the upper layers of society. When it comes to body language, the *chefurs* dominate nervous and noisy (allegedly uneducated) children, often visible on the buses (a place of close anthropological contact) where they speak loudly – very often one can hear purposely raised vulgar subjects that intentionally provoke the rest of the refined Slovenes with their provocative explicitness. On the buses the manifested generations are those of the older *chefurs* who settled in the 1990s or those who settled during the time of the Yugoslavian Federation with their origins from Bosnia, Serbia, more rarely from Croatia, and being mostly working class people that still speak silently since it is a public secret, one that has continued since the 90s (and some say even much earlier), that everyone who speaks poor Slovene language or speaks only Croatian and Serbian languages (without knowing/speaking Slovene) is desirable to speak silently, and should not dominate. Visually, times have changed, but older generations have the old fears deeply ingrained. It is the young *chefurs* that oppose Slovene aesthetics and protest against the fears and limitations of their grandmothers, grandfathers and parents.

The Deleted ones continue to un/consciously rebel also through their youthfulness. They listen to turbo-folk

music, they fight because of passion and Eros, they speak and accentuate on the hard version of the letter “č” [ch], which linguistically differentiates them from Slovenes’ softer “c.” Their clothing taste is less refined and less contemporary and trendy, the girls wear cheap jewelry, they wear aggressively styled make-up on their faces and dress with expressly sexy clothes during working hours which bravely emphasizes their forms (it is a “public secret,” or a colloquial understanding, among the citizens of Slovenia that they would always marry a Slovene girl, but their manliness and inarticulate libido could be provoked only by the attractive, free and seductive *chefur*/southern girl). The younger *chefur* boys reveal an interest in golden chains and rings, training suits, tight t-shirts which emphasize their bodies, and thus their libido is boldly open and evidently manifests their bodily desires as if in a stubbornness against the restrained catholic and discretely fascist layer of Slovene society.

Let us not neglect the successfully assimilated southerners that we can imagine and situate about and in whichever contemporary European state. They, however, have lived in terms with the pro-European tastes and needs for a long time.

During the period 2004 – 2010, more precisely since May 2004 when Slovenia entered the EU not in a quite cheerful way, rapid and evident changes took place. The sudden arrival of foreigners – tourists from Western and Eastern (EU) European countries, contributed to and about the dynamizations and liberations of the attitude, dynamics and rhythm of life of/in Ljubljana’s everyday life. The changes brought about visual diversity, and with this, new generations of young Slovenes developed who, under the newly arrived European influence, began

to loudly and bravely articulate their impressions and expressions. The cultural mixtures in regards to taste, colors, forms and appearances, fashion, restaurants and food, the new spontaneous cultural appearances and influences, as well as the choice of goods in the enormous city malls in Ljubljana’s downtown contributed to help the changes become evident. A lot of the young Slovenes began to frequently travel to Berlin, Tenerife, London, and other locations for tourist or educational reasons or due to the opening of a more open cultural cooperation which was suggested by the EU entry. The comments to be heard were that Slovenia is on its way to become open, and especially within cultural circles, so that local creativity and art become refreshed and as such improve. Ever since then there appeared the crises during the government of Janez Janša (2004 - 2008) which escalated with the arrival of the world recession in the beginning of Borut Pahor’s new government. The motions and changes, the hyper-circulation among the Slovenes themselves in and out of the country, the discontents and the crises on the one hand troubled that visible stereotipization about the getting together, the behavior and the body language, which was until then so typical for the Slovenes.

