

Laure Prouvost

15 kwietnia 2014, godz. 19.00

ul. Jaskółcza 1, GDAŃSK - DOLNE MIASTO

Spotkanie z artystką, laureatką

Nagrody Turnera oraz przegląd jej prac.

e-flux journal



Ł A Ż N I A
Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej
Centre for Contemporary Art



Laure Prouvost
15 April 2014, 7.00 pm
Meeting with the artist Laure Prouvost,
winner TURNER PRIZE 2013, and
viewing of her works.

issue #53

03/2014

e-flux journal is a monthly art publication featuring essays and contributions by some of the most engaged artists and thinkers working today. The journal is available online, in PDF format, and in print through a network of distributors.

Editors

Julieta Aranda
Brian Kuan Wood
Anton Vidokle

Copy Editor/Proofreader

Michael Andrews

Managing Editor and Distribution

Kaye Cain-Nielsen
Mariana Silva

Graphic Design

Jeff Ramsey

Layout Generator

Adam Florin

For further information, contact
journal@e-flux.com

www.e-flux.com/journals

01/01

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014
Colophon

1
See Félix Guattari, "The Three Ecologies," trans. Chris Turner, *New Formations* no. 8 (Summer 1989): 131–147.

2
An Architektur, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," *e-flux journal* no. 17 (June 2010) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/>

3
Landelijk Ongedocumenteerden Steunpunt, a foundation that supports the undocumented. See <http://www.stichtinglos.nl/>

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 [Pierre Bal-Blanc](#), [Ferran Barrenblit](#), [Alexandra Baudelot](#), [Binna Choi](#), [Eyal Danon](#), [Maria Lind](#), [Pablo Martinez](#), [Sanne Oorthuizen](#), [Emily Pethick](#), [How to Begin Living in the Trees?](#)

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

02 pp. **Editorial**

Antonio Negri

10 pp. **Reflections on the
"Manifesto for an
Accelerationist Politics"**

Benjamin Bratton

12 pp. **The Black Stack**

Ane Hjort Guttu

12 pp. **How to Become a Non-Artist**

Kim Turcot DiFruscia

10 pp. **Shapes of Freedom: A
Conversation with Elizabeth
A. Povinelli**

Reza Negarestani

14 pp. **The Labor of the Inhuman,
Part II: The Inhuman**

Mary Walling Blackburn

11 pp. **Sister Apple, Sister Pig:
Speculative Annotations**

Brian Kuan Wood

09 pp. **Is it Love?**

Pierre Bal-Blanc, Ferran Barrenblit, Alexandra Baudelot, Binna Choi, Eyal Danon, Maria Lind, Pablo Martinez, Sanne Oorthuizen, Emily Pethick, Nataša Petreščin-Bachelez, Tadej Pogačar

07 pp. **How to Begin Living in the
Trees?**

01/01

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014
Contents

Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan
Wood, Anton Vidokle
Editorial

01/02

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle
Editorial

One common explanation for why intellectual property makes no sense in an era of file-sharing uses the example of what happens when you copy a file on a computer. Copy-Paste: a second file has been produced, but the original is unaltered. Now it has a sibling, a partner, a twin. And if they keep reproducing themselves in this way, no problem. Which is to say that, at least in the digital domain, the entire calculus of scarcity is very different from the material domain. The difference between a single entity, two entities, or a billion is almost nil. Under these circumstances, as the argument goes, reintroducing laws of scarcity by limiting access is simply backward.

But this is not to say that people go unaltered by this kind of proliferation. And it is definitely not to say that scarcity goes away and all people become wealthy just because we can get our hands on lots and lots of computer files. No, it's just to say that the nature of what we consider a resource has been profoundly redistributed across domains of knowledge and whatever its material base has become. Original and counterfeit mutually melt. Some things can be reproduced ad nauseam while others simply decay. It is where the simulacrum is no longer deceptive in its distance from the real but just really confusing when it comes to trying to locate actual resources.

To be more precise, it is forcing such a high level of abstraction that productive and reproductive forces become indistinguishable from each other. In a response in this issue to the "Manifesto for Accelerationist Politics," Antonio Negri identifies this particular level of abstraction as the place that must be occupied. Cognitive labor is already abstract, and it is under the auspices of this abstraction that its output is left by the roadside to be swept up by capital and taken elsewhere. Strangely, we are faced with a scenario in which not only the Left, but also capitalism suffers from retrograde approaches to technology. And yet, as the relation of the human to technology is being rewritten seemingly on its own, the urgent task becomes one of locating the places where the most crucial abstract and immaterial effects register themselves in life. It is a question of form.

The artist Mary Walling Blackburn has pointed out that it becomes very interesting to think about overpopulation in this scenario. She was actually pregnant at the time. Overpopulation implies a capacity that has reached its limit, a bloat that is taxing resources. But what is it that is being overpopulated, and how is the capacity reached? Let's try to look at it differently – by way of the family. The family is the place where public and private mash

from them, and eventually they get involved in Petra Bauer's current art project. This led them to ask if we could help them recruit some supporting members to generate more funds.

Emily: I think that's how a community operates. You become friends and you sustain a relationship on many levels.

Alexandra Baudelot: I think we've all had this experience – turning the public into a community.

Pierre: But we also feel we have to produce an audience for each project. You never accumulate an audience – in ten years, I have never accumulated an audience. This particular concept of audience is not relevant anymore. I tried to show this in the exhibition "The Death of the Audience," using scores by Cornelius Cardew and Anna Halprin, and displays by Rasheed Araeen and Nicola L. The role of the protagonist in the art field moves, and we have to recreate a temporary collectivity for each project. A cluster community, we could say, in which anyone can adopt any position – a reversibility of positions, which offers an escape from the fixed value imposed by commodification standards.

Maria: But you accumulate relationships.

Pierre: Yes, but you also lose those relationships – they are very temporary situations. For most people, it doesn't make sense to be constantly in an art center!

Alexandra: For sure. The only way to involve the different communities we work with is to have them be part of artistic projects. We did a huge project with a specific community where I live, but when the project was finished, we never saw them again.

Maria: What happens if we think of it not as groups or individuals coming together in a community, but instead as producing space together, like Simon Sheikh has suggested. We are producing something that happens between us – a field of radiance or force. It loses intensity once the project is over, but it isn't completely gone. It can shift and be reenergized and grow in another direction.

x

Cluster is a network of eight visual arts organisations that are each located in residential areas on the peripheries of major cities, all within Europe (with the exception of Holon). Each of these organisations are actively involved in their local contexts, fostering their embeddedness within their surroundings. The members of Cluster are: CAC Brétigny, Brétigny s/Orge, France; CA2M Centro Dos De Mayo, Mostoles, Spain; Casco, office for art design and theory, Utrecht, The Netherlands; Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Aubervilliers, France; Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden; The Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon, Israel; The Showroom, London, UK; Zavod P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E., Ljubljana, Slovenia.

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Pierre Bal-Blanc, Ferran Barrenblit, Alexandra Baudelot, Binna Choi, Eyal Danon, Maria Lind, Pablo Martinez, Sergio Oorthuizen, Emily Pethick, How to Begin Living in the Trees?

condition in a way that requires some attention to methodology and context, whether synchronic or diachronic.

Ferran: When you talk about quality, I understand you as talking about *what* we work with in combination with *how*: maybe the quality should come more from *how* we develop the projects we present.

Maria: I would insist on *what* as well, as there is so much that is *really* substandard. It's constantly used in arguments by politicians in Sweden: they say, "Isn't it great that you have *more* art." No, it's not. I only want more great art, not more art in general. We are drowning in bad work and even worse curating.

Binna: In the Netherlands, there was a behind-the-scenes argument going on in relation to budget cuts. Some argued that we in fact needed the cuts – there are many "bad" organizations and many "bad" artists, so we need to cut them out. To a certain degree, one could agree with this. Some sort of transformation, reinvention, and reorganization process was necessary, since the public subsidy system's dominance brings stagnation. Yet, nobody could say this officially, because it involved the big question of "how": How do you decide what has quality and what doesn't? This problem exists on every level. Why are so many artworks produced each year? Why are so many art festivals and temporary projects instrumentalized for marketing purposes? What does art serve, if it serves anything?

Maria: But precisely because there is so much care going into this in the Cluster organizations, *that* generates a very specific idea of what I think is *quality*. I might not like the same things as you, but that's not the point. I'm not ready to let go of the notion of quality yet. I'm not prepared to raise the white flag – let's find a way to reclaim quality!

Binna: I tend to agree, but there cannot be an *absolute* quality. Quality is a term that has to be debated, while differences and a certain degree of diversity must be embraced.

Emily: I also think that there are organizations that have passed their sell-by date. They hang on because they're part of the landscape. By contrast, there's energy in an organization that is sustained by those who run it. If an organization runs out of energy, I don't think it should continue, because there are always other forms – always new things that need room to arise. In the end, it's about the people who are sustaining these things and making them alive, relevant, and challenging.

Maria: With Tensta, I'm still obsessed with the idea of creating stability, of being agile, of being able to offer continuity in a context where so many things are in flux. This continuity is

necessary in order to present art in a consistently high-quality manner – to be able to maintain a certain standard of working. Apart from that, location and staff structure can change. In twenty years time, I would like to be able to say that there is a contemporary art space in Tensta that has a long history of high-quality work. That's what I would like to see. But that would require us to develop real skills to survive very rocky conditions.

Binna: I think I'm a bit different, maybe because I started in another field, in philosophy. The goal is not art. Art might be dissolved and transformed into something else, assuming that what we pursue is value – not a field or a discipline.

Maria: If art is a form of understanding, the shape might change, but the function would remain.

Emily: That's what I mean: certain forms become redundant and others take over.

Binna: The special kind of work we do is often enabled by personal relationships. A while ago, I noticed a woman who sometimes came to our events. She looked totally different from any other professional audience member. Sometimes she was weaving while listening. During winter, I sometimes noticed that she didn't wear stockings. We wondered, who is this woman? One day I talked to her, and she said she ran an organization called Stichting LOS.³ She was extremely articulate and knowledgeable about immigration policy in the Netherlands. At the time, we were preparing an archival presentation of Martha Rosler's project *If You Lived Here*. In this context, we felt we could support the woman's work. We hosted meetings for her organization. We provided design in collaboration with a local design school. We helped publish a book of the organization's research, and we hosted the launch of the book. But then, after, we worked with her again and again – we had been working with her for three projects. For example when working with Lawrence Abu Hamdan, contact with her was extremely important: she brought Somalian migrants who were living in asylum, but they are in fact activists who shared their knowledge on Somali history and language that in turn enabled Lawrence to create an aesthetically and intellectually exceptional map that counters the relevance of language analysis to identity the origin of a refuge. It's really about caring, giving unprejudiced attention to small things, and trusting in the possibility of resilience and long-term cultivation.

Maria: The Women's Center in Tensta recently needed a few extra tables, so they borrowed three tables from us. Then we wanted catering for a board meeting, so we ordered food

together. It is the interface of both. It is a shelter from society. It forges subjectivity, for better or for worse. It is universal even if it doesn't assume a singular form. The family can be a living hell, a mafia, a black market, a restaurant, or a network of solidarity. And the purpose of any kind of solidarity is to form a micro-society whose bonds are strong enough to resist external pressures from outside. And ideally these strong bonds surpass the calculus of exchange. Giving and receiving mesh. Everything is shared according to a logic that is taken for granted. One family member is crippled and the other one is healthy as an ox, that's just how it is. You don't need a doctor to tell you what to do. You simply figure it out. Even in the most miserable family where everyone hates everyone else, there is some care and there is support. Without that, there is no family.

But a form of care that is bountiful and not subject to any measurement is also not infinite. It may be absolute in its commitment, but it is not infinite in its capacity. If we look at what is happening to family relations at the moment, we may start to see the place where the reproduction of humans and the replication of effects go to war over your love, over your time, over your vital energies. The family marks the point of indistinction where the cozy conservatism and organic purity of human reproduction and the replication of culture exert the most profound and discernible stresses. It is where China, now easing its one-child policy, might consider instituting its one-artwork policy. It is where gallerists and collectors may want to reconsider keeping it all in the family. But it is also where I can become you and you can become me. It is also where we can always pay the rent and where dinner and everything else will sort itself out, somehow.

x

Antonio Negri Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Antonio Negri
Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

01/10

The “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics” (MAP)¹ opens with a broad acknowledgment of the dramatic scenario of the current crisis: Cataclysm. The denial of the future. An imminent apocalypse. But don’t be afraid! There is nothing politico-theological here. Anyone attracted by that should not read this manifesto. There are also none of the *shibboleths* of contemporary discourse, or rather, only one: the collapse of the planet’s climate system. But while this is important, here it is completely subordinated to industrial policies, and approachable only on the basis of a criticism of those. What is at the center of the Manifesto is “the increasing automation in production processes,” including the automation of “intellectual labor,” which would explain the secular crisis of capitalism.² Catastrophism? A misinterpretation of Marx’s notion of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall?³ I wouldn’t say that.

Here, the reality of the crisis is identified as neoliberalism’s aggression against the structure of class relations that was organized in the welfare state of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries; and the cause of the crisis lies in the obstruction of productive capacities by the new forms capitalist command had to assume against the new figures of living labor. In other words, capitalism had to react to and block the political potentiality of post-Fordist labor.

