
Ontology as Reverse

Engineering:

**Understanding Practices of the
Self through Contamination,
Abstraction and Precarity**

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Abstract

This thesis stands as a proposal for a form of critical practice based on social intervention and political transformation within a pluralistic tradition rather than as a singular practice. By unpacking what I will refer to as a ‘conceptual geometry’ through a discussion of precarity, contamination and abstraction, a kind of speculative imaginary located within artistic practice will begin to emerge. This imaginary will then be figured as a tool to access self-creation in spite of the standardising force of neoliberalism. Yet rather than being developed as antithetical to this standardising force, this thesis will instead acknowledge the potential present in contamination through a geometrical interconnectedness.

On This Earth Where No Secure Foothold Is

Wanting to be a movie star like Dean Stockwell or Gigi Perreau,
answering an ad at ten or eleven you made your mother drive you
to Hollywood and had expensive Hollywood pictures taken.

•

Hollywood wasn't buying.

•

Everyone is buying but not everyone wants to buy you.

•

You see the kids watching, brooding.

•

Religion, politics, love, work, sex—each enthrallment, each
enthusiasm presenting itself as pleasure or necessity, is
recruitment.

•

Each kid is at the edge of a sea.

•

At each kid's feet multitudinous voices say I will buy you if you
buy me.

•

Who do you want to be bought by?

•

The child learns this is the question almost immediately.

•

Mother?

•

Father?

•

Both mother and father tried to enlist you but soon you learned
that you couldn't enlist on both sides at the same time.

•

They lied that you could but they were at war and soon you

learned you couldn't.

•

How glamorous they were!

•

As they aged they mourned that to buyers they had become
invisible.

•

Both of them in the end saw beneath them only abyss.

•

You are at the edge of a sea.

•

You want to buy but you know not everyone wants to buy you.

•

Each enthrallment is recruitment.

•

Your body will be added to the bodies that piled-up make the
structures of the world.

•

Your body will be erased, swallowed.

•

Who do you want to be swallowed by?

•

It's almost the same question as To be or not to be.

•

Figuring out who they want to be bought by is what all the kids
with brooding looks on their face are brooding about.

•

Your weapon is your mind.

Frank Bidart, in *Metaphysical Dog: Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

Preface

This brief work, whether we call it an MFA thesis or a necessary ending to the development of an understanding around how to turn a certain theory into practice, is an entry to something rather than an exit. When asked about what the term ‘praxis’ means in the name of our Masters in Art Praxis program at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI), I often found myself taking more pleasure in the definition of the word itself, rather than the activity it implies—the act of transforming theory into practice. Or, how one is in this world in their entirety. In this regard, this text could not manifest elsewhere but within the context of the DAI. Its reflection on ‘being in this world’ is therefore institutionally meaningful and its insistence on the responsibility of going ‘further’ is thus slightly terrifying, as most responsibilities tend to be. While trying to juggle the massive thoughts of great thinkers and doers, what I simply know is this: I do believe in the power of what the dissident produces over the production of difference under capitalism, whether it be through labour, race, sexuality or gender. This belief is also important for being able to differentiate between what/who is responsible for our current state of crisis and what/who is a symptom of that same state. And so too between what/who directs itself/themselves consciously by instrumentalising areas of flexible subjectivity—such as art and philosophy—to make itself/themselves into a project of replication; to remake the mentality and behaviour of the subject in their own image. It is important to hold what/who to account in determining what/who is responsible for enabling spaces for rightwing politics to attach themselves to late capitalism and to thrive with it. Since capitalism’s need for democracy ended we need to think again about what is necessary to endure and who exactly the ‘other’ is that we need to nurture throughout this endurance.

Introduction

The beginning of this thesis stems from a desire to make sense of this world, to be able to imagine possible worlds, or, at least, to make imaginings of possible worlds possible. It is crucial to imagine futures. Thriving for the possibility of a possibility might appear pointless. But one never knows the thickness of a possibility until it disappears, either by manifesting or ceasing. Imagining not just the betterment of this world but other possible worlds entirely is not an anti-utopian move aiming to tame the human imagination. Rather, it is a move aiming to tame human subjectivity from becoming its own universe. My use of the phrase ‘becoming its own universe’ is in line with Felix Guattari’s understanding of subjectivity in contemporary world politics. Guattari saw the effects capitalism had on subjectivity—standardising it, mass-manufacturing it, impoverishing it. In this way, capitalism is an inescapable revolution as it continually ‘reterritorialises’ what escapes it.¹

Deleuze and Guattari understood the earth as a composition of forces and milieus of mechanical phenomena and rhythmic relations.² Accordingly, territorialization emerges from the assemblage of these exterior forces and not from some interior. The interior and exterior are distinguished by the behaviour of

¹ ‘Deterritorialisation’ is a concept coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *Anti-Oedipus*. The term ‘deterritorialisation’ broadly refers to the state of subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures in relation to cultural globalisation. In this broad sense, deterritorialisation can be understood as the ‘disembedding’ of social relations. Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation exist simultaneously, accompanying each other. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 348.

² Borrowing from Brian Massumi on Deleuze and Guattari, ‘milieu’ is a technical term containing ‘surroundings’, ‘medium’, and ‘middle’. Composed of middles, milieus are not yet territories but directions in motion. Milieus respond as rhythms. Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

individuals and groups that are exposed to these phenomena in the establishment of their environment. Hence, territorialization is an act of rhythm and functions as expressiveness, locating it at the origin of production. Territorial expressiveness opens onto other assemblages, or onto the cosmos, meaning when expressiveness no longer functions strictly for the territory but instead expresses a becoming it is then deterritorialized.³ When territories have an oppressive function, as is often true with late capitalism, deterritorialisation gains a liberating function. Capitalism's continuous and inescapable reterritorialisation of what escapes it is a subjugation of the liberties that deterritorialisation enables or proposes.⁴

In my first chapter, titled 'Becoming-Artist', I will delve further into Deleuze and Guattari's project and understand 'becoming' in light of a specific political perspective. 'Becoming-Artist' will attempt to understand the preconditions and conditions constituting our ecosystem of thought. In following Deleuze and Guattari's project, my interests lie in understanding what forms of capitalist constraint can be subjected to a form of intervention. This intervention is not imagined as a one-sided effectuation but rather a mutual change, or, as I like to call it, a form of collaboration through contamination.

This brings me to the second chapter of this thesis, titled 'Contamination', in which I will expand on the collaborative nature of contamination. By doing so I

³ 'Chaos' and 'cosmos' can be understood as disorder and order. However they are not opposites but rather part of a larger continuum. Deleuze and Guattari mark clear distinctions between chaos and cosmos using the concept of 'plane of immanence', which becomes part of chaos through a form of autonomy. This process of 'becoming part of chaos through a form of autonomy' is important to understand in order to be able to identify the expressive core of production and its territorial/deterritorial function. Eugene B. Young, Gary Genosko and Janell Watson, *The Deleuze and Guattari dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 59.

⁴ Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 348.

will draw upon various arguments in favour of a reverse ontology, a rewriting, premised on contaminating the categories already existing, rather than generating an opposition to them.⁵

In the third chapter I follow the epistemology of real abstraction and its contaminative potency in relation to our own ontology. Through doing so, I will try to develop an understanding of 'ontology as reverse engineering' in order to propose it as a tool for unleashing our subversive, liberatory and revolutionary potential.