Macedonians in Slovenia are not always considered under the rank of the so-called typical *chefurs*; in some silent way we pass for those southerners who are more welcome. Macedonians learn Slovene language quickly and are able to use it without an accent. They assimilate rapidly into the contemporary Slovenes’ way of life, they quickly meld and many of them become bigger Slovenes than the Slovenes themselves, which is itself a symptomatic and very common phenomenon for foreigners living in a host country. Slovenes regard Macedonians as people of meek nature, and they perceive us to be a musical

nation. In communicating with Macedonians who have lived and worked in Slovenia for some time, there is a communicative difference to those Macedonians who have just arrived. The former are more relaxed and spontaneous in communication (most of them have found their place in Slovenia), the latter are more tense and more restrained due to the new surroundings and its influences and the suppressed tests they have to pass. The tiny group of Macedonian elite in Slovenia is a closed and barely accessible circle.

Albanians in Slovenia are considered to be very industrious and untroublesome inhabitants. They mostly run businesses with burek and doner kebab food. As for clothing, they are for the most part assimilated and up-to-date, and traditionally clothed Albanians are rarely to be seen in Ljubljana. When being in contact with them they are real traders, always obliging, efficacious, smiling and communicative. Their bodies are always set to work and to deal with the engagements, they are in constant movement and passing from one engagement to the other. They manifest a natural capacity to maintain a standard of quality and constancy in the business attitude.

Today, Slovenia is marked as an interesting destination and a young country accessible to leisurely, varied and entertaining international student life, but also it is a state with a liberated gay population where gay couples still do not hold hands in public. This newly obtained image of Slovenia is at the level of tourist representation, while as a whole Slovenes further remain a closed and cautious nation with a serious fear of giant bankruptcy.

Theater and Body/Attitude

(Slovenia – the period 2004/2010)

Within theater circles, for a long time there reigned the dictum that the southerners are the ones who are always welcomed, all this with the aim to renew and re-glorify the theatrical life and art in Slovenia with their alleged southerner-creative temperament. The southerner (in the theatrical context: the talented *chefur*) was considered to be the one who once allegedly brought Eros and rhythm into Slovene theatrical creativity, and this resulted in stimulating the entire crew. It is said that southern artists are less creatively inhibited than Slovenes; today, the Slovene is deprived of Eros in art, the Slovene artist falls into too much of the intellectualization and theoretization of art and the theater process, for example, Slovene directors quickly “jump on the bandwagon” and forget that actors need sincere art stimulation, artistic Eros and a creative challenge on the level of a guiding/moving energy. Most of the directors lose themselves in too much of research and too less practical risk and experiment in theater, abandoning intuition, which is so necessary for the work with actors and a surprise in arts. With the excessive politicization of Slovene theater, reduced to a theatrical occupation equal to that of a family business, productivity was reduced to a boring hyper-production of a not-so-cheap drama performance. A few renowned directors make five performances a year, while the remainder, especially those from the younger generations of directors, hardly make it to the stage. Theater circles are the most closed ones, and they operate with the highest budgets, and these facts from reality secured a handful of theater personalities with a relatively comfortable life and a decent amount

of prosperity. The art directors of Slovene theaters, which are at once art directors and managing directors, apply their wrong policy of seeing to their personal interests and cooperation only with steadily renowned (predominantly local) directors, which means working with the “checked” players and making impossible the influx of new artists in the new theatrical visions. Also, art directors do not take risks when it comes to the repertoire, and the only novelty in it is the tendency to adapt and stage famous screenplays from the movie world (*Some Like it Hot* by Billy Wilder, *Crime and Punishment* by Andrzej Wajda, *The Damned* by Luchino Visconti, *When I was Dead* by Ernst Lubitsch, *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick, and others), and these are staged superficially and sensationally. In such surroundings, the southerners are not that welcome, at least not in occupations such as stage design, costume design, graphic design, visual dramaturgy and the like. When it comes to the de-mystification of occupations, the closed circles and the tolerated plagiarists, for whom there is no one to criticize openly, bravely and with arguments, there are several Slovene designers who selfishly control the stage with the justification that they are now in the phase called “visual citations.” Generations back-up one another, hence the reticence and inaccessibility of such professional circles.