This is followed by a harsh criticism of both right-wing governmental forces, and of a good part of what remains of a Left – the latter often deceived (at best) by the new and impossible hypothesis of a Keynesian resistance, unable to imagine a radical alternative. Under these conditions, the future appears to have been cancelled by the imposition of a complete paralysis of the political imaginary. We cannot come out of this condition spontaneously. Only a systematic class-based approach to the construction of a new economy, along with a new political organization of workers, will make possible the reconstruction of hegemony and will put proletarian hands on a possible future.

There is still space for subversive knowledge!

The opening of this manifesto is adequate to the communist task of today. It represents a decided and decisive leap forward – necessary if we want to enter the terrain of revolutionary reflection. But above all, it gives a new “form” to the movement, with “form” here meaning a constitutive apparatus that is full of potentiality, and that aims to break the repressive and hierarchical horizon of state-supported contemporary capitalism. This is not about a reversal of the state-form in general; rather, it refers to potentiality against power – biopolitics against biopower. It is under this premise that

help us grow in a way that is not mere expansion. We shouldn’t see small spaces like ours as just a rung on the hierarchical ladder, and we shouldn’t pursue expansion just for the sake of survival.

Pierre: Recently, I finally came to understand that I could not convince the Ministry of Culture in France that small-scale institutions are sometimes much more relevant than big ones. The Ministry regards small institutions as merely local or regional entities – they don’t understand that a small institution can have a very relevant existence in the global situation. We have proven with our network that in fact small institutions are relevant, if you take a larger view.

Maria: One of the problems is that too often, funders think about small-scale organizations the same way they think about large-scale organizations. Standards based on what the Tate Modern, the Centre Pompidou, or the Moderna Museet do trickle down and are supposed to serve as the principles for assessing what we do. However, we have less in common with these national organizations than we do with, for example, a small publisher or record label. Moreover, in economic terms, we *are* efficient. If you think of us as part of the research and development branch of society, and if you consider that the things we develop will eventually be put to use for economic profit, then the public money we receive is probably quite a good investment.

Ferran: Maybe we have to find a different word than “efficiency,” because that’s a neoliberal concern. It’s true that we want to make the most of our money and our budgets, but I don’t think we can be measured in terms of efficiency. I insist in thinking about ourselves and our work in terms of the butterfly effect. I know that the next revolution will start in a Cluster member organization! Maybe it will be Casco. If we insist on thinking of efficiency in neoliberal terms, we will always lose the battle, because it will always come back to haunt us.

Emily: But I think we are a very efficient. We do a lot with very little. We are a good value for what we deliver.

Ferran: Yes, but then somebody else will come and do more with less. We should introduce a different element for evaluating our work, one that is linked to something other than budgetary efficiency. When I try to explain our museum to our officials – we’re mostly dependent on a single source of income – I say that starting a museum was a good idea, that we’re building something sustainable for them. I try to demonstrate that we have 0.01 percent of the general budget of the Madrid region. This way of thinking works for them. But it doesn’t for us, and maybe it doesn’t work for our artists either.

Emily: I think the Silent University was a good example of the limitations of a large institution like the Tate. They set up a really amazing one-year project with Ahmet Öğüt – they developed a group of asylum seekers who weren’t allowed to work, and who voluntarily kept coming to the project, taking part, and giving a lot of time and knowledge. At the end of the project, they had an amazing body of relationships, which is a treasure for any organization – a group of people who are engaged and committed to something. But the Tate couldn’t sustain it, and so the artist asked us at The Showroom if there was anything we could do to continue the network, because it would’ve been a shame to lose it. It’s a project that should go on for another two years. Something really incredible could come out of it.

Maria: It’s a different sense of accumulation. I’d also like to talk about *quality*. Each of us has a rather precise way of articulating what we do. We have a precise way of selecting the artists or the artworks we engage with, and of selecting the *combinations*, the *methods*, and the *timing* that figures into our work. This specificity generates a sense of quality because it is based on many distinctions; you have to cut away a lot, you have to negate a lot, you have to put aside a lot. For me this is urgent, because we are flooded with art that is rubbish! I want to talk about this idea of having more exact formulations of *why* we’re actually engaging with what we’re engaging with, and *how* we do it. We insist on quality. This is certainly not a monolithic notion, but rather something that has to be reformulated and negotiated in each situation.

Pierre: I understand what you’re saying, but I think we are concerned with building something as a general idea over time, which is not like producing one project after the other. I think the common way to work is to be attentive to the often overlooked parts – what is in between two projects, how you pass from one project to another, how you negotiate two projects at the same time, how you proceed in a general way. When I worked as an independent curator at other institutions, I was sometimes surprised at how people just produced one event after another without any connection. They just looked straight ahead. Here, we have something that is the complete contradiction of that.

Maria: One way of putting forth a notion of quality is by paying attention to many things that, in the process of curating and running an institution, are often ignored. This is what I would call “working curatorially.” This is the major difference between institutions whose purpose is to construct a canon, and those that are more interested in investigating a cultural

to change with Cluster, using our knowledge of the margin.

Maria: It is also about atomization: things got very dispersed at one point, with plenty of relative peripheries or relative centers, depending on how you saw it. But this very much involved the structural changes of neoliberalism. The effect started to become more palpable in certain places around 2005, and it has escalated in terms of the conditions of production for organizations like ours. Now it is time to connect the dots, maybe even to mobilize.

Eyal: Speaking from our perspective, we always felt that we were working in isolation – globally, but also in our region. So we needed different kinds of networks, like the one we tried to establish with our project Liminal Spaces. It was all about trying to overcome this kind of isolation.

Pierre: As organizations, are we an alternative, or are we producing the same things as the market? The legitimization of value is dominated by the market, and we are also under this dominion of value.

Maria: What do you think?

Pierre: It's a bit like Félix Guattari's "existential territory" – the alternative is the temporary coalition.¹ Our network is just a temporary coalition. It cannot become an institutionalized network because it will lose the energy that is currently has. The question is how to constantly mutate in our activity, because the mission of the market is to institute value, to focus and condense everything into the same value. How do we produce a situation in which we can provide another kind of legitimization, other kinds of values? Neoliberals try to convince everyone that there is just one market, but that's a lie: there are different markets. The drug market, the weapons market, even the art market is not completely inside the neoliberal market. At the same time, we all strive to take our activity into the market. We are all concerned with seeing the artists we work with recognized in the market. Markets are not the problem per se. The problem is the monopolization on legitimization.

Maria: I am not sure if we are concerned with making the artists we work with become recognized by the market. Sometimes that happens anyway. If it is true that we work according to a tailored logic, that we tailor-make everything, this also means that we're infinitely flexible. Which means that we exhibit one of the main characteristics of neoliberalism.

Emily Pethick: The way we work with flexibility is quite often on a timescale – we give a lot of time to things, slow things down, and that runs counter to the market economy, which is based on efficiency and shrinking down

processes. We give a lot of time to artists and stretch the timescale if it feels like something will go further. It's a kind of slowing down. The models of the biennials or larger institutions have a lot more problems with enabling these kinds of processes. We're actually stretching things out and enabling something to grow on its own.

Binna: If we look at ourselves from an economic or productive perspective, we're like organic produce, an organic shop. The things that we produce or sell are often cultivated locally, not mass-produced. Although they might be expensive, they're tasty for those who pay attention.

Emily: The risk of that analogy – the tailor-made or the organic vegetable – is that it's not something that everybody can afford. That's where public funding comes in – we're subsidized so that everyone can afford us. The benefit of flexibility is that you can change the rules. At the Tate, they have a whole visitor services team that controls how people move through the institution. The baby crawling across the floor doesn't fit into the system at Tate. We had a program devised by artist Andrea Francke called *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood*. Some of the people involved said they used to feel uncomfortable taking their children to galleries and museums, so we put a little notice on our website saying, "Children are welcome at all our events." We got an amazing response. There are unspoken rules or invisible structures within every institution. There's a discomfort in how you inhabit the space.

Ferran Barrenblit: For me, the question is, how can we be relevant without pretending to be leaders? In London, during our public conversation with Chris Dercon and Ralph Rugoff at The Showroom in May 2013, Dercon asked what our biggest achievement was. I said: surviving. Ralph Rugoff replied that maybe we should have disappeared, because in the art world, the idea is that you can only be relevant if you are the leader of something. How do we introduce another system of relevance?

Binna: Many of us are talking about the commons and the practice of commoning. How we can multiply and broaden the commons? How do we see the future of our organizations, especially in terms of scale – perhaps in twenty years' time? Stavros Stavrides has talked about the problem of the avant-garde as an "alternative enclave" that is doomed to fail in achieving utopia, because in order to achieve this, you need to multiply the passages linking individuals, groups, and different open places.² Can leadership, or better "initiatives," center around creating passages that amount to more than just the sum of many small minorities? This might

02/10



the possibility of an emancipatory future is radically opposed to the present of capitalist dominion. And here, we can experiment with the “One divides into Two” formula that today constitutes the only rational premise of a subversive praxis (rather than its conclusion).⁴

Within and Against the Tendency of Capitalism

Let’s have a look at how the MAP theory develops. Its hypothesis is that the liberation of the potentiality of labor *against* the blockage determined by capitalism must happen *within* the evolution of capitalism itself. It is about pursuing economic growth and technological evolution (both of which are accompanied by growing social inequalities) in order to provoke a complete reversal of class relations. *Within and against*: the traditional refrain of Operaism returns.⁵ The process of liberation can only happen by accelerating capitalist development, but – and this is important – without confusing *acceleration with speed*,⁶ because acceleration here has all the characteristics of an engine-apparatus, of an experimental process of discovery and creation within the space of possibilities determined by capitalism itself.

In the Manifesto, the Marxian concept of “tendency” is coupled with a spatial analysis of the parameters of development: an insistence on the territory as “*terra*,” on all the processes of territorialization and deterritorialization, that was typical of Deleuze and Guattari. The fundamental issue here is the power of cognitive labor that is determined yet repressed by capitalism; constituted by capitalism yet reduced within the growing algorithmic automation of dominion; ontologically valorized (it increases the production of value), yet devalorized from the monetary and disciplinary point of view (not only within the current crisis but also throughout the entire story of the development and management of the state-form). With all due respect to those who still comically believe that revolutionary possibilities must be linked to the revival of the working class of the twentieth century, such a potentiality clarifies that we are still dealing with a class, but a different one, and one endowed with a higher power. It is the class of cognitive labor. This is the class to liberate, this is the class that has to free itself.

In this way, the recovery of the Marxian and Leninist concept of tendency is complete. Any “futurist” illusion, so to speak, has been removed, since it is class struggle that determines not only the movement of capitalism, but also the capacity to turn its highest abstraction into a solid machine for struggle.

The MAP’s argument is entirely based on

this capacity to liberate the productive forces of cognitive labor. We have to remove any illusion of a return to Fordist labor; we have to finally grasp the shift from the hegemony of material labor to the hegemony of immaterial labor. Therefore, considering the command of capital over technology, it is necessary to attack “capital’s increasingly retrograde approach to technology.”⁷ Productive forces are limited by the command of capital. The key issue is then to liberate the *latent* productive forces, as revolutionary materialism has always done. It is on this “latency” that we must now dwell.

But before doing so, we should note how the Manifesto’s attention turns insistently to the issue of organization. The MAP deploys a strong criticism against the “horizontal” and “spontaneous” organizational concepts developed within contemporary movements, and against their understanding of “democracy as process.”⁸ According to the Manifesto, these are mere fetishistic determinations of democracy which have no effectual (destituent or constituent) consequences on the institutions of capitalist command. This last assertion is perhaps excessive, considering the current movements that oppose (albeit with neither alternatives nor proper tools) financial capital and its institutional materializations. When it comes to revolutionary transformation, we certainly cannot avoid a strong institutional transition, one stronger than any transition democratic horizontalism could ever propose. Planning is necessary – either before or after the revolutionary leap – in order to transform our abstract knowledge of tendency into the constituent power of postcapitalist and communist institutions to come. According to the MAP, such “planning” no longer constitutes the vertical command of the state over working class society; rather, today it must take the form of the convergence of productive and directional capacities into the Network. The following must be taken as a task to elaborate further: planning the struggle comes before planning production. We will discuss this later.

The Reappropriation of Fixed Capital

Let’s get back to us. First of all, the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics” is about unleashing the power of cognitive labor by tearing it from its latency: “We surely do not yet know what a modern technosocial body can do!” Here, the Manifesto insists on two elements. The first element is what I would call the “reappropriation of fixed capital” and the consequent anthropological transformation of the working subject.⁹ The second element is sociopolitical: such a new potentiality of our bodies is essentially collective and political. In

Cluster actually done? Why did Cluster emerge at this point in time? Why not ten or even five years ago?

Binna Choi: It partly came out of the financial crisis – that may have necessitated our way of working. Maybe there is also skepticism about what culture can produce or generate. By forming this network, you’re creating some kind of circuit that galvanizes a new force.

Pierre Bal-Blanc: It’s very difficult to produce ideas or even to produce content through a network. With Cluster, we try to experiment with our shared practices, sites, and knowledge, and then we take time to understand the differences and similarities among our respective situations. We are isolated. We sometimes feel like we’re working in hostile environments. We are confronted with indifferent audiences, with people we have to continually convince to participate in our activities. The different parts of our practice as small-scale institutions are not natural, but rather the result of clear decisions – not something that has its own tradition and customs, but something that involves a commitment to working to transform our environments.

Maria: In many cases, we are the places where people have their first encounter with contemporary art. In the case of Tensta, that’s particularly true when it comes to young people. It’s a huge responsibility.