This will be expanded on further in 'Geometric Imaginary of the Subject', the first part of the fourth chapter 'Geometric Imaginaries'. In pursuit of liberation, and to understand this revolution called capitalism, I will focus on its two main modes of operation: subjection and production. Guattari advocated that the pursuit of liberation should be sought through the unleashing of singularising processes that could then transform existence in all its dimensions. In aligning with his thinking, I will argue for a necessary rejection of dualisms and hierarchies as they are producers of generalities and generalisations. In Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, 'singularity'—a term borrowed from mathematics and physics, but also used by Deleuze as a synonym for the term 'haecceity', meaning the opposite of universalities—is favoured over generalisation. Singularity is an instantiation comprising the effectuation of the event into form, replacing generality in the economy of thought.⁶ Singularity is a critique of universals, both in regards to the Structuralist delineation of universal paradigms, patterns and forms, and also the

⁵ 'Ontology', as different to epistemology, can be defined by its subject matter. It is the nature of being, becoming, existence or reality, often dealing with questions concerning what entities exist or may be said to exist. To put it simply, ontology is the examination of what is meant by 'being'.

⁶ Peter Borum, 'The Notion of 'Singularity in the Work of Gilles Deleuze', in *Deleuze Studies 11:1* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 98.

abstract universals studied within traditional philosophy. I will therefore follow the line of ‘schizoanalysis’, another term also coined by Deleuze and Guattari, to focus on what produces and is produced by singularities: events, mutations and potentialities.

In the second part of Chapter Four, titled ‘Somathèque as Geometric Subjectivity’, I will push this rejection of dualisms further to introduce a refusal of ‘artist’ and ‘art’ as unified ontological categories. This will result in a necessary rejection of the two apparently dualistic art worlds that currently exist in our divided world. One that is voluntarily driven by the market and its forces, and the other, which works to affirm itself as a laboratory for a world moved by forces of social, cultural and political participation. I will settle on focusing on the latter, as it is here where the practice of collaboration through contamination can result in the main argument of this thesis: ‘ontology as reverse engineering’ as an interventionist practice. In this navigation we will oscillate between contamination, which is built upon ‘becoming’ and ‘creation’—terms first introduced in Chapter One of this thesis—and a ‘geometrical imaginary’ that is built upon ‘practices of the self’.⁷ In understanding practices of the self as fabulations and imaginary activities of self-making, we can begin to see this activity as poetic engineering. To conclude my argument, and in expanding on this idea through developing my own poetic engineering, I will lean on Paul B. Preciado’s project and the use of his term *somathèque*.

Before continuing, I would like to insist that the kind of knowledge I desire to generate throughout this text is not going to follow any model of expertise but

⁷ ‘Practices of the self’ are to be seen as ‘fabulations’ within the context of this thesis. In Deleuzian terms, fabulation is a means of expression, a meditation on otherness, a creation of concepts and a practice of commentary. In short, it is the activity of creating new concepts and inventing new means of philosophical expression.

will rather mimic the kind of knowledge that is generated, cultivated and consumed by bodies and thoughts that come from and go into practice, including the practice of thinking itself.

Chapter 1: Becoming-Artist

The activity of beginning from practice and writing from there while staying with it happily coalesces with what Jason Read notes in his reading of Deleuze and Guattari's 'oblique assertion'.⁸ Here he suggests that thinking can be a war cry against a certain conception of the world. As Read borrows from Deleuze and Guattari, 'desire belongs to the infrastructure'.⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's rejection of any dualisms and hierarchies that lie between the mental and the material, the subjective and objective or the social and libidinal, confronts psychoanalysis through not reducing the social to an affect of the libidinal. Moreover, it also confronts traditional Marxism through elevating subjectivity from the status of merely being an effect of the material.¹⁰ Following this rejection of the dualism of mental and material, when speaking of the world one also needs to consider emotional positions and the conditions and circumstances of conflict from which these spring. Paolo Virno points out that:

What is involved here is the conceptualisation of the field of immediate coincidence between production and ethics, structure and superstructure, between the revolution of labour process and the revolution of sentiments, between technology and emotional tonality, between material development and culture.¹¹

⁸ Deleuze, Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 348.

⁹ Jason Read, 'The Age of Cynicism: Deleuze and Guattari on the Production of Subjectivity in Capitalism', in *Deleuze and Politics*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 139–140.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Paolo Virno, 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 14.

Any confinement to these dichotomies can only result in the repetition of the metaphysical split ‘between lower and higher, animal and rational, body and soul’. If we want to understand how to productively address today’s two dominant movements of opportunism and cynicism, then we need to grasp the overlaps and intrusions between ‘labour practices’ and ‘modes of life’. As in the end, it is these intrusions that become determining factors for the current forms of contemporary culture.¹² To follow Virno’s advice—and to avoid falling into the tendency to dichotomise points of difference between labour practices and modes of life—let us endeavour to replace dualisms with paradoxes in thinking. Preemptively it is important to make a distinction between the two. Contrary to dualisms and hierarchies, paradoxes are essential, with perhaps the most intriguing one being the paradox of contending with the nature of change. In order to begin thinking with change, or even, through change, by constantly disassembling and reweaving the fabric of natural, cultural and political life, I will address a series of movements. These movements, to borrow from Elizabeth Grosz, will be referred to as ‘becomings’.¹³

Change has to be unforeseeable and unpredictable in order to be new, yet paradoxically it must also be unrecognisable. If change would present itself in a familiar form it would be easily determined in advance and would therefore not be new. For Deleuze, becoming is without an origin or a destination. It is unlimited and unending:

Insofar as the past is itself considered infinite, the present counter-intuitively always occurs as the return of recognisable and even foreseeable forms, but is irreducible to such forms precisely because

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Grosz, Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life Politics and Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.

becoming can never be 'given': it is... always in between the past and future since 'it moves in both directions at once' and 'always eludes the present'.¹⁴

Becoming henceforth presents itself as imperceptible through its immediate disappearance. This paradox is crucial in understanding why the emphasis is on the movement itself, rather than on the cause and result of said movement, in the discussion of various types of becomings within Guattari's work (becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming intense etc.). Cause and result reflect past and present, which are merely reflections of one another in terms of the act of becoming.

As Grosz puts it very elegantly, and hence why it feels necessary to keep this quote in its entirety:

What it is that becomes, and what it becomes, are less clear and less interesting than the movement itself. Movement does not attach to a stable thing, putting it in motion; rather, movement preexists the thing and is the process of differentiation that distinguishes one object from another. These various forms of movement, forms of accomplishment or actualisation, constitute material and living things. Things undergo becomings, which transform them in ways which are unpredictable and irreversible. These becomings are the testament to the differences that constitute whatever identity things—including subjects, living beings—might have. Becomings complexify, transform, overcome in ways that are measurable but also imperceptible. Every thing, every process, every event or encounter is itself a mode of becoming that has its own time, its own movements, its own force. These multiple becomings both make and

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 40.

unmake, they do (up) and they undo. These becomings enable life to erupt from certain mixtures of chemicals, to complicate and enable materiality to undergo becomings, and to generate living beings of all kinds, within which both individuals and species (if these terms make sense) also become more and other than their histories through their engagement with dynamic environments. They also enable orders of social organisation (both animal and human) to emerge from certain forms of life that transform those forms and that are themselves the sites of further becomings, becomings that function through the generation of a kind of politics, a complex interaction of populations, collectives, groups. Each of these becomings is a mode of transformation of the actual and the present according to virtual forces, forces that emerge from within, meeting forces that surround and enmesh things, events and processes. These becomings are individuations, processes of the production of things, processes that transform states of matter, processes that enable and complicate life.¹⁵

In the direction of Grosz, while looking at the processes of the production of things, I will focus on certain conditions and preconditions that stand as determining factors for the plurality of crises facing our world today. These conditions and preconditions surround becomings. Thinking in terms of these conditions and preconditions and revolutionising ourselves within them, I will extract certain aspects that—rather than seeking revolution through attempting to reverse these conditions and preconditions—can actually be utilised in developing practices of the self as the main liberatory act.