What is, then, the attitude towards the body in Slovene theater in such roughly drawn lines and working conditions in Slovene theater stages? Every local theater has its own policy when it comes to taste, posture, and quality. The new trend towards commercialization and an emphasized sensationalization of theater performances leads the theater artist to rush into love affairs with much younger colleagues with the hope that such experience will refresh them both as humans and artists. It is in this

way that they also provide food for the Slovene yellow papers, and this should bring-in a larger audience, and a diverse audience at that, including those who normally do not go to the theater but read the yellow papers.

The stage is dominated by young and attractive actors who overshadow their female colleagues both in stage appearance, attractiveness and talent and in content. There is a braver parading with nakedness of the young attractive male bodies on stage, but this aesthetic and symbolic exhibitionism of the actor does not suffice since the director’s mise-en-scène is not fundamentally rationalized, and this is why the banalization of Eros in performances happens extremely quickly. As we have already mentioned, a lot of theater directors make it blunt not knowing how to dynamize, in an articulated way, the actors’ bodies on the stage. The Eros because of Eros and the fetish of youthfulness do not suffice *per se*, since it does not communicate in content without constructive and inspiring/inspired theater directing.

Dialogical dramatic theater does not imply only speaking. Speaking and interpreting the dialogues cannot bring the viewer in the performance and its life. In order for eroticism to function also in a commercial, superficially seductive context and aim, I believe we do not have to forget the physics and metaphysics of the art and craft of theater.

Few Slovene directors master this, since a lot of the new ones do not have almost any life experience but do have had an abundance of relationships, while older directors, in a surrounding without critical mass, quickly fell into “secure” conformism making predictable and boring performances and with this, spend their energy in posing with quasi-genius and half-justified seniority.

The Slovene actor/actress is the best of contemporary Slovene theater, and they truly deserve the director's challenges which would know how to uncompromisingly spend and renew the talent, *élan* and all the capacities of their acting bodies.

Translated from Macedonian by Stanimir Panayotov

Notes:

1. The author of this text lived, studied and worked in Ljubljana, Slovenia throughout the period 2001 – 2010. In 2004 – 2009 she worked as part-time stage and costume designer and assistant in Slovene theaters (Slovensko Mladinsko gledališče/Slovene Youth's Theater, Mestno gledališče Ljubljana/City Theater Ljubljana, Lutkovno gledališče Ljubljana/Puppetry Theater Ljubljana, SNG Drama/National Theatre Ljubljana and Glej/Skuc Theater, also in Ljubljana). Her anthropological research and findings are based on several years of living, working, self-promotion and project cooperation in Slovene spaces and theaters.
2. Main references: from conversations and analyses/findings with/ of friends and colleagues from Ljubljana on the everyday life in Slovenia to systematically following the paper *Sobotna priloga* (the Saturday supplement of the daily *Delo* [www.delo.si] which features famous Slovene columnists and their articles on intellectual subjects and opinions on actual local and international topics) in the period 2001–2010.
3. Main references: from *Delo* (2001/2010).
4. Conversations with the anthropologist P.N., employed at the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, 2009.

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IV Review

Igor
Stojanovski

John Protevi,
Towards
Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic,
University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.

The harsh debate between the advocates of social determinism, on one side, and genetic determinism, on the other, sets the basis of the claim that philosophy today is totally distanced from the achievements of natural sciences. In this book, an attempt is made to overcome the limitations which arise from the opposite claims of these two key theories. By connecting Deleuze's ontology with the results of the latest research in biology, Protevi makes a synthesis of the seemingly opposing arguments with which the social and genetic determinists operate. It can be said that in *Political Affect*, Protevi shows that these two theories of human nature can be quite complementary, which at first can seem a little strange.