Tadej Pogačar: Here at P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E., from the very beginning we organized a lot of exhibitions, like first solo shows. For the majority of young girls and boys, this is their first encounter with an art space. They are totally lost. They have no idea what to expect. They are trembling. How this initiation happens is extremely important, so we really try to work hard on it.

Sanne Oorthuizen: Courage is important, having the courage to tremble.

Pierre: They need that. Sometimes, children in the exhibition space are completely fascinated by the space itself, even if there is nothing inside. Our role is to make clear for them that space is a language. As Henry Lefebvre would say: “La pratique spatiale règle la vie; elle ne la fait pas.”

Pablo Martinez: If the institution is located in a working class context, you are not supposed to do things that are intellectually or aesthetically challenging – you’re supposed to do things that are easy for the audience, because for working class people, this is their first contact with art. But I think being in this context makes it necessary to do quality things with the best artists. This is the inverse logic followed by art professionals who have in mind an audience that is more intellectual or sensitive to an established set of references.

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez: None of us could do the same work if we were somewhere else. We understand these institutions not as neutral places, but as always situated and reflected, as interacting with their surroundings. It’s not just that the institutions interact with their surrounding class environments; surrounding conditions also impact what happens within the institutions.

Maria: It’s a radical specificity. Everything we do is tailor-made. If everything is tailor-made, it’s much more expensive in terms of resources, time, labor, energy, and so on. That’s a common denominator. We put a lot of care into shaping something in relation to local conditions. I have a question about proximity. When you’re close to something, “embeddedness” is a useful term – we are perhaps organizations consciously embedded in our contexts, in our neighborhoods. What happened to the embedded journalists in Iraq? They went with the troops; they were really there when things happened, and they took lots of blurry photographs with their mobile phones. The things they wanted to transmit were difficult to see, although they were the ones closest to the real thing, true eyewitnesses. The situation we’re facing is similar, in that it’s hard for us to transmit what we’re doing, because of this proximity. Hito Steyerl has written beautifully about this – the closer you get, the more abstract the visual output. I think we’re in that situation somehow. The pixels are getting more and more blurred. So we have to tell the story in a different way. We are all, in various ways, vital parts of small and large art biotopes, but we don’t necessarily get covered by national media or international art magazines. In that sense, we are a blind spot.

Eyal Danon: It’s not only related to how we tell the story to the outside. We also need this perspective for ourselves. We need to see that the places we work in are unique, and that there are similarities among them. We need this even before we reach the level of communicating with the outside.

Pierre: Every art institution is embedded in its local situation, even the big museums in the center of the city. In my view, the problem is understanding of our situation in relation to the globalization of the art world. The emergence of biennials and contemporary art organizations everywhere on the planet in the ’90s shifted the center away from the West. It is important to see us also as a product of this situation. Nowadays, we are supposed to obey the forces imposed by neoliberalism (decentralization, dispersion, disproportion) without any of the advantages of the previous situation – that is, liberalism (centrality, monopoly, scale). That’s what we have

Pierre Bal-Blanc, Ferran Barrenblit, Alexandra Baudelot, Binna Choi, Eyal Danon, Maria Lind, Pablo Martinez, Sanne Oorthuizen, Emily Pethick, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Tadej Pogačar

How to Begin Living in the Trees?

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014
How to Begin Living in the Trees?
Pierre Bal-Blanc, Ferran Barrenblit, Alexandra Baudelot, Binna Choi, Eyal Danon, Maria Lind, Pablo Martinez, Sanne Oorthuizen, Emily Pethick,

Cluster is a network of eight contemporary visual arts organizations located in residential areas on the periphery of European cities (with one member organization in Israel). Each is highly invested in engaging with its particular locality. The network was formed in summer 2011 with the goal of facilitating an exchange of knowledge on how the different member organizations operate and how they relate to their local contexts, to funders, and to the media. Most of the organizations are situated in underserved or impoverished areas with large immigrant populations, and where many languages are spoken. It is the first network of its kind.

The member organizations of Cluster are focused on commissioning and producing contemporary art. Their programs are often experimental, process-driven, and research-based, and the organizations work with both local and international artists. Although the organizations vary in size, they all produce work that is deeply invested in their local contexts. Cluster believes there is a strong need to build a dialogue around this work, not least because the activities of art institutions in peripheral cities are hardly covered in art publications, but also because these spaces play a small but very important role in the constitution of the public sphere – they are physical spaces for unusual forms of assembly, experience, and exchange. The Cluster network is dedicated to exploring such possibilities, especially in the light of nationalist tendencies across Europe.

A symposium on the artistic, social, and political implications of this work will take place June 13–15, 2014. Subsequently, a book discussing the Cluster network and its concerns will be published by Sternberg Press. The member institutions of Cluster are: Casco – Office for Art, Design, and Theory (Utrecht); Centre d'art contemporain de Brétigny (Brétigny); Les Laboratoires D'Aubervilliers (Paris); The Showroom (London); Tensta Konsthall (Stockholm); CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Mostoles); Israeli Center for Digital Art (Holon); and the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art (Ljubljana). This discussion took place at the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum in Ljubljana on September 28, 2013.

– Cluster

Maria Lind: I have recently been thinking about the main character in Italo Calvino's book *Baron of the Trees* – the aristocratic boy in eighteenth-century Italy who decides to live in trees. This is such a powerful image of living differently. It doesn't involve inventing a spaceship or some fantastic new device. It just involves shifting the terms we have right outside the window. The Cluster network is now two years old, and my questions are: What has

04/10



This distorted *Financial Times* cover is used to illustrate one of Strike Debt's blogposts, see <http://www.strikedebtuk.com/>.

other words, the surplus added in production is derived primarily from *socially productive cooperation*. This is probably the most crucial passage of the Manifesto.¹⁰ With an attitude that attenuates the humanism present in philosophical critique, the MAP insists on the material and technical qualities of the *corporeal* reappropriation of fixed capital. Productive quantification, economic modeling, big data analysis, and the most abstract cognitive models are all appropriated by worker-subjects through education and science. The use of mathematical models and algorithms by capital does not make them a feature of capital. It is not a problem of mathematics – it is a problem of power.

No doubt, there is some optimism in this Manifesto. Such an optimistic perception of the technosocial body is not very useful for the critique of the complex human-machine relationship, but nonetheless this Machiavellian optimism helps us to dive into the discussion about organization, which is the most urgent one today. Once the discussion is brought back to the issue of *power*, it leads directly to the issue of organization. Says the MAP: the Left has to develop socio-technological hegemony – “material platforms of production, finance, logistics, and consumption can and will be reprogrammed and reformatted towards post-capitalist ends.”¹¹ Without a doubt, there is a strong reliance on objectivity and materiality, on a sort of *Dasein* of development – and consequently a certain underestimation of the social, political, and cooperative elements that we assumed to be there when we agreed to the basic protocol: “One divides into Two.” However, such an underestimation should not prevent us from recognizing the importance of acquiring the highest techniques employed by capitalistic command, as well as the abstraction of labor, in order to bring them back to a communist administration performed “by the things themselves.” I understand the passage on technopolitical hegemony in this way: we first have to mature the whole complex of productive potentialities of cognitive labor in order to advance a new hegemony.

An Ecology of New Institutions

At this point, the problem of organization is properly posed. As already said, a new configuration of the relation between network and planning is proposed against extremist horizontalism. Against any peaceful conception of democracy as process, a new attention shifts from the means (voting, democratic representation, constitutional state, and so forth) to the ends (collective emancipation and self-government). Obviously, new illusions of centralism and empty reinterpretations of the

“proletarian dictatorship” are not repeated by the authors. The MAP grasps the opportunity to clarify this by proposing a sort of “ecology of organizations,” insisting on a framework of multiple forces that come into resonance with each other and therefore manage to produce engines of collective decision-making beyond any sectarianism.¹² You may have doubts about such a proposal; you may recognize difficulties that are greater than the happy options that are offered. Nevertheless, this is a direction to explore. This is even clearer today, at the end of the cycle of struggles that started in 2011, which have all shown insuperable limits regarding their forms of organization throughout their clashes with power, despite their strength and new genuine revolutionary contents.

The MAP proposes three urgent goals that are appropriate and realistic for the time being: First of all, building a new kind of intellectual infrastructure to support a new ideal project and the study of new economic models. Second, organizing a strong initiative on the terrain of mainstream mass media: the internet and social networks have undoubtedly democratized communication and they have been very useful for global struggles, yet communication still remains subjugated to its most traditional forms. The task becomes one of focusing substantial resources and all the energy possible in order to get our hands on adequate means of communication. The third goal is activating all possible institutional forms of class power (transitional and permanent, political and unionist, global and local). A unitary constitution of class power will be possible only through the assemblage and hybridization of all experiences developed so far, and those yet to be invented.

An Enlightenment aspiration – “the future needs to be constructed” – runs through the entire Manifesto.¹³ A Promethean and humanist politics resounds as well. Such a humanism, however, going beyond the limits imposed by capitalist society, is open to post-human and scientific utopias, reviving the dreams of twentieth-century space exploration or conceiving new impregnable barriers against death and all the accidents of life. Rational imagination must be accompanied by the collective fantasy of new worlds, organizing a strong *self-valorization* of labor and society. The most modern epoch that we have experienced has shown us that there is nothing but an Inside of globalization, that there is no longer an Outside. Today, however, reformulating again the issue of reconstructing the future, we have the necessity – and also the possibility – of bringing the Outside in, to breathe a powerful life into the Inside.

What can be said about this document?

Brian Kuan Wood is an editor of *e-flux journal*

1
Jan Verwoert has often adapted this to the best definition of art I've ever come across.

2
Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/power.htm>

3
Is there on the contrary a logic that subtracts mutually? See Envy, Extreme jealousy, Evil Eye, Evil, Misery, Satan.

4
See Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “The Future After the End of Economy,” *e-flux journal* 30 (December 2011) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-future-after-the-end-of-the-economy/>

5
Thanks to Evgeny Shkaraburov for informing me of this after a jog.

6
See the report published by the *New England Journal of Medicine* on the increase in cases of sudden cardiac arrest following long-distance running races in the US between 2000 and 2010: <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1106468#t=article>

7
Confucianism in China is probably the best example of how family love can function as an organizing principle strong enough to sustain society without central command or mediation by state bodies. Because Confucianism in a nutshell implements a command structure within the private space of family relations, the social order is doubly protected from instabilities outside by basic solidarities backed by blood, love, and seniority. On this level Confucianism is essentially a moral code based in absolute unwavering obedience to one's own family elders, and to one's self by juniors in the family. And while many cite Confucianism as the popular belief system that sustained Chinese civilization for millennia in spite of wars and regime changes, its stabilizing effects come at the expense of social inequities between various clans and families, between women and men, between young and old. Confucianism is not egalitarian and does not aim to be. Powerful families stay strong, and the weak families stay weak.

8
The universal cosmic love declared by nineteenth century utopians like Charles Fourier was always an attempt to formulate how love could be socialized, transitioned from the sphere of family and sensual attraction to an ethical, universal human responsibility between people. And the more bizarre and extreme aspects of Fourier's thinking, which was in

05/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Antonio Negri
Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

09/09

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Brian Kuan Wood
Is it Love?

coming on behalf of a large organization that does not want to have you living surrounded by your own waste. Yet, when infrastructure breaks down, we start to develop special powers – such as telepathy. The evil eye returns; envy becomes a material force. God returns because faith becomes necessary. Not only the starving peasant finds comfort in the cross or in the face of Jesus Christ. We all start to look up to the stars and planets and feverishly read our horoscopes hoping no one notices, or interrupts. But what is love in this context?

Love becomes a society without the state, to paraphrase Pierre Clastres. Love within strong and well-managed infrastructural conditions is explained with transcendental and highly personal terms – we are meant to be together, we are made for each other. We have so much in common. We are a private commons within the society. Love is allowed to be platonic and never opportunistic, and only the most wretched or destitute people marry the child of a factory owner for that reason, for a passport, etc. But when the trash man stops showing up, everything starts to marble and flip. Infrastructure turns to love and love becomes infrastructure. The son becomes the trash man. True love becomes a healthy family business, with children as its labor force. The economic mobilization of love might explain how love can be used to territorialize close communities. It doesn't explain how much power these communities actually hold through those very bonds, through their ability to dissolve the apparent necessity of making alliances with power structures that don't offer any immediate form of reciprocal support simply because they are there.



Metahaven, *City Rising*, 2014. Single-channel video, color.