As true for every mode of production under capitalist rule, in reproducing particular forms of subjectivity, particular forms of technological competence

¹⁵ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, p. 2.

and political subjection, an inescapable and simultaneous breakage with the past and present is produced. These breakages with the present can be termed 'detachments'. What I mean by detachment is not necessarily the breakdown and collapse of the previous modes of production, but instead a desynchronisation stemming from the uneven temporal development of capitalism. Yet with an emphasis on practices of the self against artistic practices as a category, we are able to talk about certain modes of production where production as a way of life is not entirely secondary to the production of surplus value. This is when practices of the self produce a reconnection to the past alongside the breakage that occurs. Practices of the self do not limit the mode of production to a particular technical or economic manner of producing things, but help us understand a mode of production to constitute a particular form of life, acknowledging the direct relationship between desire and production.

'Practices of the self' is what I will use as terminology in place of talking about artistic practices. This is to be seen as a move to disappear art and the artist as unified categories by an expansion and redefinition. The reason for this particular move stems from an urgency I feel to cancel out a discussion and definition of artistic practice as it relates to the production and division of labour—these structural ontologies belonging to the first version of the art world that I mentioned earlier—and to instead talk about it as an iteration within a larger discussion of the extended sphere of what it is to be a 'practitioner'. A sphere whereby those who are not named 'artist' but who are busy with the production of the self, such as a midwife, a pool cleaner or a tree nurturer, can also belong. I introduce the midwife as a figure within this sphere after being inspired specifically by Kodwo Eshun's memorial lecture for Mark Fisher, where after naming categories of thinkers such as cybergoths, cyber-feminists, afro-

futurists, speculative realists, hauntologists, eliminativists, accelerationists, students of black study.... he adds:

Each of these neologisms are actually forms of life. Each of them are the names of, and for, aesthetico-political positions that operate by disagreements and differentiations—that make claims that must be argued. Each of these is not so much a term as a war of, and over, interpretation. A stance that aims to intervene in cultural politics, that fashions itself to articulate a discontent—to focus despair and depression into theories that live. Theories to live by. Theories that are embodied. Theories that live in us and through us. And with us. And on us. To put it another way; Mark Fisher was a midwife...¹⁶

Eshun's defense of 'forms of life' that manifest through differentiation reiterates the expanded sphere that I am referring to. Every subject that queers categorical interpretation, that is, every subject who is able to have 'encounters' under today's regime of mobilised precarity, is an artist busy with the production and practice of selfhood. Moreover, following Grosz's take on Deleuze we can claim that practices of the self, beyond a string of decision-makings—in the logistical sense of the educational and occupational path making—are becomings. The world, without origin and destination, is always in flux. Practices of the self are becomings because they generate themselves as a link between past and present. They occur as the return of recognisable and foreseeable forms, but at the same time as new, moving in both directions at once. Possible change that can be brought with self-practicing, then, needs to be able to change both the past and the future—linearities which happen to be reflections and refractions of one another. Thinking of practices of the self as becomings is a mode of

¹⁶ Kodwo Eshun, 'The inaugural Mark Fisher Memorial Lecture', lecture, Goldsmiths University of London, London, January 19 2018.

transformation of the 'actual'. They connect to the present through the actual of both virtual forces, and forces that emerge from within, conforming with forces that surround things, events and processes. Practices of the self are individuations. As Grosz notes, '[They are] processes of the production of things, processes that transform states of matter, processes that enable and complicate life.'¹⁷

These processes are what we can also call 'becoming-artist'. This expanded expression or expressing in terms of becoming is pointed towards both a necessary differentiation between kinds of artists amassed under one word, and to enunciate on behalf of the many who are neglected as participants for not holding the correct title in the discourse surrounding precarity and precariousness.¹⁸ Becoming-artist is an opposition to the division of labour as it directly engages with the incapacities generated by such processes. It works unsettle production and reproduction as the preeminent conditions of creation. That is to say, its output is not external to the self.

In her paper 'The Knowing-Body Compass in Curatorial Practices', Suely Rolnik spends a great length of time defining and differentiating between creation and creativity.¹⁹ She separates creation from creativity by emphasising the latter as a reactive movement and the former as an active one. In its reactive vector, creativity tends to be the management of the process of instrumentalisation

¹⁷ Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari propose a way of speaking through forming enunciations that state a command as abstracted from its context. This thereby makes the enunciation proliferate. Leonard R. Lawlor, 'Three Ways of Speaking: Deleuze's Way, or Death and Flight' in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 10:1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 70–84.

¹⁹ Suely Rolnik, 'The Knowing-Body Compass in Curatorial Practices', in *Theater* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 116–136.

adopted by capital. However in its active vector, creation contains the evaluation of what is and is not negotiable in maintaining poetic force and in the potential of contamination.

Practices of the self are aware that the colonial-capitalistic regime reduces subjective experience solely to the subject, producing ‘the unconscious body’ through making individuals subject to and subjected by its dominance. This reduction results in a form of imprisonment in the virtual world.²⁰ Creativity here becomes the materialisation of this virtual world through the reaccommodation of exiting codes. This ends up a sterile life where conservative manifestations are all that are produced. These conservative manifestations are bearers of colonial-capitalistic unconsciousness where creation is confined to only reproduce itself. In this case, creativity can easily be mistaken with creation. Yet this ‘becoming creative of desire’s force’ of creation is an operation in turning life sterile.²¹ The colonial-capitalistic unconscious makes desire drift from its ethical course. This ethical course is what contains the potency of creation. Creation then can be seen as a germinating potency of life. However, a new field of creative economies—developed in order to extract economic, political and cultural surplus value from itself—drains this potency. This is where we can also see becoming-artist as an anti-colonial practice—with self-colonisation being the nearest form of it—where there is resistance to the sterilisation and drainage of life potency in practices of creation. Following this discussion of creation and creativity as the first corner of the ‘triangular geometry’ underpinning this thesis,

²⁰ Here, we need to look at Deleuze’s concept of the virtual in two movements. He firstly speaks of the virtual at a material level as a kind of surface effect. Yet concurrently speaks of the virtual on a non-material level, in the sense that it is generative in nature, manifesting as a kind of potentiality that becomes fulfilled in the actual. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1991), p. 96.

²¹ Rolnik, *Theater*, p. 127.

and to further understand the conditions and preconditions of various practices today, in the following chapters I will focus on the preconditions of precarity and contamination in order to begin drawing the second corner of our triangle: real abstraction.

Chapter 2: Contamination

Alfred Sohn-Rethel, with his revolutionary idea, introduced the expression ‘real abstraction’ into the Marxist debate as means to point towards abstraction’s effects on the transformation of monetary apparatuses containing cultural and ideological superstructures. In its fundamental state, his aim was to put the invention of money center state in searching for the foundations of abstract thinking. He posited that money in its general equivalence to exchange is a social practice which grounded the rise of the abstract signifiers of early Greek philosophy such as identity, substance, divisibility and infinity. His argumentation was the genealogical relation between the money form, the thought form and the labour form. This genealogical relation is a molecular contamination.²² As soon as the vertical control of money ended, its numerical form began to contaminate philosophy by forming secular abstractions. The emphasis over the secular here is to understand that the abstraction caused by money comes after the abstractions introduced by regimes of mythology and religion.²³

In looking at the cognitive effects of money form, Sohn-Rethel’s arguments hold a crucial place. He argued that the origins of symbolic forms of knowledge are not empirical or ontological, but historical and specifically economic. He searched for materialist origins for symbolic forms of thought, claiming these thoughts as expressions of historical social relations. To understand this claim we can borrow from Anselm Jappe, when he writes, ‘The faculty of abstract thinking, of seizing what is common to several objects without being visible in

²² For Deleuze and Guattari, ‘molarity’ is a mode of being rather than becoming. Their revolutionary objective lies with molecularity in their call for becoming rather than being, for becoming-other rather than being the same. Eugene B. Young, Gary Genosko and Janell Watson, *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 201–202.