The author John Protevi is a professor of French Studies at Louisiana State University. His early interests in Heidegger and Derrida are supplemented with the specialisation of Deleuze, cognitive sciences and biology. The main issues in his lectures are the theories of Foucault, Bergson and Badiou. *Political Affect* represents an addition of his book *Political Physics: Deleuze, Derrida and the Body Politic* in which Protevi uses the notion of

self-management of material systems, known in complexity theory, along with the critique of hylomorphism that Deleuze and Guattari develop in relation to this idea as a readers pattern for certain episodes of the history of Western philosophy. As Protevi himself claims, this book explores the connection of the social and the somatic, or how our bodies, minds and social settings are intricately and intimately connected. In creating the hypothesis, Protevi uses arguments from philosophy, science, and politics, and he calls his perspective "political physiology." With this term, Protevi not only indicates the mix of intellectual resources, but also the bypassing of subjectivity in favour of a direct link between the social and the somatic. Following his line of thought, Protevi creates three basic concepts which he names "bodies politic," "political cognition," and "political affect." With the concept of bodies politic he captures the embodied, embedded and extended character of subjectivity, or how the production, bypassing, and surpassing of subjectivity is found in the interactions of social and somatic systems. In this analysis, he makes three compositional scales of bodies politic – personal, group, and civic and three

temporal scales – short-term, mid-term, and long-term. Borrowing this concept from Deleuze’s ontology, in the first chapter of the book, Protevi explains how on all these compositional and temporal scales we see the events as a product of differential relations that structure a dynamic bio-social-political-economic field. On the personal scale of political physiology, we can see the formation of the somatic bodies politic, the patterns and triggers of the bodily action and reaction. On the group compositional scale, we can see the short-term events of the concrete social perception and action that eventually form bodies politic. On the highest scale of the political physiology, we can see the formation of the bodies politic in a classical sense, or what Protevi calls “civil bodies politic” - the patterns and triggers of institutional action.

In the third part of the book, Protevi takes a look of three case studies of contemporary instances of a politically formed and triggered affective cognition as concrete intersections of the social, physiological and psychological. Those three cases are Terri Schiavo, the Columbine High School massacre and the natural disaster caused by the Hurricane Katrina. Protevi develops a different emotional focus for every case – love in the case of Schiavo, rage in the case of Columbine and fear in the case of Katrina. To create continuity throughout the analysis, Protevi concentrates on empathy as an important instance of the affective cognition. The empathy as an important emotional connection between all of the corporal beings is biologically widespread between the primates, as well as between humans. Even though it’s widespread, Protevi thinks that empathy needs an appropriate development – it needs a genetic background and a social environment. That’s why empathy is not present in

everyone with the same intensity. If the proto-empathic identification is present, it is triggered most easily by the ones that are found in the in-group which is concerned with the case, and its transfer to the others is weak and it can be overcome by the social factors which manipulate with the thresholds of rage and anger such as political indoctrination and military training. The proto-empathic identification is an aspect of the political physiology. It is biological, but it’s submitted to political manipulation.

In the conclusion of the book, Protevi claims that political physiology may be useful in political theory in understanding the notion of sovereignty. The capability of “the forces of order” to kill in a planned and systematic manner is the key of sovereignty conceived as the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within the borders of a certain territory. He says that we have to take into consideration the techniques with which we can overcome the proto-empathic identification and its inhibition of violence. To understand terrorism as political violence, we must have a clear understanding if the intersection between the political rhetoric, affective neuroscience and the act of killing. In other words, Protevi claims that we need a way of thinking of humans as collective and emotional, but also as individual and emotional beings. The need for political physiology to study the political affect is evident, because the negative affects of panic and rage, as well as the weaker forms of fear, anger, anxiety and sadness, represent emotions which are the easiest for political manipulation. Protevi says that all of the affects are not negative, but we have to rethink the focus of political physiology over the rational subject not just in panic and rage, but also in love and empathy, or what Aristotle calls “*philia*.”

Even though Protevi himself admits that this is a book that is synthetic, and in some instances speculative, because it uses arguments from various scientific fields, it still represents interesting theoretical research that uses strong arguments in the discovery of the intersections of the somatic, on one side, and the social field, on the other, in which every human being lives.

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