None of this is new. In fact, it's incredibly old. For peasants and farmers the world over this is and has always been completely basic. And in areas that supersede or evade infrastructure, whether politics or organized crime, family bonds always translate into strategic interests, but also

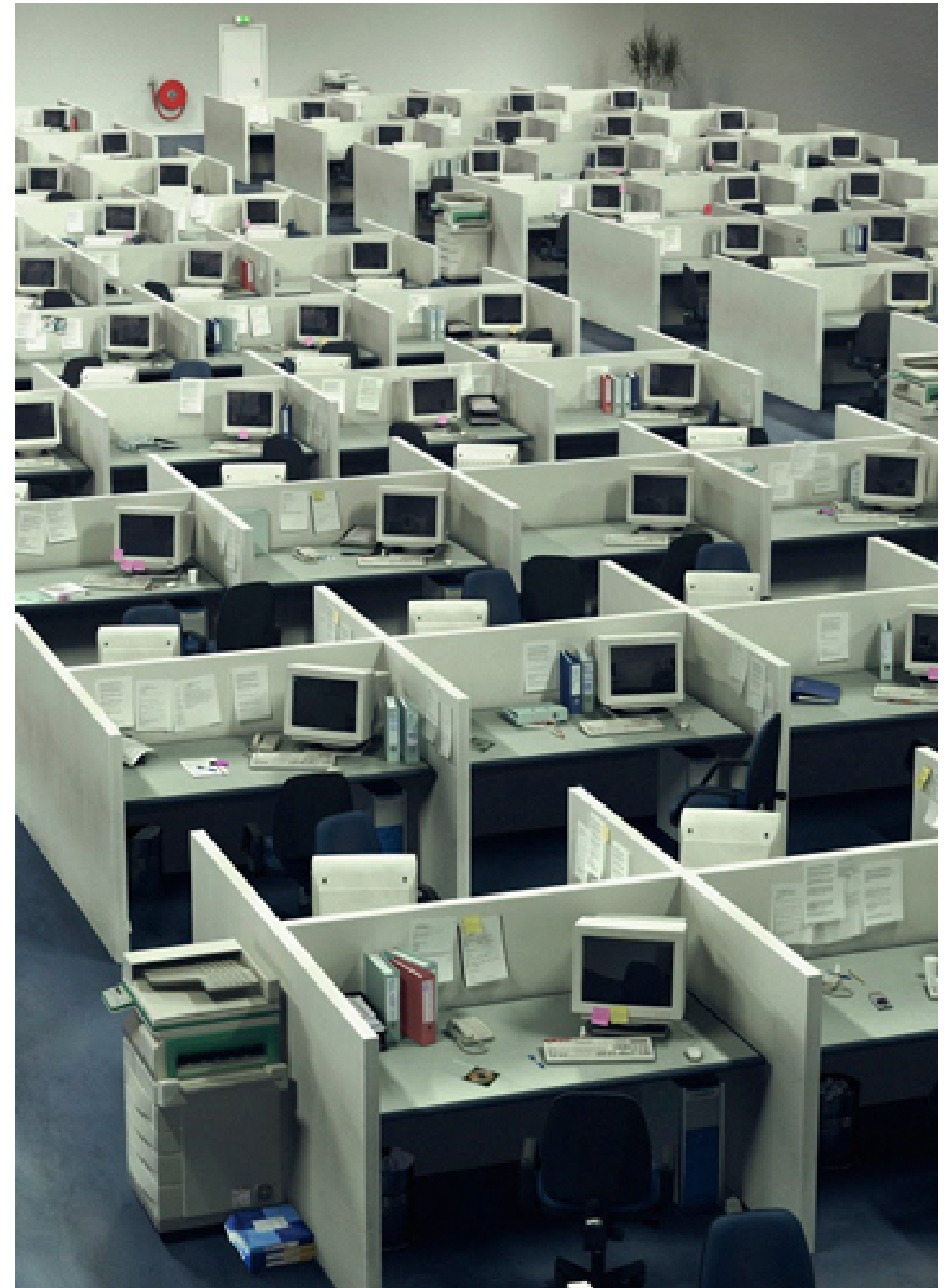
08/09

into the relations of trust that sustain the society.⁷ Love never claims to be unbiased, because it is a highly subjective affair. Why anyhow should I love someone out of some universal principle when my own family is suffering? This is the question that Mao set out to answer when he launched a campaign against Confucianism as part of the Cultural Revolution. In order to build a free society, the authority of Confucianism had to be smashed and replaced with a moral code that included the state as the primary arbiter of relations between people. This was the only way to even begin thinking of resolving the severe class differences that plagued China's history. Confucianism was a kind of Mafia family code locking China into the feudal system that blocked the kind of clarity and administration needed to transition the country into the modern world.⁸

Surely this is what Zhou Enlai, Mao's second in command was thinking when he so beautifully proclaimed that "it's too soon to tell" whether the French Revolution succeeded yet. We must see love as a radicalization of the integration and confusing of the public and private spheres. On the one hand, when Thatcher proclaimed there was no such thing as society, that there are only people, she was making an argument for true love – not the state-subsidized universal love driven by some ethical idea of equality. Families and friends, a true conservative love. But to return to Lacan's formulation, when the stakes are lowered even further – say, following Thatcher – there is very little to be given or received other than affection and emotional support, promises and white lies, and maybe even some personal ethics to hold it all together in the meantime. Thatcherite savage realism knew that the state administered public sphere is something no one really had and no one really wanted that much anyways. But like the falling or fallen tyrants everywhere are being forced to discover, a tyrant called love is coming.

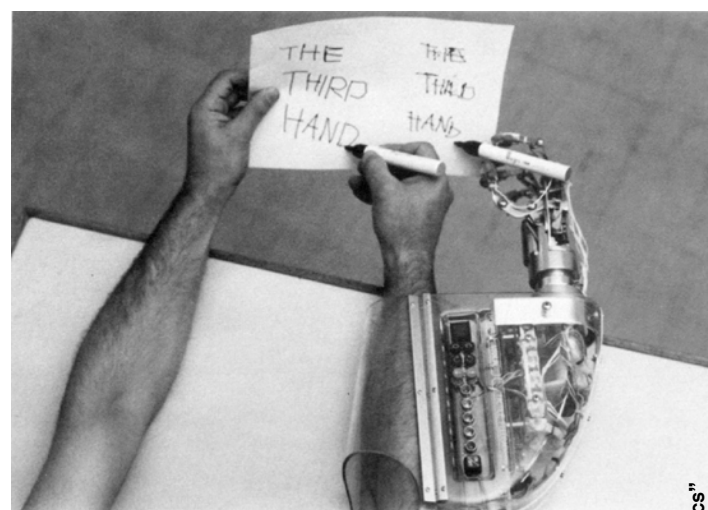
×

Parts of this text were sourced and edited by Metahaven for their video *City Rising*, 2014. After many iterations, its debts are to Franco Berardi, Diana McCarty, Michael Baers, Evgeny Skaraburov, Hito Steyerl, Natascha Sadr Haghghian, Iman Issa, Marion Von Osten, Julieta Aranda, Jan Verwoert, Anselm Franke, Maria Lind, Reza Negarestani, Daniel van der Velden, Vinca Kruk, Mariana Silva, Kaye Cain-Nielsen, Anton Vidokle. Dedicated to Hany Darwish.



Some of us perceive it as an Anglo-Saxon complement to the perspective of post-Operaism – less inclined to revive socialist humanism, and better able to develop a new positive humanism. The name “accelerationism” is certainly unfortunate, as it ascribes a sense of “futurism” to something that is not at all futuristic. The document is undoubtedly timely, not only in its critique of “real” social democracy and socialism, but also in its analysis of social movements since 2011. It posits, with extreme strength, the issue of the tendency of capitalistic development, of the need for both its reappropriation and for its rupture. On this basis, it advances the construction of a communist program. These are strong legs on which to move forward.

07/10



Stelarc, *The Third Hand*, 1980. Performance.

On the Thresholds of Technopolitics

Some criticism may be useful at this point to reopen the discussion and push the argument forward towards points of agreement. Firstly, there is too much determinism in this project, both political and technological. The relation to historicity (or, if you prefer, to history, to contemporaneity, to praxis) is likely to be distorted by something that we are not inclined to call teleology, but that looks like teleology. The relation to singularities and therefore the capacity to understand tendency as virtual (involving singularities), and material determination (that pushes tendency forward) as a power of subjectivization, appears to me to be underestimated. Tendency can be defined only as an open relation, as a constitutive relation that is animated by class subjects. It may be objected that this insistence on openness may lead to perverse effects, for example, to a framework so heterogeneous that it becomes chaotic and therefore irresolvable – a

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Antonio Negri
Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

multiplicity that is enlarged and made so gigantic that it constitutes a bad infinity. Undoubtedly such a “bad infinity” is what post-Operaism and even *A Thousand Plateaus* have sometimes appeared to suggest. This is a difficult and crucial point. Let’s dig further into it.

For this problem, the MAP has come up with a good solution when it places a transformative anthropology of the workers’ bodies right at the center of the relation between subject and object (what I would call the relation between the *technical composition* and the *political composition* of the proletariat, being traditionally accustomed to other terminologies).¹⁴ In this way, the drift of pluralism into a “bad infinity” can be avoided. However, if we want to continue on this ground – which I believe to be useful and decisive – we have to break the relentless progression of productive tension on which the Manifesto relies. We have to identify the thresholds of development and the consolidations of such thresholds – what Deleuze and Guattari would call *agencements collectifs*. These consolidations are the reappropriation of fixed capital and the transformation of labor power; they consist of anthropologies, languages, and activities. These historically constituted thresholds arise in the relationship between the technical and the political composition of the proletariat. Without such consolidations, a political program – as transitory as it may be – is impossible. It is precisely because we cannot clarify such a relationship between technical composition and political composition, that at times we find ourselves methodologically helpless and politically powerless. Conversely, it is the determination of a historic threshold and the awareness of a specific modality of technopolitical relations, which allows for the formulation of both an organizational process and an appropriate program of action.

Mind you: posing this problem implicitly raises the problem of how to better define the process in which the relationship between singularity and the common grows and consolidates (acknowledging the progressive nature of the productive tendency). We need to specify *what the common is* in any technological assemblage, while developing a specific study of the anthropology of production.

The Hegemony of Cooperation

To return again to the issue of the reappropriation of fixed capital: as I have pointed out, in the MAP, the cooperative dimension of production (and particularly the production of subjectivities) is underestimated in relation to technological criteria. Technical parameters of

We are forced into these situations to consider how solidarity works to surpass structural limits by bonds of trust and reciprocity, but also about the stresses placed back on those very solidarities when a structure is so bankrupt that it can only permanently rely upon informal generousities for its basic vital functions. This is to say that love is both the problem and the solution to an emerging form of hyperactive, supercommitted self-application that surpasses logics of exploitation and labor extraction because no one is really benefitting from the added value when it evaporates under the auspices of love or dedication.

We might also be looking in the wrong places, because things do not only evaporate when they enter the expressive sphere, but are also catalogued and archived by the NSA, by museums, any other infrastructure dedicated to historical memory and surveillance alike. A pathological commitment that defers to the expressive sphere when it hits a political impasse has to then contend with the politics of artistic form in order for it to hold together. The language of that form is increasingly being defined by its ability to access emotional registers. This is probably why we are finding so many people in the arts who are essentially activists continuing their work in the absence of any concrete political horizon, but who also become in the meantime the most beautiful singers in the tradition of a Baez or Om Kulthum. Put simply, expressions of the fullness of being have moved from the structural to the symbolic and emotional registers. One of the most widely-read texts speaking to this is not coincidentally by Plato, who brought us divine and rational love. But Plato’s *Phaedrus* is all about using wordplay to seduce a lover, and it is also about using seduction to inspire wordplay – which leads to a semiotically-inspired madness. You master a text not by solidifying its internal logical structure, but by knowing and loving your audience, even to the point where, as in *Phaedrus*, you can convince them to want to sleep with you. Rock’n’roll figured this one out a long time ago.

But rock stars also die young. Or they become fat, they become bloated, they become depressed with age. On the one hand, the scale of amplification of their symbolic output is nearly impossible to reverse, and on the other they are tied to a form of symbolic production structured around youth and vitalism and libidinal surplus that is impossible to sustain with age. The human heart is the most banal metaphor for love, but is also a physiological timekeeper. Many athletes suffer from a condition where the heart swells to become too large as a result of overexertion.⁵ Essentially, even if you are a

07/09

marathon runner fully endowed with the endurance and stamina to run enormously long distances with ease each day, your body will nevertheless collapse after some time.⁶ And yet, it remains extremely hard for athletes and trainers to identify when the limit to overexertion has been reached, as the tearing of muscle tissue is likewise the prompt for the muscle to grow and become stronger. Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens, where he collapsed and died to deliver a message of victory in the form of a single word: νικῶμεν (victory).

Many thinkers today are fond of reminding us that, in spite of information technology’s implicit claims to immateriality and free-floating copy-paste generosity and all-around deterritorialized accessibility, the internet has a material base that makes it subject to scarcity, national boundary policing, traditional state surveillance, etc. It’s totally true. But don’t be misled into a Marxist-materialist line of thinking that the materiality of the internet fully accounts for what it is doing to us. Other thinkers (Bifo, Geert Lovink) have at moments suggested that it is the emotional content that travels over the lines that the stresses and limits to information exchange are to be found. Badly written emails, trigger-happy responses, and breakneck turnaround times lead to a kind of psychotic swamp of affect and emotional feedback loops, and this is where the apparent immateriality of information finds its final form – not in infrastructural bonds but in the melting and reforming of personal and loving bonds. And what it seizes upon most ferociously are people who can absorb and mediate the burdens of the people around them, and the emotional baggage that is the secondary infrastructure of the information economy. These are the real high financiers, the fat cats of affect economy – nurses, single mothers, good listeners, generous thinkers, party organizers, dinner hosts. The internet is only a metaphor for this much larger atmospheric superhighway of emotional dementia. They are the mesh. You thought they were only making potato salad and cookies for the picnic, but actually they are the central nodes and the real server farms in a telepathic meta-network and probably our last hope.