²³ Matteo Pasquinelli, *Capital Thinks Too: The Idea of the Common in the Age of Machine Intelligence* (Amsterdam: Open!, 2015), pp. 1–2.

any of them, is not a given, a prius, as the idealistic conception of thought has always claimed, but is the result of the existence of real abstractions in the production and reproduction of human life.²⁴ Here Jappe reintroduces what Sohn-Rethel neglects in his claim about the origin of philosophical abstractions; that is, abstraction in production and labour. As also pointed out by Matteo Pasquinelli, Sohn-Rethel 'completely overlooked the pre-monetary dimension of labour and in particular of language as originary abstraction.'²⁵ However my interest here is using his intuition as a source for thinking with crisis through contamination. The relation between our imagination, thoughts and capital already exists as 'capital feeds upon our power of imagination, cognitive capabilities and desire for a better future.'²⁶ Pasquinelli puts it clearly in saying:

This is not a cynical position to say that any symbolic or logic form, any line of poetry as much as any algorithm, is whatsoever an incarnation of capital. Money should be finally demystified and secularised: there is nothing magical or sublime in financial derivatives if not a more complex and atomised set of social relations. Money is an abstract machine like others that replaces and amplifies previous social relations. As any other machine, it can be analysed according to its inputs and outputs, to the division of labour and social relations that it engenders.²⁷

The demystification of money is a crucial step in beginning to unearth autonomy and the power of abstraction. Autonomy of abstraction belongs first to the collective mind and to its technological extensions that make money a

²⁴ Anselm Jappe, 'Sohn-Rethel and the Origin of Real Abstraction', in *Historical Materialism 21:1* (Leiden Brill, 2013), pp. 13–14.

²⁵ Pasquinelli, *Capital Thinks Too*, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pasquinelli, *Capital Thinks Too*, p. 3.

byproduct. Money has to adapt to the social power of abstraction, to the social abstraction in itself. The monetary nature of thought and cognitive nature of capital do not cancel each other out but coexist. As Pasquenelli also points out, it is possible to seek some traces of this coexistence in art history. As claimed by many art historians, the dematerialisation of the art object coalesces with the dematerialisation of money.²⁸

The autonomy and power of abstraction is of great interest for any revolutionary act through its affects on subjectivity. These affects occur through one's subjective sense of power as a social component of and a behavioural influence on their subjectivity. The sense of the amount of power one possesses is partly determined by our relation to information. As abstract thought is less constraining than concrete thought, and power is a parallelism to the expansion of abstract thought, abstraction in thinking contributes to one's subjective power. For a 'greater sense of power, greater preference for high-power roles, and more feelings of control over the environment, [are] relative to both a concrete-thought and a control condition.'²⁹ This correlation between power and abstract thinking, in explaining the unintentional perpetuation of hierarchies, helps us better understand the contamination that is happening in all directions.

²⁸ As Pasquinelli also quotes from Jean-Joseph Goux's book *The Coiners of Language*, 'Was it purely by chance that the crisis of realism in the novel and in painting coincided with the end of gold money? Or that the birth of 'abstract' art coincided with the shocking invention of inconvertible monetary signs, now in general use? Can we not see in this double crisis of money and language the collapse of guarantees and frames of reference, a rupture between sign and thing, undermining representation and ushering in the age of the floating signifier?' Jean-Joseph Goux, *The Coiners of Language* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), p. 3.

²⁹ Pamela K. Smith, Daniël H.J. Wigboldus, Ap Dijksterhuis. 'Abstract Thinking Increases One's Sense of Power', in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), pp. 378–385.

In light of this, and in an attempt to give a more nuanced definition to earlier discussions of 'practices of the self', I would like to invoke it as an umbrella term for all activities that stem from and arrive at contamination, namely to the capacity for having an encounter. Contamination does not only change one side of the encounter but equally both sides, generating transformation through encounter. Contamination manifests by working collaboratively across difference. Liveliness is the condition of survival, and what survival here specifically means, opposite to how it is conceived under capitalist thinking, is collaboration. Survival is a condition that is against the idea of self-containment and therefore self-interest.

Here we begin to see clearly a side to contamination that might hold the potential to intervene in real politics. By relying on the mutual inclusiveness of contamination we can begin to understand it as the precondition to any kind of resistance or revolutionary act. In this understanding, contamination is re-rendered as an opposition to purity and hygienic encounters. In recognising this opposition between an inherent condition and a constructed ideological one we become better at understanding the inadequate disastrousness of totalitarian and fascist ideas for our contaminated world. This also explains the historical repression of our capacity to contaminate. This capacity had the key to understanding the world as a field of forces. These forces form sensations and in return make themselves present in our bodies. To repeat again, contamination does not only change one side of the encounter but equally both sides, generating transformation through encounter.

In her recently reissued writing from the 1980s, Suely Rolnik began referring to this capacity, one which she calls a second capacity, as the 'resonant body'. Borrowing from her:

It is our body as a whole that has this power of resonating with the world. Between the capacity of our body to resonate and its capacity of perception there is a paradoxical relation, for these are modes of apprehending reality that work according to totally distinct logics, irreducible to each other. It is the tension of this paradox that mobilises and galvanises the potential of thought/creation, to the extent that the new sensations that incorporate themselves in our sensible texture carry out mutations that are not transmittable by our available representations.³⁰

This introduction of crises to the body is precisely what feeds our urgency to invent new forms of expression. The signs the world gives us, then, are integrated into our body and incorporated in our existential territories through their expression. Moved by this paradox, we are continually forced to think/create, renewing the power of intervention inherent in thought/creation and constituting an essential instrument for the transformation of the subjective and objective landscape. This ‘power to intervene in reality and to participate in the orientation of its destiny, constituting an essential instrument for the transformation of the subjective and objective landscape’ is exactly what I represent as the revolutionary side to contamination.³¹

Our struggle with capitalism and our resistance against it is not simply determined by our belief systems. In capitalism production does not aim at reproducing the community, the codes and the relations of subordination, but only aims at reproducing itself; the production of more capital. Capitalism does

³⁰ Suely Rolnik, ‘The Geopolitics of Pimping’, in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the ‘Creative Industries’*, eds. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray and Ulf Wuggenig (London: May Fly, 2011), pp. 25–26.