So, it looks like we are entering an era of profound love. The construction of the modern subject from the Western Enlightenment on through the Scientific Revolution advocated a mechanistic view of the world that inadvertently sought a kind of stabilization of life and causal relationships through a natural order. Peace and prosperity follow. Infrastructure would be built accordingly. Labor would be specialized, the train would arrive on time and take you where you want to go, the garbage man would keep

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Brian Kuan Wood
Is it Love?

and mesh, giving and receiving pleasure and love. The question of love is the phantom that hangs over the question of work. It is both a radicalization of the concept of work by way of mashing it with life (with or without the creative class promises) but also what comes after work – at the end of the workday on the one hand, but also when there are no jobs and people have to make do by sharing their skills with each other. The unemployed member of the family is usually expected to care for sick relatives or babysit. Their occupation is to love, and it is always a lot of work. Here, love becomes a figure of total depletion, even a catholic figure of giving oneself away to the point of exhaustion and humiliating defeat. We look a mess because we have given our love in the absolute, to the Absolute. To have nothing left to give is to start looking like Christ on the cross – after the passion. To help someone walk when they are not related to you is social love. Many people remark on how teaching is a joy in itself.³ The shifting of labor into the private and domestic spheres is on the one hand a reallocation of resources from state or workplace into the private and personal sphere of the home. But, with self-managed and free-floating labor, it is also marked by a sliding of troubles from the office or factory to the home, the marriage, the partner, the mind, the children. Every day is bring your kid to work day as well as never take a shower or change out of your fucking pajamas day. Under the auspices of love, a generalized generosity form has emerged within the private and public sphere alike. Through the family, the lover, the market, the street, a machine of reciprocity now stretches horizontally from horizon to distant horizon across a flat landscape converting labor into love and love back into labor. Love is a promise converted to a curse converted back to a promise.

Essentially both blur into an expressive force with seemingly no addressee in established political structures or aesthetic regimes, and whose underside is a depletion so cruel that we can only cry ourselves to sleep at night. It is a perverse advancement of the Romantic project as a concretization of romance. The Romantic era was a surge of energy released by the potential of an era of revolutions in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today we live in a similar era, but now the energy has no addressee and is extracted under the auspices of a liberation that no one really believes in.

As capital cancels itself, differences in value do not just go away. The management and regulation of those differences don't go away either. Negotiations within those differences assume the terms of exchange, which is to say they reflect them and reinforce them, producing

and reproducing them. We are really in a time of hyper-paradox where sign value and use value converge and split and converge again too fast for money to even make sense. Every price mechanism is faulted. Marx or Debord's darkest warnings about capital and spectacle and price speculation are a decent but ultimately gloomy manual for understanding the way things are. Even if the neoliberal economists of the Chicago School are the architects of this condition, they themselves have a hard time explaining what is happening without the help of an astrologist or meteorologist or shaman. If this means the eventual and complete death of economics, only to be replaced by love, the transition might be bumpy at first but it won't be such a bad thing in the long run. Of course, this regime change will be disastrous for many relationships, but how can you complain when you are witnessing the phasing out of work and its replacement by friends? Maybe you thought you were still looking at contemporary art – but actually art left the building quite a while ago and the artist is mostly using the real estate to work a gigantic production job of stabilizing an image of career trajectory in the absence of any social or art historical one.

Today it has become disturbingly easy to confuse stress and exhaustion with love. This can be attributed to the sheer amount of energies being exchanged that prey upon emotional responses.⁴ And only in recent years have we learned that we are no longer talking about work or labor capture but about the distribution of vital energies that surpass the calculus of both. While some of these energies are politically beneficial or monetize in ancillary or surprising ways, the physics of application doesn't really account for how much energy is poured into forms of political or lyrical expression out of love or fun or idleness or pathological commitment – that is, without asking for anything in return.

There may be a whole other side to the situation that we have only started to ascertain through the political uprisings of recent years, where a form of political commitment gets displaced onto the expressive sphere. Much has been written about the role of images and blogging in these movements while most of us know what a poor user interface these forms are for negotiating the common, which has changed so radically that the very location of the common itself has probably shifted elsewhere. While there is a great deal to look forward to in this fact alone – the dislocation in terms of site and objective have left so many people vulnerable to forms of pathological commitment that can risk coming unhinged from their political objectives, and ultimately consume the people themselves.

productivity aside, the material aspects of production in fact also describe the anthropological transformation of labor power. I insist on this point. The cooperative element does become central and conducive to a possible hegemony within the set of languages, algorithms, functions, and technological know-how that constitutes the contemporary proletariat. Such a statement comes from noticing that the structure itself of capitalist exploitation has now changed. Capital continues to *exploit*, but paradoxically in limited forms – when compared to its power of surplus-labor *extraction* from society as a whole. However, when we become aware of this new determination, we realize that fixed capital (i.e., the part of the capital directly involved in the production of surplus value) essentially establishes itself in the *surplus determined by cooperation*. Such a cooperation is something incommensurable: as Marx said, it is not the sum of the surplus labor of two or more workers but the surplus produced by the fact that they work together (in short, the surplus that is beyond the sum itself).¹⁵

If we assume the primacy of *extractive capital* over exploitative capital (including of course the latter into the former), we can reach some interesting conclusions. I will briefly mention one. The transition between Fordism and post-Fordism was once described as the application of “automation” to the factory and “informatization” to society. The latter is of great importance in the process that leads to the complete (real) subsumption of society within capital – informatization is indeed interpreting and leading this tendency. Informatization is indeed more important than automation, which by itself, in that specific historical moment, managed to characterize a new social form only in a partial and precarious way. As the Manifesto clarifies and experience confirms, today we are well beyond that point. Productive society appears not only globally informatized, but such a computerized social world is in itself reorganized and automatized according to new criteria in the management of the labor market and new hierarchical parameters in the management of society. When production is socially generalized through cognitive work and social knowledge, informatization remains the most valuable form of fixed capital, while automation becomes the cement of capitalist organization, bending both informatics and the information society back into itself. Information technology is thus subordinated to automation. The command of capitalist algorithms is marked by this transformation of production.

We are thus at a higher level of real subsumption. Hence the great role played by

logistics, which, after being automated, began to configure any and all territorial dimensions of capitalist command and to establish internal and external hierarchies of global space, as does the algorithmic machinery that centralizes and commands, by degrees of abstraction and branches of knowledge, with variables of frequency and function – that complex system of knowledge that since Marx we have been accustomed to calling General Intellect. Now, if extractive capitalism expands its power of exploitation *extensively* to any social infrastructure and *intensively* to any degree of abstraction of the productive machine (at any level of global finance, for instance), it will be necessary to reopen the debate on the reappropriation of fixed capital within such a practical and theoretical space. The construction of new struggles is to be measured according to such a space. Fixed capital can potentially be reappropriated by the proletariat. This is the potentiality that must be liberated.

The Currency of the Common and the Refusal of Labor

One last theme – omitted by the MAP, but entirely consistent with its theoretical argumentation – is “the currency of the common.” The authors of the Manifesto are well aware that today, money has the particular function – as an abstract machine – of being the supreme form of measurement of the value extracted from society through the real subsumption of this current society by capital. The same scheme that describes the extraction/exploitation of social labor forces us to recognize money: as measure-money, hierarchy-money, planning-money. Such a monetary abstraction, as a tendency of the becoming-hegemonic of financial capital itself, also points to potential forms of resistance and subversion at the same highest level. The communist program for a postcapitalist future should be carried out on this terrain, not only by advancing the proletarian reappropriation of wealth, but by building a hegemonic power – thus working on “the common” that is at the basis of both the highest extraction/abstraction of value from labor and its universal translation into money. This is today the meaning of “the currency of the common.” Nothing utopian, but rather a programmatic and paradigmatic indication of how to anticipate, within struggles, the attack on the measure of labor imposed by capital, on the hierarchies of surplus labor (imposed directly by bosses), and on the social general distribution of income imposed by the capitalist state. On this, a great deal of work is still to be done.

To conclude (though there are so many

06/09

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Brian Kuan Wood
Is it Love?

08/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Antonio Negri
Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

things left to discuss!), what does it mean to traverse the tendency of capitalism up to the end, and to beat capitalism itself in this process? Just one example: today it means to renew the slogan “Refusal of labor.” The struggle against algorithmic automation must positively catch the increase of productivity that is determined by it, and then it must enforce drastic reductions of the labor time disciplined or controlled by machines and, at the same time, it must result in consistent and increasingly substantial salary increases. On the one hand, the time at the service of automatons must be adjusted in a manner equal to all. On the other hand, a base income must be instituted so as to translate any figure of labor into the recognition of the equal participation of all in the construction of collective wealth. In this way, everyone will be able to freely increase to their best ability their own *joie de vivre* (recalling Marx’s appreciation of Fourier). All this must be immediately claimed through the struggle. And, at this point, we should not forget to open up another theme: the production of subjectivity, the agonistic use of passions, and the historical dialectics this opens against capitalist and sovereign command.

×

Translated by Matteo Pasquinelli. Originally published in Italian on Euronmade.

09/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014- Antonio Negri
Reflections on the “Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”

Antonio Negri is a Marxist philosopher and scholar, and a central figure of Italian Operaism. He was born in 1933 in Padua, Italy. He is best known for his groundbreaking works *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, co-authored with Michael Hardt, and for his books on Spinoza. He was a founder of the group Potere Operaio (Worker’s Power) in 1969, and an active member of Autonomia Operaia. He has been a Professor of Political Science at the University of Padua and a Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Paris.

05/09



Death by e-mail: Luc-Olivier Merson, *Pheidippides Giving Word of Victory*, 1869.



In the days following the removal of Mohammed Morsi from the presidency on July 3, 2013, Egyptian Army fighter planes drew hearts in the sky over Cairo. Shahira Issa speculated that this is what fascism looks like.

1
The "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics" (2013) by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek can be read here <http://www.syntheticedifice.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics>

2
MAP 01.02.

3
The "tendency of the rate of profit to fall" is a classic problem of political economy. In Marx's formulation, it describes the potential implosion of capitalism due to the fall of profits over the long term. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, chapter 13.

4
The expression "One divides into Two" refers to the irreversible class division occurring within capitalism. Specifically, the term originated in Maoist China in the 1960s to criticize any political recomposition with capitalism ("Two combines into One"). See also Mladen Dolar, "One Divides into Two," *e-flux journal* 33 (March 2012) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/one-divides-into-two/>

5
Since Mario Tronti's essay on the so-called social factory ("La fabbrica e la società," *Quaderni Rossi*, no. 2 [1962]), and across the whole tradition of Italian Operaism, the expression "within and against capital" means that class struggle operates within the contradictions of capitalist development that it generates. The working class is not "outside capital," as class struggle is the very engine that pushes capitalist development.

6
MAP 02.02.

7
MAP 03.03.

8
MAP 03.13.

9
In Marx (and traditionally in political economy), "fixed capital" refers to money invested in fixed assets, such as buildings, machinery, and infrastructures (as opposed to "circulating capital," which includes raw materials and workers' wages). In post-Fordism, this capital may include information technologies, personal media, and also intangible assets like software, patents, and forms of collective knowledge. The "reappropriation of fixed capital" refers then to the reappropriation of a productive capacity (also under the form of value and welfare) by the collectivity of workers.

10
MAP 03.06.

11
MAP 03.11.

12
MAP 03.15.

13
MAP 03.24.

14
The notion of class composition was introduced by Italian Operaism to overcome the trite debates on "class consciousness" typical of the 1960s. Technical composition refers to the all material and also cultural forms of labor in a specific economic regime; political composition refers to the clash with and transformation of these forms into a political project. A given technical composition is not automatically conducive to a virtuous political recomposition.

15
A canonical quote: "The sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workers differs from the social force that is developed when many hands cooperate in the same undivided operation." Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 443.

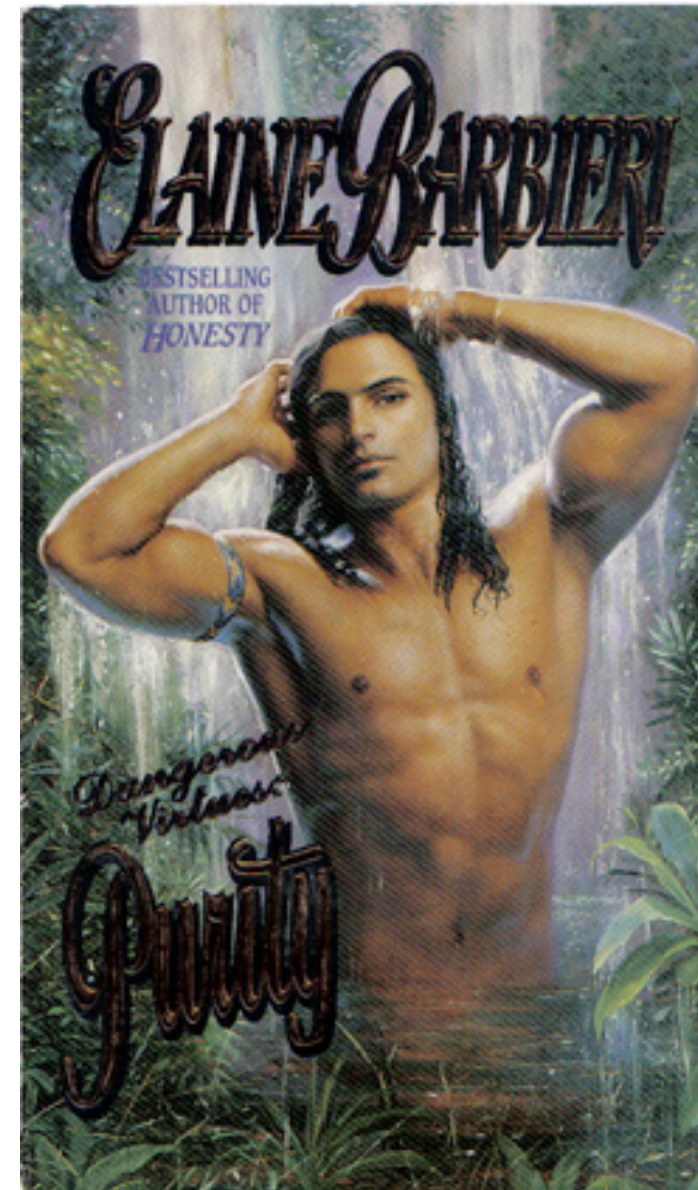
Benjamin Bratton The Black Stack

01/12

Planetary-scale computation takes different forms at different scales: energy grids and mineral sourcing; chthonic cloud infrastructure; urban software and public service privatization; massive universal addressing systems; interfaces drawn by the augmentation of the hand, of the eye, or dissolved into objects; users both overdetermined by self-quantification and exploded by the arrival of legions of nonhuman users (sensors, cars, robots). Instead of seeing the various species of contemporary computational technologies as so many different genres of machines, spinning out on their own, we should instead see them as forming the body of an accidental megastructure. Perhaps these parts align, layer by layer, into something not unlike a vast (if also incomplete), pervasive (if also irregular) software and hardware *Stack*. This model is of a Stack that both does and does not exist as such: it is a machine that serves as a schema, as much as it is a schema of machines.¹ As such, perhaps the image of a totality that this conception provides would – as theories of totality have before – make the composition of new governmentalities and new sovereignties both more legible and more effective.