³¹ Ibid.

not organise the force of our desire's creation or code various practices and desire. Labour and wealth are both separated from each other through deterritorialisation. In other words, they are 'stripped of any code that would tie them to any determinate relation to the past.'³² Rather, capitalism's main mode of operation is setting up quantitative relations between labour and capital, 'establishing as axiomatic an equivalence between a particular amount of labour time and a particular amount of money. In order for capitalism to function one does not need to believe in anything, even in it, one only needs to act in accordance with the quantitative flows.'³³

To further understand this deterritorialisation one needs to understand the division of labour in its historical entirety. Marx defines the social division of labour as 'the totality of heterogeneous forms of useful labour, which differ in order, genus, species and variety.'³⁴ While championed by eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century industrialists and thinkers such as Adam Smith and Charles Babbage, the division of labour is a strenuous activity, performed autonomously from others, which has detrimental effects on the body and mind of the worker. This then contaminates the metaphorical body and mind of the State. The division of labour relegates the worker to becoming a component of a machine for the sake of production growth within modern industry. This has occurred at an exponential rate in the last two and a half centuries. As work became more designed, particular and repetitive with the Fordist and post-Fordist labour models, it became proportionately more de-skilled and more deleterious, alienating workers literally and metaphorically from the products of their work. Hence their relationship to the products they produce

³² Read, *Deleuze and Politic*, p. 145.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (New York: Vintage, 1976), p. 132.

is abstracted exponentially, consequently abstracting their relationship to other products that they encounter in the outside world.³⁵

The main reason for this abstraction is the contrast between the price and value of a product, with the latter remaining complexly immeasurable in opposition to the price remaining complexly abstract. Indeed this abstraction is so complex it renders a kind of social index that is 'leading to a creeping alienation of all members of a society from one another and from processes of production, including the production of society itself.'³⁶ Labour division transforms work into a negative category of activity, precluding another understanding of it. As poet Frank Bidart puts it, 'to see the human's need to make as not only central but inescapable, not as a tract, but a tapestry in which making is seen in the context of the other processes—sexuality, mortality—inseparable from it.'³⁷ Moving towards present day and inescapably towards parametricism, we must consider labour models by their literal and metaphoric division of time and space, and their effect on conceptions and perceptions of such divisions.³⁸

³⁵ Matthew Poole, 'Speculation, presumption, and assumption: The ideology of algebraic-to-parametric workspace', in *The Politics of Parametricism: Digital Technologies in Architecture*, eds. Matthew Poole and Manuel Shvartzberg (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 144.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bidart, Frank. *Music Like Dirt: Volume 1*. Kentucky: Sarabande Books, 2002.

³⁸ Parametricism is a style within contemporary architecture, promoted as a successor to post-modern architecture. The term was coined by Patrick Schumacher, an architectural partner of Zaha Hadid. Parametricism has its origin in programs, algorithms and computers to manipulate data into design. This translation of information into commodity has a fundamental effect on work in turn. As noted in the *Politics of Parametricism*, 'The acquisition of knowledge [takes place] in order to work shifts to a position where the acquisition of knowledge as information becomes the primary concern and operation of work. Work becomes the very operation of the accumulation, funneling, and ordering of information.' Poole, *The Politics of Parametricism*, p. 140.

Times and spaces of work under Fordist and post-Fordist divisions of labour are tightly regulated, controlled and conditioned towards an exponential efficiency and growth. While at the same time, they remain hypothetical to the internal effects of external social and market forces on work. The production paradigm is subjected to traditions, customs, religions, laws, government policies, group and individual identities, communities, histories, ideologies, judiciaries interdependently regulating each other, 'conforming to a more complex algebraic relationality, where spatiotemporal relations are not only immediately interdependent but are also dependent upon the more ineffable qualities of the ideas, habits, wants, desires, and morals of the social relations of the society that (re)produce the complexities of the market itself.'³⁹ Beyond changing this mirroring effect between the supply and demand of the market, these complex vectors enhance and accelerate the alienation of members of a given society. The alienation of workers from their work at the level of production resonates as a double alienation of the consumer at the level of consumption. This doubling is a necessary condition for this algebraic spatiotemporal relationship to work to actually work. This algebraic relation works by attaching unattainable goals to products—such as happiness, fulfilment and attractiveness—creating a second alienation on top of the alienation already inherent to the production process. Pure geometric forms drive the algebraic relations between external telic variables and existing Fordist production paradigms. These pure geometric forms are metaphorical and conceptual geometries regulating the function of the algebraic relations in this paradigm. Matthew Poole understands these forms as types of fixed variables that are specific in function and shape, driving the dimensions of the algebraic relations. On this he notes:

Such 'types' have to be invented, dreamt up, reinvented, and innovated constantly within this production paradigm; hence the almost hysterical

³⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

obsession with ‘the new’ and newness that almost all industries have. This is quite different to the post-Fordist paradigm, which also has algebraic relations of production but whose algebraic relations of production are parametric, meaning that the dimensions of the relations drive the geometry or shape of the function, making redundant the necessity of types, newness, invention and innovation as such.⁴⁰

With the introduction of computation to the equation, capitalism utilised the distance between computation and thinking consequently further complicating the relation between value and price. Matteo Pasquinelli summarises this very efficiently when he writes:

The idea that money is ‘thinking inside us’ may sound a bit creepy, but in the age of cognitive capitalism, with machine learning and cryptocurrencies based on distributed computing such as Bitcoin, it brings an interesting precedent to the discussion on capital as computation and cognition. In our age, capital is emerging as a form of computation.⁴¹

These new abstractions delivered by science and computation extend and alter the definition of money and labour. This alteration redefines conditions toward a more complex precarity, where boundaries of inside and outside, machine and living, computational and emotional become even more blurred.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

⁴¹ Pasquinelli, *Capital Thinks Too*, p. 2.

Chapter 3: Precarity

If we were to summarise capitalism in one sentence it would read: capitalism is the liberation of production from a particular form of life while simultaneously privatising desire, the demands of reproduction set by the community, and the codes and relations of subordination. The subject has become 'private' in reality through the constant revolutionising of production, the uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, and the everlasting uncertainty and agitation.⁴² With the persistence of capitalism, the collapse of the working class as an antagonistic form of subjectivity and the return of other seemingly outmoded beliefs and subjectivities, the new and the ancient are lived side by side.⁴³ Guattari was driven by similar concerns with the capitalistic production of subjectivity, and in response the cultivation of micropolitical processes of singularisation that frustrate and subvert this subjection, engendering in its wake new collective arrangements.⁴⁴

That which was produced by labour in the past repeats itself in the production of the new simultaneously, both as resemblance and difference. This paradoxical simultaneity of resemblance and difference appears as a precondition. This paradox can help us understand the juxtaposition and coexistence of the archaic, the tribal and the antiquated alongside the new, the modern and the futuristic in our contemporary society, as well as the recurring return of eschatological modes of thinking. Similar to the split created by real abstraction, people are also split between the high speed, the new and the traditional

⁴² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 476.

⁴³ Read, *Deleuze and Politics*, p. 140

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 203.

through ethical identities and neotribalisms present in a global world positioning itself beyond national identities.⁴⁵

This contradictory regime's relation to labour is perhaps most measurable within artistic practices. The reason for this, as Suely Rolnik also argues, is the main source of energy for the new regime. She refers to this as the force of creation channeled into the force of creativity. If creation is creativity expressed as lived experience, perhaps thinking is the most fundamental mode of creation as it can express a myriad of purely existential forms and is triggered immensely by crisis. As Suely Rolnik further expresses in her text 'The Geopolitics of Pimping', whatever the expression is, regardless of its means, is fundamentally a result of a force that orients our everyday life towards inventing new possibilities. This force stems from sensible mutations that are seeking to seep into the fabric of life and our day-to-day experience. This force is not about a narcissistic demand for the new—for instance, in the case of the search for the new artist, eager for institutional recognition and media prestige—but a demand for the new as a life form.⁴⁶

One of the affects of the disparity between the force of creativity and the force of creation is a constant negotiation—specifically among artist, the institution and the market—where power is completely imbalanced to favour the latter. In today's regime all human activities tend to be financialised, especially those that can feed its need for novelties (and preferably with the addition of seduction as is often the case in the practice of art). Art practice is more than something needing to be freed from its ties with the new regime. It is useful and one of the only tools we have for intervention against the same regime. This potentiality stems from art's affirmative existence as a becoming. As with all becomings, it

⁴⁵ Read, *Deleuze and Politic*, p. 156

⁴⁶ Rolnik, *Critique of Creativity*, p. 24.

contends with the nature of novelty on a paradoxical yet essential level. The paradox, instead of creating a blockage, uncoils into a plane in which inhabitation and performing liveliness becomes possible.

If we understand disciplinary divides as territories, artistic practice serves as a great complement to the concept of deterritorialisation. The reason that we are not just talking about 'being' or 'artist', but coining it in terms of 'becoming' is to emphasise that divisions of disciplines and divisions of labour are not as black and white as posited by capitalism. Here, becoming is an argument in understanding art practice as a space for a non-division of labour unified through precarity and precariousness. This is a matter of perspective in understanding what precariousness enables rather than disables.

Precariousness also affords possibilities. If there is any side to precarity that is open to potential revolution it is this side of it—the one eroding the boundaries of divisions of labour and mobilising work toward the artistic. To continue with Guattari:

The expansion of enunciation and expression concerns artistic materials, which the artist transforms into vectors of subjectivisation, in animist auto-poietic facilities. The artist detaches and deterritorialises a segment of the real in order to make it play the role of a partial enunciator. The art confers meaning and alterity to a subgroup of the perceived world. This quasi-animist speaking out on the part of the artwork consequently redrafts subjectivity both of the artist and of his consumer.⁴⁷

This is the key to how practices of the self can make structural change. For as in the current system of homogenetic, identitarian, colonial and capitalist forces,

⁴⁷ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 131.

the only stable factors are insecurity, unpredictability and instability. Given this, seeking temporary stability through a consumptive relation to the forces that are shared with our environment and already present in us hinders us from becoming a practitioner of the self. This is why that instead of temporary stability, a proposal of how to thrive in adversity becomes important. With such a proposal precariousness becomes a new form of demanding existence. In this way we begin to shift from precariousness as a means of authoritarian repression to precariousness as the existential basis for greater freedom. This shift demands a new imaginary of relations; relations that are different from the imaginaries before neoliberalism expertly appropriated flexible subjectivity, after which words like flexibility, creativity and experimentation became vital instruments of the regime.⁴⁸ As Zygmunt Bauman described, we are living in a new 'liquid modernity' of cultural or cognitive capitalism in which we have all been seduced into incessantly reshaping our subjectivities according to strategies based on thriving in adversity and pursuing our creative potential.⁴⁹ The shift of paradigm I am proposing, from repression to freedom, impossibility to possibility, is more than a shift in perspective. It is a shift that returns the body to its central role of catalytic action in political intervention. In its central role the body can initiate resurgence through its reactivity in the presence of certain agents that are composing and decomposing our everyday life. Resurgence here is not a simple interpretation of a forest fire replenishing the forest but the understanding that precariousness is indeed a multifaceted and multiform mode of existence. This is because a subject existing in conditions of precarity is a

⁴⁸ Anna Dezeuze, 'How to live precariously: Lygia Clark's Caminhando and Tropicalism in 1960s Brazil', in *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 235.

⁴⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press and Blackwell, 2000).

subject-in-process who initiates change with every encounter, in every moment.⁵⁰ This is where we begin thinking through precarity and propose it as a new idea of existence against all static crystallisation present within duration.

⁵⁰ Deuze, *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, p. 234.

Chapter 4: Geometric Imaginaries

Chapter 4.1: Geometric Imaginary of the Subject

In order to crystallise the affects of today's new regime on the subject, I would like to draw a geometrical imaginary of the subject. These affects can be named erosions, and specifically pertain to our relation to the world, time and space. What erodes can be imagined as the geometrical subject's grainy surfaces, deeming them as smooth spherical bodies, cancelling their capacity to make contact and therefore cancelling their capacity to contaminate. This cultivates in depoliticisation. This is the structural destruction of our individual potency of resistance, resulting in friction and attrition.⁵¹ What ends up most effected is our reason, feelings, affections and values. In determining forms and modes of interventionist actions, it becomes crucial to understand these erosions. What erodes is difference, the difference between Being and being. In Deleuze's words:

This difference is not 'between' in the ordinary sense of the word. It is the 'fold', Ztviefalt. It is constitutive of Being and of the manner in which Being constitutes being, in the double movement of 'clearing' and 'veiling'. Being is truly the differentiator of difference—whence the expression 'ontological difference'.⁵²

⁵¹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing speaks of friction when she writes, 'Cultures are continually co-produced in the interaction I call 'friction': the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference... Friction refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine.... Friction can be the fly in the elephant's nose.' Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 4.

⁵² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 78.

The erosion of difference means the erosion of the conditions necessary for development and evolution. This erosion manifests through the incapacity of encounter on the operational level of the involution/envelopment of inorganic and/or organic matter (objects and/or subjects). I want to expand on these ideas while further developing a geometrical imaginary of the subject, subjectivity and its relations.

Here, let me confect a useful dualism and try to make an incision into the subject. With the dissection of the subject two entities emerge: the subject who accepts the capacity to have encounters and the subject who denies the same capacity. For these two subjects we can also use the terms knowing and cynic, connected and self-sufficient, spherical and geometric. The spherical subject is an absorbent body; it does not get transformed by encounter. Expanding on the direction of its interests, it utilises encounters but remains unchanged in them. The geometric subject—the subject in question when we refer to practices of the self—is a vibrating body, with the capacity to see in new ways, and it thusly understands its vital emotions as well as the forces generated in its topology. The geometric subject contains vulnerability. Yet as Rolnik posits, one of the fundamental problems that face subjectification, or the geometric subject, is the anaesthesia that is infused within our vulnerability by the regime. This anaesthesia is further cultivated when the other is deemed as hierarchically inferior because of the cataloguing of their social, political, economic, sexual and racial identifiers by the ruling cartography. Especially under these conditions, Rolnik adds, ‘Vulnerability is the precondition for the other to cease being a simple object for the projection of pre-established images, in order to become a living presence, with whom we can construct the territories of our existence and the changing contours of our subjectivity.’⁵³ Vulnerability then is a tool in

⁵³ Rolnik, *Critique of Creativity*, p. 25.

reaching beyond the margins of an objective projection of the pre-established image of what it is to be alive.

Subjectivity as an epistemological and political operation is inseparable from language. It has no roots in nature. As the privilege of speech has profound political meaning so too does listening. The practice of self—not as an expressionist puppetry or a vitalist lecturing, but as an act of listening and as an updated animist ritual—can transmit political meaning. Here a distinction between animisms is important. Animism is a particular historical phenomenon and trajectory that has been worked upon by many theoreticians and writers in relation to the fantasies where occult is understood as a form of liberation and a form of resistance. My interest is not in this understanding of animism but animism from a Guattarian trajectory, where it is understood as the process of activating subjectivity within a world that includes both humans and non-humans. This is a politically conscious animism that is linked to the geometric imaginary posited here and expresses a relation to the concept of becoming-artist and the force of creation.

In this animist conception of subjectivity the object extends as the bearer of dimensions of partial subjectivity and participates in the invariants of scale. 'In other words simultaneously it can be singular, singularising an individual or a group of individuals, but also supported by the assemblages of space, architectural and plastic assemblages and all other cosmic assemblages.'⁵⁴ This demands the existence of a conductive thread where things, through becomings, haecceities and forms of objective subjectivities contaminate each

⁵⁴ Felix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), p. 240.

other.⁵⁵ There is always a conductive thread in and between assemblages for untenable positions; the untenable position of a decentered subjectivity, a new definition of a subjectivity that loses the transcendent and transcendental status that characterises the Western paradigm. A decentered subjectivity cancels out the human's position as the measurer. As Maurizio Lazzarato notes, this cancelling affects capitalism's 'hypervalorisation of the subject and homogenisation and impoverishment of the components of its subjectivity (parcelled out into modular faculties such as reason, understanding, will, affectivity, governed by norms).'⁵⁶ This is because the primary production of the capitalist world is subjectivity.