My interest in the geopolitics of planetary-scale computation focuses less on issues of personal privacy and state surveillance than on how it distorts and deforms traditional Westphalian modes of political geography, jurisdiction, and sovereignty, and produces new territories in its image. It draws from (and against) Carl Schmitt's later work on *The Nomos of the Earth*, and from his (albeit) flawed history of the geometries of geopolitical architectures.² "Nomos" refers to the dominant and essential logic to the political subdivisions of the earth (of land, seas, and/or air, and now also of the domain that the US military simply calls "cyber") and to the geopolitical order that stabilizes these subdivisions accordingly. Today, as the *nomos* that was defined by the horizontal loop geometry of the modern state system creaks and groans, and as "Seeing like a State" takes leave of that initial territorial nest – both with and against the demands of planetary-scale computation³ – we wrestle with the irregular abstractions of information, time, and territory, and the chaotic de-lamination of (practical) sovereignty from the occupation of place. For this, a *nomos* of the Cloud would, for example, draw jurisdiction not only according to the horizontal subdivision of physical sites by and for states, but also according to the vertical stacking of interdependent layers on top of one another: two geometries sometimes in cahoots, sometimes completely diagonal and unrecognizable to one another.⁴

The Stack, in short, is that new *nomos*



Love is in this sense not an elevated romantic phenomenon but the economization of empathy. Love is immaterial capital in the absolute in a sphere of value relations where capital and labor are no longer the main operators or arbiters of value. As unfixed capital summons higher and higher symbolic registers into the arena of exchange, its increasing abstraction puts it constantly on the prowl for a lower base to peg value to. But we now find ourselves in a moment where the situation has taken hold to the point where we are no longer really talking about value in an economic sense, but rather about how to sustain meaning in its most fundamental semantic and ontological sense. And this meaning is provided by the base-level foundations for life and for identification, for solidarity or for support, in reproductive and affective relations, from childbirth to friendship. There is also an idea that solidarities

between people within the sphere of capital are capable of compensating for the inequities produced by capital, and that this constitutes a kind of exception to the economy within it. But in fact these solidarities are the very essence of what regulates the flows of value and compensate for its inconsistencies through promises, favors – the handshake or the handjob. Kisses and compliments cost nothing and mean everything, like the phrase "sweet nothings" to describe lovers' whispers to each other. It is not through the "nothing" but the "sweet" that semiotics becomes material when plucking the strings of the heart. Love abounds on information networks – like a home, every inbox is a cacophony of emotions, of simple pleasures, seething frustrations, of unconditional support and permanent disavowals, of silent treatments and gushing confessions. It is through bonds of solidarity that all the things that that cannot be registered and accounted for – because they are irrational and errant and ill defined suspended interactions – find their place, either due to tolerance or an ability to codify or both. In this sense, what I am talking about is a bloat in the sphere of mutual solidarities, a bubble that is no longer economic but will only burst as an aneurism or an uprising – its effects will not be registered according to any language so far understood as being within the realm of economy. Even if Marx did give us a premonition in his closing lines of "The Power of Money":

Let us assume *man* to be *man*, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your *real individual life*. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the *manifestation* of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a *beloved person*, then your love is impotent and a misfortune.²

When in love, giving and receiving have no calculus; they have infinite supply and demand. Just as in lovemaking, giving pleasure and receiving pleasure are indistinguishable from each other to the extent that they are in fact no different. Meanwhile, care labor, raising children, and all of these so-called labors of love make public service and private interests swirl around

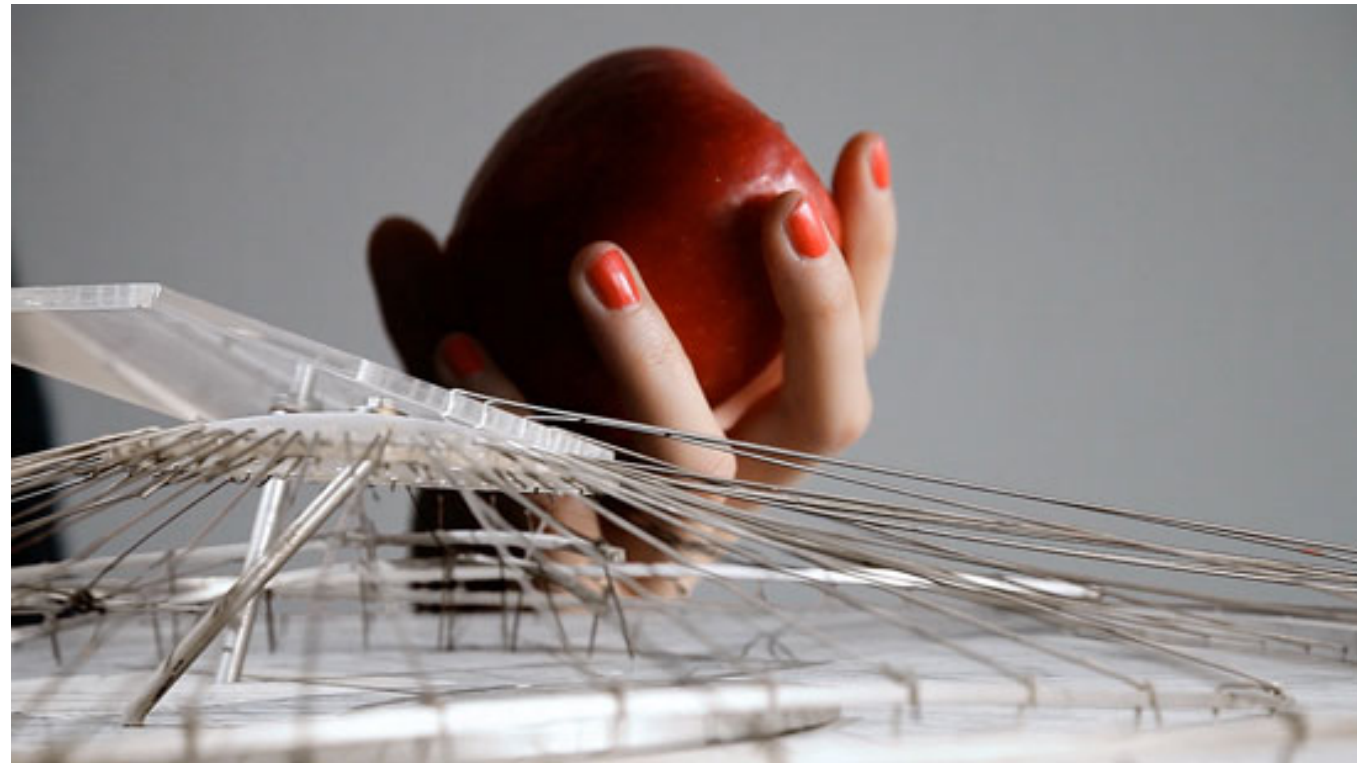
communication now. Information and communication turns immaterial economy into superstition and affective projections. Capital defers down to pure communication, and what used to be an idea of the collective has become a force of conviviality in the absolute. Information-driven overstimulation and actual impoverishment may have fallen in love with each other as well, and they shack up together on an unemployed person's Facebook page. Now that we live a constant slump, what used to be called biopolitics has been accelerated to the degree that it starts to line up with older pre-capitalist and pre-mercantile means of stabilizing exchanges. Why, after all, do you think there is so much talk about feudalism these days? And how did you suddenly get so many friends that you don't even like? Where do you think we got all the bromance films – Hollywood romantic comedies on Platonic love between immature men with nothing in common who are nonetheless forced to improve difficult circumstances by forming bonds of intimacy and solidarity? Neighborhood currencies appear, not only in places like Greece, to keep goods and services moving when the money system breaks down. The currency could be a stone or a handshake – it doesn't matter and doesn't even have to be material when it's backed by bonds of trust, by family love, or by friendship. All that is

02/09

capital melts into love.

Love is the most recently introduced member in the family of inflation and bloat. It is a burst of fresh air fed straight into the bubble. It gives the Ponzi scheme at least another decade before people start to think about cashing out. Remember when you would run out of time and replace that with energy? Push a little harder and move a little faster and you can trick time, because darling you're a superhero. But when you run out of time and energy alike, you run into a problem. You need help. You need support. You need love and a bit of tenderness. Now, with the help of others, you can feed the machine again.

Without time and energy of your own, love is the conduit through which you extract the time and energy of others. You then start to take the shape of that loving conduit. But you have also become a professional lover – or a diabolically good flirt. You are a kind of Marilyn Monroe or Don Juan in the labor of other Marylins and Dons. This arrangement actually makes for a beautifully collective endeavor so long as you can stay beautiful, tender, and kind to your lovers, and so long as they stay that way to you. This tenderness is a force of resynchronization. Maybe it is a new kind of force altogether. Maybe it is love time. Let's inhale and exhale together.



Metahaven, *City Rising*, 2014. Single-channel video, color. This video still features a model by Constant Nieuwenhuys, whose writings are also sourced in the work.

rendered now as vertically thickened political geography. In my analysis, there are six layers to this Stack: *Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, and User*. Rather than demonstrating each layer of the Stack as a whole, I'll focus specifically on the Cloud and the User layers, and articulate some alternative designs for these layers and for the totality (or even better, for the next totality, the *nomos* to come). *The Black Stack*, then, is to the Stack what the shadow of the future is to the form of the present. The Black Stack is less the anarchist stack, or the death-metal stack, or the utterly opaque stack, than the computational totality-to-come, defined at this moment by what it is not, by the empty content fields of its framework, and by its dire inevitability. It is not the platform we have, but the platform that might be. That platform would be defined by the productivity of its accidents, and by the strategy for which whatever may appear at first as the worst option (even evil) may ultimately be where to look for the best way out. It is less a "possible future" than an escape from the present.

Cloud

The platforms of the Cloud layer of the Stack are structured by dense, plural, and noncontiguous geographies, a hybrid of US super-jurisdiction

02/12

and Charter Cities, which have carved new partially privatized polities from the whole cloth of de-sovereigned lands. But perhaps there is more there.

The immediate geographical drama of the Cloud layer is seen most directly in the ongoing Sino-Google conflicts of 2008 to the present: China hacking Google, Google pulling out of China, the NSA hacking China, the NSA hacking Google, Google ghostwriting books for the State Department, and Google wordlessly circumventing the last instances of state oversight altogether, not by transgressing them but by absorbing them into its service offering. Meanwhile, Chinese router firmware bides its time.

The geographies at work are often weird. For example, Google filed a series of patents on offshore data centers, to be built in international waters on towers using tidal currents and available water to keep the servers cool. The complexities of jurisdiction suggested by a global Cloud piped in from non-state space are fantastic, but they are now less exceptional than exemplary of a new normal. Between the "hackers" of the People's Liberation Army and Google there exists more than a standoff between the proxies of two state apparatuses.



The façade of Inntel Hotel Amsterdam-Zaandam, Holland, is designed by WAM architects.



Brian Kuan Wood Is it Love?



Above: The militaristic tower of the new Mac Pro descends on the assembly line in a factory in Austin, Texas. Below: Manganese nodules contain rare-earth minerals used in disk drives, fluorescent lamps, and rechargeable batteries, among other things. Photo: Charles D. Winters.

And pairs that cannot absorb one another
in meaning effects
Go backward and forward and there is no
place

01/09

– Lisa Robertson, “Palinodes”

No one lives in the future. No one lives in
the past.
The men who own the city make more
sense than we do.
Their actions are clear, their lives are their
own.
But you, went behind glass.

– Gang of Four, “Is It Love?”

Over the past few decades, it has often
been said that we no longer have an addressee
for our political demands. But that’s not true. We
have each other. What we can no longer get from
the state, the party, the union, the boss, we ask
for from one another. And we provide. Lacan
famously defined love as giving something you
don’t have to someone who doesn’t want it.¹ But
love is more than a YouTube link or a URL. This
beautiful negative flip of what is commonly
considered the most positive force in the
universe helps us begin to see love’s fullness and
endless bounty, as based in emptiness and lack
– in mutual loss. Love’s joy is not to be found in
fulfillment, but in recognition: even though I can
never return what was taken away from you, I
may be the only person alive who knows what it
is. I don’t have what it is you’re missing, but
knowing its shape already makes a world where
you can live without it.