In this cancelling of the hierarchical precedence of language, listening entails not a singular voice but a multi-vocal assemblage with a polysomic trans-individual subjectivity. This political force operates two fold on a macro and micro level, fuelling the resistance and creativity of the dominated. Here it is necessary to underline that in fuelling the resistance and creativity of the dominated, our emphases has to shift towards not only including language (what Rolnik calls 'cortical') but also include somatic presences and practices (what Rolnik calls 'subcortical').

[Language and the sensible] correspond to perception, allowing us to apprehend the world in terms of forms, in order to then project upon them the representations we have available, so as to give them meaning. This capacity, which is the most familiar to us, is associated with time, with the

⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze uses the term 'haecceity' to denote entities that exist on the plane of immanence. In line with difference and individuation, haecceities are against object-based metaphysics. Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 599.

⁵⁶ Maurizio Lazzarato and Angela Melitopoulos, 'Machinic Animism', in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 6:1 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 240–241.

history of the subject and with language. With it arise the very figures of subject and object, clearly delineated and maintaining a relationship of exteriority to each other. The cortical capacity of the sensible is what allows us to preserve the map of reigning representations, so that we can move through a known scenario.⁵⁷

The cortical capacity only allows us to move in the known and doesn't prepare us for the unknown, deeming us immobile under precarity. Hence my interest and emphasis lies with the subcortical capacity, as it allows us to capture the world as a field of forces that affect us and mould us. The unleashing of this capacity has to happen outside history and language and at the level of the body. This way, the other or the different is comprehended as a 'malleable multiplicity of forces that pulse in our sensible texture, thus becoming part of our very selves. Here the figures of subject and object dissolve, and with them, that which separates the body from the world.'⁵⁸ The geometric subject's vibrating body connotes performing a subjectivity that is outside of the subject, creating zones for a relational body to get affected by the forces generated by difference/otherness within the topology. If life is an endless power of creation and differentiation then what we are seeking with intervention is an affirmation of life; its constant invention and reinvention through the paradoxical and non-dialectical relation between the experience of form and experience of force. In a topological universe what is inside becomes outside, what is force becomes form, continuously.

⁵⁷ Rolnik, *Critique of Creativity*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 4.2: Somathèque as Geometric Subjectivity

In this topological universe the existence of a subject outside of subjectivity is established through a disruption of differentiation. This moment and location of disruption gives us a signal in which we can gain the possibility to disrupt differentiation ourselves. Seeing this differentiation as one and the same movement allows us to expand our discourse toward not just labour divisions but all divisions, such as the metaphysical division between body as a visible outside and the mind an invisible inside. When drawing a geometric imaginary of the subject, an emphasis on the body equal to an emphasis on mind, form to forces, matter to spirit, seems crucial. Hence I will think with Paul B. Preciado and reiterate what he proposes between body and mind, matter and spirit—the *somathèque*.

Preciado's project is the radical transformation of political techniques that are producing the psyche with an emphasis on neoliberal governmental techniques. While looking for signs of political and epistemic displacement, Preciado is pointing towards gender divisions as a clinical tool used for the management of intersexuality and the possibility of technically constructing sexual difference through the use of hormones and surgery, but also psychological management and legal techniques. There is an intricate relationship between techniques of the body, technologies of government and apparatuses of truth making that underwent a transformation following certain postcolonial and geopolitical shifts. Preciado is giving us a genealogy of power technologies while trying to 'exceed the psyche as interiority and the metaphysical separation between body and mind, matter and spirit'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).

The geometrical imaginary of the subject in part sees the subject as a tentacular being without falling into the binary separations of front and back, left or right, thus aligning all duration with one encounter. Similarly to Preciado, Deleuze puts it beautifully when he writes, ‘the inside is the outside and the before is the after. The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.’⁶⁰ In Deleuze’s explanation of an embryonic self—as in larval subject and passive self—differentiation is the doubling of the self/other by an interiorisation of the outside. Deleuze continues:

In all his work Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me. It resembles exactly the invagination of a tissue in embryology, or the act of doubling in sewing: twist, fold, stop, and so on.⁶¹

Preciado’s work opens up several proposals regarding the possibilities of how the body of the practitioner of self is a tool of resistance that can be used to intervene within the processes of subjectification; therefore intervening in the capitalist machinery. I will try to confect my own proposal in light of what I have drawn, pointed at, borrowed and constructed throughout this text so far. This proposal is of a critical practice of social intervention and political transformation within a pluralistic tradition rather than a singular practice.

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

The practices of self are somato-political practices against capitalism's inscription of labour divisions, political divisions and gender divisions onto the body and its produce. The body as a somatic apparatus is one of the last (if not the last) stronghold for any constructivist and critical analyses and revolutionary act. Beyond anatomical and classical discourses surrounding the body, if we follow Preciado in understanding the body as a living historical and cultural archive (and subsequently reimagine its practices), we see that it connects to the future as a practice of the new and to the past as a practice of the archival, reclaiming itself against the flattening of cultural and political time and space forced upon it by late capitalism. When talking about agency and capacity of political intervention, my emphasis is on the body and not any institution (such as museums, schools, libraries and so on), because the body unlike the latter has the quality of being alive. The question of positioning oneself in an institution or positioning an institution in the institutional becomes irrelevant, as I am proposing the body as a counter institution. Perhaps the question should then be, what can be an institution in our abstracted, precarious, contaminated world that is full of bodies, figures of sexual difference and political subalterns?

Our refusal of an inside and outside does not necessarily mean the refusal of a psyche. Preciado's subject is not necessarily a subject without a psyche but a subject with an externalised psyche, 'mediated by bio and media technologies, by pharmacology, pornography, prosthetics... It is the notion of 'subject' itself, tackled by the political fictions of identity and autonomy, that is being displaced by a series of processes of subjectification'.⁶² While disappearing the duality of interior and exterior Preciado doesn't diminish the inside but understands it as a continuity. Here I will connect this proposal to Daniel Dennet through his thinking on how the exterior affects the interior through affordances. If the inside is the

⁶² Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Notes for a Psychoanalytic Forum*, in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), vol. 17, p. 24.

fold of the outside, the body can be understood as the continuum of the *Umwelt* (the 'self-centered world'), therefore making it and being made by it simultaneously. This makes the potential of intervention into real politics perceivable. The geometric relations are both established with others and the environment on different scales. Umwelt, which according to James Gibson can be seen as opportunities, is what the environment has to offer to the subject for good or bad. The ontology of a species is determined by practicality, by the ability of our motor functions to respond properly to affordances by evolution. This, as Daniel Dennett beautifully puts it, can be seen as 'ontology from an engineering perspective'.⁶³

I will propose here to see the practices of self as practices of reverse engineering, analysing the functions of the parts, processes and behaviours of artefacts and living beings. In this analysis what the material is, is the difference between the ontology of the things that are in the making, the ontology of the maker and the ontology of things that already exist. In this sense, through the production of practices of self we try to understand the 'real'. To borrow from Daniel Dennett's lecture:

The question of what is real, if posed in a scientific vacuum, is answerable only by a war of intuitions. Ontology as reverse engineering, in contrast, provides a unifying perspective on the question of how things, in the broadest sense of the term, hang together. And shows how our manifest image has gradually evolved to include colours, poisons, money, words, and many other 'things'.⁶⁴

⁶³ Daniel Dennett, 'Ontology, Science, and the Evolution of the Manifest Image', lecture, New College of the Humanities, London, March 14 2017.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

This topological space is one of possibilities where machinic assemblages possess a porto-subjectivity, an enunciative facility even if at an embryonic stage. A myriad of expressions—including non-human expression like biological and technological ones—are enabled through an enlarged conception of enunciation. Expansion in subjectivity toward non-human modes of expression occur, where:

The problem of assembling enunciation would no longer be specific to a semiotic register, but would cross over into expressive heterogeneous matter (extra-linguistic, non-human, biological, technological, aesthetics etc.). Thus, in machinic animism, there is not a unique subjectivity embodied by the Western man—male and white—but one of heterogeneous ontological modes of subjectivity. These partial subjectivities (human and non-human) assume the position of partial enunciators.⁶⁵

In this topological space the geometrical relations form behaviour as well. The difference found between the behaviours of an ant eating another insect and an anteater eating an ant becomes helpful in picturing the geometrical relation. This territory is a domain for becoming.