Now it becomes easy to see how love
translates to economic terms as a union based in
mutual debt. When the debt is paid off or called
in, the union dissolves. And now that pretty much
everyone is in debt, love abounds! Professionals
are moving back in with their parents, people are
returning home to their countries to depend on
their extended families, contracts are
increasingly backed by personal relationships,
and even the values of goods and currencies are
backed less by bonds and legal tender and more
by the trust and intimacy that gives them their
character. Shared associations and affinities
expressed over communication lines produce
pockets of enormous value in an otherwise lonely
ocean of random data streams. Musicians record
reams of songs without ever thinking about
wanting a record contract from major labels that
are still struggling to understand how to make
money off computer files.

Musicians produce music for pure

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 [Brian Kuan Wood](#)
Is it Love?

fellow wraiths, Sister doesn't cleave or cling. She has won lone reprieve from the aesthetic and repetitive machinations of cultural trauma embodied by the apparition. Henceforth, our Narrator asks Reader and Listener to seek a third path, a subtle and complex reckoning with benevolent killing (of plants, of beasts, and children).

Download *Sister Apple, Sister Pig*.

x

11/11

1
Advertisement for Victorian-era abortionist Madam Restell, c. 1870, quoted in Marvin N. Olasky, *Prodigal Press: The Anti-Christian Bias of the American News Media* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 187.

2
Second-wave publications such as the *Redstockings Newsletter* contrived this connection wholeheartedly; consciousness raising, for instance, was founded on a kind of discourse-as-expertise apparatus, where the experience was legitimized as a practice requiring – well, *practice* – in order to truly understand. Per Barbara Susan's "About My Consciousness Raising," *Redstockings Newsletter*, November 1968.

3
Naomi Wolf, "Our Bodies, Our Souls," *The New Republic*, October 16, 1995. This article helped to galvanize the feminist community against Wolf's third-wave politics; Dawn Skorzewski's counter-argument published in *On Our Backs* helped give shape to this debate as it unfolded.

4
I refer here to the tendency in logical positivism to rely on observable results, relegating emotions and metaphysics to the margins of epistemological experience. As Walling Blackburn's notes imply, Surrealism and the countercultural movements that it inspired were instrumental in using emotion and metaphysics to complicate the relationship between photographic evidence and "the facts." As André Masson said in 1941, reflecting on the Surrealists' gleeful rejection of Enlightenment philosophy, "For us, young surrealists of 1924, the great prostitute was reason. We judged that Cartesians, Voltaireans, and other officials of the intelligence had only made use of it for the preservation of values which were both established and dead." He then admitted that this viewpoint had been too absolutist, and quoted the Romanticist critic Friedrich Schlegel's assertion that "the contrary of a fault is another fault." Masson's admission feels, in the context of Walling Blackburn's project, like a poetic reflection of the failures of 1960s countercultures to also fully unseat Enlightenment values. See Masson, "Peindre est une Gageure," *Cahiers de Sud*, no. 233 (March 1941); reprinted in André Masson, *Le plaisir de peindre* (Paris: La Diane française, 1950), 11–18.

5
It is not a coincidence, I think, that challenges to logical positivism arose at the same time as feminist and activist challenges to what constituted learning and authority in general – in the late 1950s and early

'60s.

6
In *Man at Play* (1923) Karl Groos allocates one section to a cursory investigation of "the luxury of grief" in European contexts. Groos describes a bourgeois individual who draws upon distress as a form of play, aiming for a certain "mental suffering, a feeling of suspension between pain and pleasure." Lee, the protagonist of *Sister Apple, Sister Pig*, allays the possibility of repressed psychic distress by the active formation of an ally born of that anxiety. Lee does this without lingering in the interstitial space between pleasure and pain. Is there a political stratagem here ... when sorrow and fear become light and active?

There is rather a fundamental conflict over the geometry of political geography itself, with one side bound by the territorial integrity of the state, and the other by the gossamer threads of the world's information demanding to be "organized and made useful." This is a clash between two logics of governance, two geometries of territory: one a subdivision of the horizontal, the other a stacking of vertical layers; one a state, the other a para-state; one superimposed on top of the other at any point on the map, and never resolving into some consensual cosmopolitanism, but rather continuing to grind against the grain of one another's planes. This characterizes the geopolitics of our moment (this, plus the gravity of generalized succession, but the two are interrelated).

From here we see that contemporary Cloud platforms are displacing, if not also replacing, traditional core functions of states, and demonstrating, for both good and ill, new spatial and temporal models of politics and publics. Archaic states drew their authority from the regular provision of food. Over the course of modernization, more was added to the intricate bargains of Leviathan: energy, infrastructure, legal identity and standing, objective and comprehensive maps, credible currencies, and flag-brand loyalties. Bit by bit, each of these and more are now provided by Cloud platforms, not necessarily as formal replacements for the state versions but, like Google ID, simply more useful and effective for daily life. For these platforms, the terms of participation are not mandatory, and because of this, their social contracts are more extractive than constitutional. The Cloud Polis draws revenue from the cognitive capital of its Users, who trade attention and microeconomic compliance in exchange for global infrastructural services, and in turn, it provides each of them with an active discrete online identity and the license to use this infrastructure.

That said, it is clear that we don't have anything like a proper geopolitical theory of these transformations. Before the full ambition of the US security apparatus was so evident, it was thought by many that the Cloud was a place where states had no ultimate competence, nor maybe even a role to play: too slow, too dumb, too easily outwitted by using the right browser. States would be cored out, component by component, until nothing was left but a well-armed health insurance scheme with its own World Cup team. In the long run, that may still be the outcome, with modern liberal states taking their place next to ceremonial monarchs and stripped of all but symbolic authority, not necessarily replaced but displaced and misplaced to one side. But now we are hearing the opposite, equally brittle conclusion: that the

Cloud is *only* the state, that it equals the state, and that its totality (figural, potential) is intrinsically totalitarian. Despite all, I wouldn't take that bet.



Early personal computer advertisement promises an easy way out of a future technological swamp.

Looking toward the Black Stack, we observe that new forms of governmentality arise through new capacities to tax flows (at ports, at gates, on property, on income, on attention, on clicks, on movement, on electrons, on carbon, and so forth). It is not at all clear whether, in the long run, Cloud platforms will overwhelm state control on such flows, or whether states will continue to evolve into Cloud platforms, absorbing the displaced functions back into themselves, or whether both will split or rotate diagonally to one another, or how deeply what we may now recognize as the surveillance state (US, China, and so forth) will become a universal solvent of compulsory transparency and/or a cosmically opaque megastructure of absolute paranoia, or all of the above, or none of the above.

Between the state, the market, and the platform, which is better designed to tax the interfaces of everyday life and draw sovereignty thereby? It is a false choice to be sure, but one that raises the question of where to locate the proper site of governance as such. What would we mean by "the public" if not that which is constituted by such interfaces, and where else

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Mary Walling Blackburn
Sister Apple, Sister Pig: Speculative Annotations

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Benjamin Bratton
The Black Stack



show Arno, who was born without arms and legs, in a box.) The following page reveals that three-year-old Arno is dead. The question floats: Is this disability porn? (Images that dilate the condition of bodily-ness for the edification of the stranger.)

The Strength of the Hills (1989)

Breaks markedly with the farm-based, photo-illustrated books of the 1970s. The child reader must negotiate long textual explanations, a critique of the contemporary corporatization of dairy farming, and long-view images aligned with adult perspectives of land and labor. The political intent of the genre is intact, but the visual means and pedagogical tactics are not. Still in circulation at Chelsea Public Library, Vermont 2013.

Mom Can't See Me (1990)

Stresses the strategies employed by a heterosexual, suburban, white, middle class family in order to adjust to a mother's blindness. The mediated exposure of private reality is central to the politicization. It asks the reader to dilate the contours of "normalcy" rather than questioning the category itself.

Non-Existent Books For Children (A Cryptobibliography)

K. Kondo, *Mother's Day is Bullshit!* (Tokyo: Hakusensha, 1979). Photo-illustrated account of anti-Mother's Day protest organized by feminist mothers and their children (in strollers) in Tokyo.

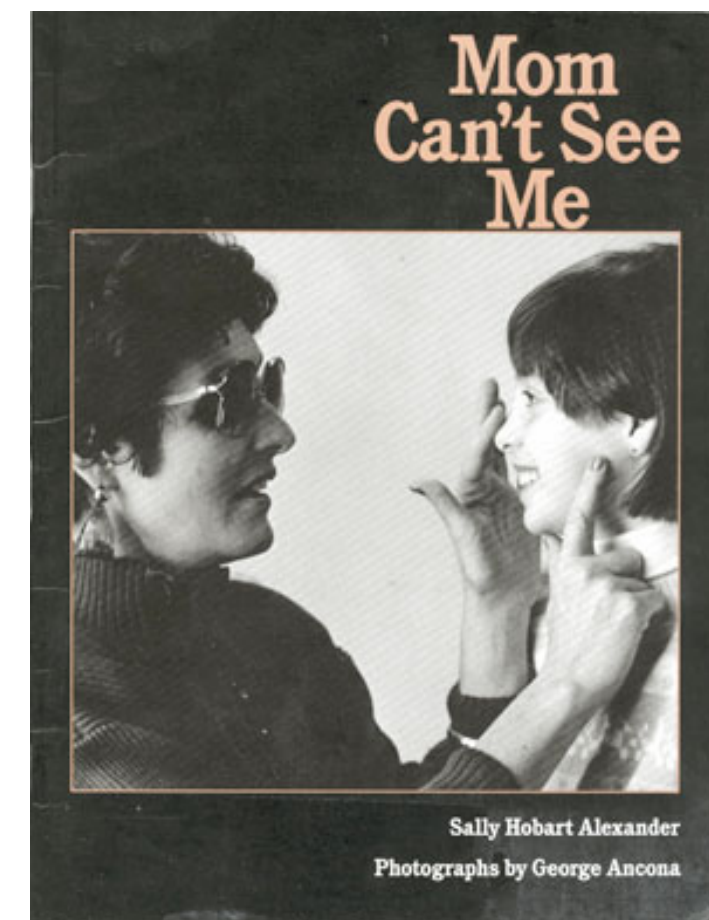
Antonin Artaud, *Sperm!* Illustrations by J. Panlevier. Private commission for undisclosed collection. Series: Artists' books on human sexual reproduction for children. Note: Panlevier, underwater cinematographer, directed and shot a film that features the pregnancy and labor of the male seahorse. The text of *Sperm!*, written by Artaud, is explosive, scarring, and confusing.

Buffy St. Marie, *Unthanksgiving Day* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971). Photo-illustrated account of the occupation of Alcatraz Island by the American Indian Movement. Narrative is told by one of the children who accompanied her parent to the island in 1969 and focuses on the supplanting holiday, Unthanksgiving Day. Accompanying album features Buffy St. Marie, who demonstrated her support for the action by visiting the occupation on Alcatraz Island.

Benjamin Smoke, *Paul(a) Bunyan: Cross-Dressed Paper Dolls From 19th-Century American Logging Camp Dances* (Atlanta: Cabbagetown Press, 1988). 25 illustrated pages. 6 paper dolls, including wooden lady.

Swiss Commission on Nuclear Disaster and Civilian Preparation, *Saint Safety* (Geneva: Government of Switzerland, 1989). 20 illustrations by Balthus. Note: A small girl follows the adult civilian assigned, in the wake of a nuclear disaster, to pack and transport the

Catholic saint of protection and his accompanying dog statuette to a fallout shelter. Once a month, each Swiss civilian enacts his or her assigned role: the small girl is introduced to the concept of collective national action and to the notion that there never has to be an end. Apocalypse deferred, again again.



Mom Can't See Me (1990), frontispiece.

Postscript

The Unthinkable Book casts about for a perverse narrator: the one that reads childishly about unchildish things to a child.

This impossible book casts about for a notional listener: callow yet capable of parsing a spirit from its surgical remains (read: abortion), a listener willing to toddle through a simulated moral universe dependent on a child protagonist's nascent sense of agency as tempered by imagination.

This book floats away from an exhausted ethical binary (the polemics of Left or Right, secular or religious, dead or alive) produced in relation to the deliberate termination of human pregnancy. Our book's ethereal antagonist is neither dead nor alive. And, although it is true that she's joining a mythic gang of infant dead (from the folkloric and sonic Frozen Charlotte to the literary *Beloved* [Toni Morrison]), unlike her

people around him on the battered cat he has found in the junk-filled empty lot.

Danny Goes to the Hospital (not radical, not political) (1970)

Note: The visual grammar of *Life* magazine's photo-essays is reproduced by employing *Life* photographer Yale Joel. The book presents as intact subjectivity a Caucasoid middle class American household with absolute support from the other as an uninterrogated surface. The visual grammar is retooled by radical authors of the '70s.

James Lincoln Collier (author) recounts Danny's operation (Danny's lazy eye migrates to the side of his socket, but this condition is never named). Danny's eye is a straying organ, shepherded by the scalpel.

The book was found in a free box in Brooklyn, New York in 2011; however, the interior pages were stamped "P.S. 31 Brooklyn." The inside cover indicates that the book was never once checked out.