Since the expressions of the feminine today are determined by the industrialised media, psychopharmacology and bioscience, the application in real time of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of 'becoming-woman' alongside Preciado's project is very meaningful. Becoming-woman is not understood as being feminine or being woman but as a worldview that cuts through the butter of patriarchy. To quote Deleuze and Guattari:

⁶⁵ Lazzarato, Melitopoulos, *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 6, p. 245.

The resistance to the molar form of ‘woman’ determined by the majority (‘men’); the molecular sexuality in all genders (and ages, ethnicities, etc.) which can be identified with the ahistorical, apolitical little girl who has no identity (neither woman, man, nor even child) or predetermined sexual orientation. The girl’s becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her. The girl is certainly not defined by virginity. She is an abstract line, or a line of flight. Thus girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes. It is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl.⁶⁶

Sexuality then is the production of a myriad of sexes and a myriad of beings where sexuality proceeds ‘by way of the becoming-woman of the man and the becoming-animal of the human: an emission of particles.’⁶⁷

As being opposed to labour divisions is at the core here, following Preciado in destroying the reluctance toward the notion of sexual difference would give us a precise example of forging a project out of the liquidity of Deleuzian thinking. Once forged, becoming allows ‘unbecoming’ through anti-colonial techniques of intervention. As Grosz notes, ‘unbecoming is the very motor of becoming, making the past and present not given but fundamentally ever altering, virtual. Intuition is the precise method of discernment available to philosophy in its exploration of these durational becomings.’⁶⁸ Preciado’s project is a ‘critical reaction to the normative boundaries imposed by psychoanalytic discourses on

⁶⁶ Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 305.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming’, in *Parallax* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), vol. 11:2, pp. 4–13.

the understanding of gendered and sexual subjectivities.’⁶⁹ This is where, through a geometric subjectivity, the somathèque folds into reverse engineering and reverse engineering folds into becoming-woman.

Under capitalism we don’t have to believe in anything, we don’t have to think anything and we don’t have to do anything. The basic rule of capitalism is the absolute possibility of competence without comprehension, while the ideology of the manifest image, or as Dennett calls it the ‘folk-metaphysics’, is recycled.

The lack of possibility for intervention can also shed light on our feelings of unease and alienation in parametric spaces. One of the key qualities of parametric space is hygiene and purity, meaning ‘there are no signs of labour’.⁷⁰ The body inside is completely choreographed, with nature or the outdoors only merely symbolically present in patches signaling sustainability. This resonates on the body as a blockage to its capacity to contaminate, thus rendering it as spherical. The dualism appears here between the old and the new, stemming from both parametricism’s paradoxical state of being both abstract in form and concrete in force—in relation to its production by computation as the highest degree of the division of labour—and the paradox inherent in the structure of capital itself (the structure of including everything at all times). Yet philosophers and artist alike—or to put it under one umbrella, practitioners of self—are closer to the manifest image in their understanding. Because they do auto-anthropology, using themselves as informants while withholding belief. This creates an ability to reverse engineer our own manifest image.

⁶⁹ Preciado, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 1.

Contamination is not solely the infiltration of structural means for the purpose of regenerating a better being but also includes negative things like exhaustion, stress, frustration and dilution. These negatives result in detachment.

Detachment is a means to stop contamination. The individual retracts from the world to stay hygienic, not affected by the pain inherent in the regime or the pain of the others. Here we see that the control and influence of parametrics inherent in neoliberal governance doesn't only create an environment that is effecting our *umfelt*—therefore our bodies physical means and behaviour—but also our emotional world and revolutionary competence. This is how the vibrating body of the practitioner of self connects to the parametric world of today: through contamination, precarity and real abstraction. In regards to its social treatment, this body does not demand wellness but revolutionary change.

Conclusion: The Triangle

Arithmetic forms of political dissidence in today's parametric late capitalist machinery are clearly powerless. We must come up with alternative geometric forms of political dissidence that use our proximal bodies as the first tool for contaminating this machinery. Perhaps here the final question becomes: How do we intervene in this machinery to produce distance from subjectification, from moments of denaturalisation? And how do we do this while also remaining critical (rather than escapist) through using the inseparable connection— anchored by contamination, precarity and real abstraction— our bodies have to this machinery? The answer must surely be in the production of counter fictions that are somato-politically meaningful imaginings of possible worlds; the production of counter fictions that are dissident presentations questioning the production of norm and normality; the production of counter fictions that are inhabitable; the production of counter fictions that are deactivating the very base of the production of difference. The art world has been seen as the key place for such productions to happen. But the art world clearly is not a safe haven for the revolutionary act. It does not contain more 'revolutionary' people with 'good' intentions than any other world out there. There is not a multiplicity of practices that can be reduced to the unified word 'art'. Rather, there is a set of contagion practices that are, perhaps unconsciously, producing distances from subjectification and moments of denaturalisation while generating a critical distance from norm and normality, to the parametric governance over the body, and to the excruciatingly exploitive nature of cognitive capitalism.

My project with this thesis is the development of a triangular geometry geared for conscious construction. One that is centered in a conceptual geometric imaginary and that is based on scientific, philosophical and corporal knowledge. The first edge of this triangular geometry is the very important distinction

between creativity and creation. Reorienting ourselves in light of this distinction is a key movement in our position against the division of labour and more generally against separative formations of power. This leads us to the second edge of this project, which is the idea of becoming-artist as a practice of contamination. The third edge of my project is established by making a construct to understand the power of abstraction in relation to the. In line with Paul B. Preciado, and since the division between body and mind doesn't exist, I am working with the power of abstraction. This move starts with real abstraction. By making the link between real abstraction and Preciado's project, the transition between forms of power in abstraction and forms of transformative contamination—both on the individual scale of the body and the collective scale of society—is made clear.

Now, after following this line of thinking, the triad can fit into the understanding of ontology as reverse engineering. To understand ontology as reverse engineering first we have to understand the epistemology of real abstraction and its own contamination of our ontology. Once we understand the epistemology of real abstraction and its relationship to our ontology in the form of contamination then we will see that there is a subversive, liberatory and revolutionary potential in this process. Contamination makes us understand how the division of labour transforms into a division of sexuality. This transformative structure gives us hope that if we can make it happen then challenging division of labour will transform into challenging the division of sexuality. In my project I am suggesting that labour divisions can be challenged through ontology as reverse engineering—through understanding real abstraction and in thinking creation rather than creativity. This then provides a segue for challenging sexual modalities and thinking transsexually.

The light at the end of the tunnel here is, if such practices of self happen consciously and with an understanding of a conceptual geometry then the body can begin to imagine a world that is not already thinking it back. That is to say that the body that is in a world made of itself can begin to imagine a different world without limitation. This is ultimately where change can occur, using the body as a compass and ontology as reverse engineering.

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