Finally: A claim should be made that Collier has begun to address disability (as Danny's condition is both a social stigma and a hindrance to depth perception). Danny's operation appears to alleviate the problem, restoring Danny's social relations and sight. Is the temporary nature of Danny's condition counter to its political instrumentalization?

It was awkward, this book in my hands. In 1982, I underwent the same operation as Danny. (Vomiting as a prominent side effect is omitted from Danny's tale.) My pupil eventually ceased floating to the right unbidden (twenty-three years later). What did the right eye "see" when the left looked forward? The side story, the runoff. I would like to make a film that records what was collected but unregistered. What lies in the optic gutter?

A Calf is Born (1975)

A series of photographs documenting a year in the life of a semi-industrial dairy cow. Includes graphic close-ups of a calf's birth. The young reader/milk-drinker is included within the cycle of production.

Note: The visual inclusion of the placenta's expulsion is not solely a commitment to depicting a process but, in addition, illustrates a cultural moment where the natural, the psychedelic, and the political converge. Discarded by Jaffrey Public Library in 2012. (Calf as child protagonist.)

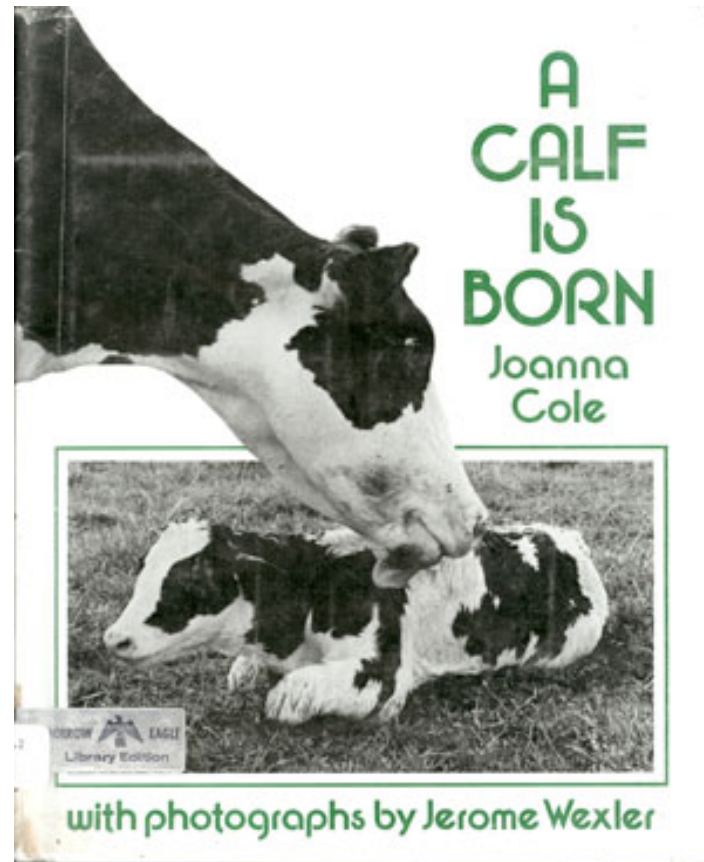
1980s Waning of Radically Charged, Socially Motivated, Photo-Illustrated Children's Books (i.e., Gender, Race, Ecology at Center):

Emphasis on differently abled bodies and the social acceptance of physical ability.

Is this literature produced by both the Left and the Right? When did the evangelical anti-

choice movement begin to introduce a new argument that mobilized sympathetic narratives of children with disabilities? The cynic wonders if the outgrowth of this genre is the convergence of evangelical and feminist body politics in the '80s, both generating parallel materials urging the reader to reconsider the viability of bodies previously framed as abject.

09/11



A Calf is Born (1975), frontispiece.

In Rindge, New Hampshire, the public library serves a primarily rural, Republican constituency; in the stacks, three photo-illustrated children's books feature the lives of children contending with a range of physical differences that limit their mobility. The pedagogical intentions of the 1970s have clearly receded. The graphic design no longer emphasizes the visual perspective of small children, and the number of images have been reduced. Lengthy and unwieldy texts underscore the distinction between an adult readership and a child readership. The intended audience is obfuscated: A child with the same condition as the protagonist? A peer? His or her parents? Is the book a salve or a proviso? Which librarian selects and purchases a Scandinavian photobook of a hospital for differently abled children? Will this be read at children's hour? What tone shall be struck when describing Arno's exhaustion? (The accompanying photographs

should "governance" – meant here as the necessary, deliberate, and enforceable composition of durable political subjects and their mediations – live if not there? Not in some obtuse chain of parliamentary representation, nor in some delusional monadic individual unit, nor in some sad little community consensus powered by moral hectoring, but instead in the immanent, immediate, and exactly present interfaces that cleave and bind us. Where should sovereignty reside if not in what is in-between us – derived not from each of us individually but from what draws the world through us?

For this, it's critical to underscore that Cloud platforms (including sometimes state apparatuses) are exactly that: *platforms*. It is important as well to recognize that "platforms" are not only a technical architecture; they are also an institutional form. They centralize (like states), scaffolding the terms of participation according to rigid but universal protocols, even as they decentralize (like markets), coordinating economies not through the superimposition of fixed plans but through interoperable and emergent interaction. Next to states and markets, platforms are a third form, coordinating through fixed protocols while scattering free-range Users watched over in loving, if also disconcertingly omniscient, grace. In the platform-as-totality, drawing the interfaces of everyday life into one another, the maximal state and the minimal state, Red Plenty and Google Gosplan, start to look weirdly similar.

Our own subjective enrollment in this is less as citizens of a *polis* or as *homo economicus* within a market, but rather as Users of a platform. As I see it, the work of geopolitical theory is to develop a proper history, typology, and program for such platforms. These would not be a shorthand for Cloud Feudalism (nor for the network politics of the "multitude") but models for the organization of durable alter-totalities which command the force of law, if not necessarily its forms and formality. Our understanding of the political economy of platforms demands its own Hobbes, Marx, Hayek, and Keynes.⁵

User

One of the useful paradoxes of the User's position as a political subject is the contradictory impulse directed simultaneously toward his artificial *over-individuation* and his ultimate *pluralization*, with both participating differently in the geopolitics of transparency. For example, the Quantified Self movement (a true medical theology in California) is haunted by this contradiction. At first, the intensity and granularity of a new informational mirror image convinces the User of his individuated coherency

06/12

and stability as a subject. He is flattered by the singular beauty of his reflection, and this is why QSelf is so popular with those inspired by an X-Men reading of *Atlas Shrugged*. But as more data is added to the diagram that quantifies the outside world's impact on his person – the health of the microbial biome in his gut, immediate and long-term environmental conditions, his various epidemiological contexts, and so on – the quality of everything that is "not him" comes to overcode and overwhelm any notion of himself as a withdrawn and self-contained agent. Like Theseus's Paradox – where after every component of a thing has been replaced, nothing original remains but a metaphysical husk – the User is confronted with the existential lesson that at any point he is only the intersection of many streams. At first, the subject position of the User overproduces individual identity, but in the continuance of the same mechanisms, it then succeeds in exploding it.

The geopolitics of the User we have now is inadequate, including its oppositional modes. The Oedipal discourse of privacy and transparency in relation to the Evil Eye of the uninvited stepfather is a necessary process toward an alterglobalism, but it has real limits worth spelling out. A geopolitics of computation predicated at its core upon the biopolitics of *privacy*, of self-immunization from any compulsory appearance in front of publics, of platforms, of states, of Others, can sometimes also serve a psychological internalization of a now-ascendant general economy of succession, castration anxiety – whatever. The result is the pre-paranoia of withdrawal into an atomic and anomic dream of self-mastery that elsewhere we call the "neoliberal subject."



This smart data-collecting onesie for babies monitors heart activity and basic functions. It also activates other baby-gadgets according to the signals detected in the child.

The space in which the discursive formation of the subject meets the technical constitution

of the User enjoys a much larger horizon than the one defined by these kinds of individuation. Consider, for example, proxy users. uProxy, a project supported by Google Ideas, is a browser modification that lets users easily pair up across distances to allow someone in one location (trapped in the Bad Internets) to send information unencumbered through the virtual position of another User in another location (enjoying the Good Internets). Recalling the proxy servers set up during the Arab Spring, one can see how Google Ideas (Jared Cohen's group) might take special interest in baking this into Chrome. For Sino-Google geopolitics, the platform could theoretically be available at a billion-user scale to those who live in China, even if Google is not technically "in China," because those Users, acting through and as foreign proxies, are themselves, as far as internet geography is concerned, both in and not in China. Developers of uProxy believe that it would take two simultaneous and synchronized man-in-the-middle attacks to hack the link, and at a population scale that would prove difficult even for the best state actors, for now. More disconcerting perhaps is that such a framework could just as easily be used to withdraw data from a paired site – a paired "user" – which for

07/12

good reasons should be left alone.

Some plural User subject that is conjoined by a proxy link or other means could be composed of different types of addressable subjects: two humans in different countries, or a human and a sensor, a sensor and a bot, a human and a robot and a sensor, a whatever and a whatever. In principle, any one of these subcomponents could not only be part of multiple conjoined positions, but might not even know or need to know which meta-User they contribute to, any more than the microbial biome in your gut needs to know your name. Spoofing with honeypot identities, between humans and nonhumans, is measured against the theoretical address space of IPv6 (roughly 10^{23} addresses per person) or some other massive universal addressing scheme. The abyssal quantity and range of "things" that could, in principle, participate in these vast pluralities includes real and fictional addressable persons, objects, and locations, and even addressable mass-less relations between things, any of which could be a sub-User in this Internet of Haeccities.

So while the Stack (and the Black Stack) stage the death of the User in one sense – the eclipse of a certain resolute humanism – they do so because they also bring the multiplication and

- Narrative driven by child protagonist's decisions
- Sociopolitical realities directly represented by photographs
- Black and white photographs (because this is social evidence)
- Presumption that child is an active agent in the production of his or her own political consciousness
- Intimate, detailed photos that cater to children's aesthetic sensibilities
- Producers untroubled by the instrumentalization of children within various political discourses
- Greater demographic range of protagonist (class, race, gender)
- Unlike much of Chinese children's literature produced during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the children do not talk and behave like "adult political instructors." The Americans do not deploy "abstract revolutionary rhetoric."⁶

The following bibliographic portion singularly consists of books that came into the writer's possession because they had been discarded by a library (*A Calf is Born*), sold for a dollar at a country yard sale (*J.T.*), or abandoned on the street (*Danny Goes to the Hospital*):

08/11

the children's hour, it includes a written summation of the network's critical agenda. This summation recalls a literary device common to eighteenth-century British children's literature, in which the moral intent of the author was explicitly outlined in order to tip the scales. To what extent did major television networks (late '60s–late '70s) initiate and screen socially progressive programs for economic gain? Was *J.T.* part of a progressive zeitgeist that included Sister Corita Kent's Christmas eve broadcasts on major television networks (Kent was a radical nun and artist)? If socially progressive, photo-illustrated children's literature and the potential roots of radical television wither in tandem, what struck equally at their base?

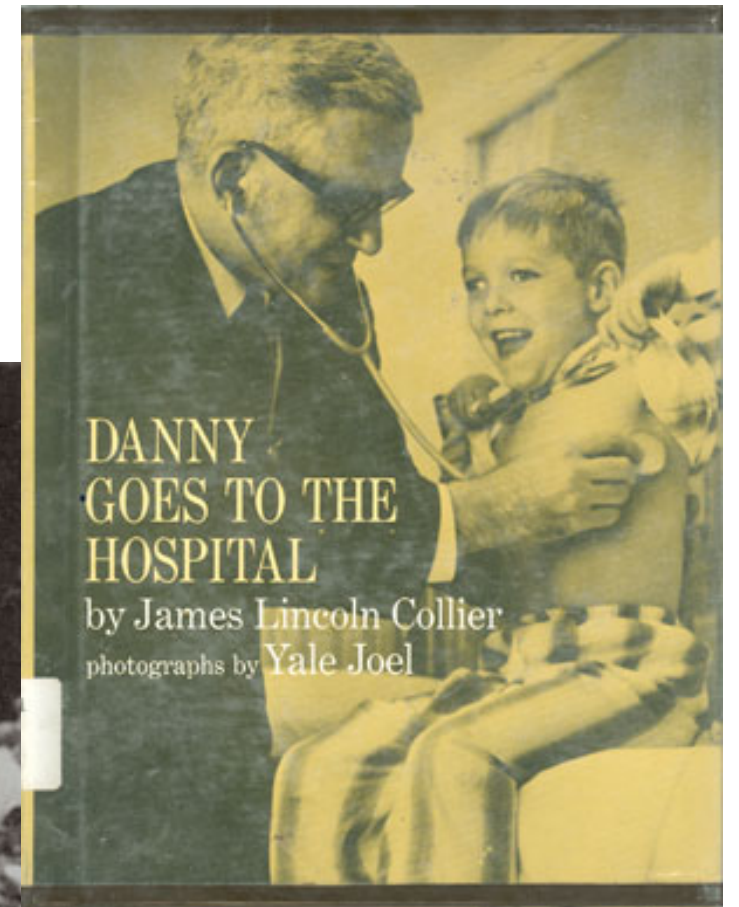


Lady Liberty is on the go.
Regram courtesy of the passerby
Eva Franch i Gilabert.



J.T. (1969), frontispiece.

J.T. (1969)
Author: Jane Wagner
Photographs: Gordon Parks Jr., director
of *Superfly* (1971) and *Three the Hard Way* (1974).
Based on a TV movie produced by CBS for

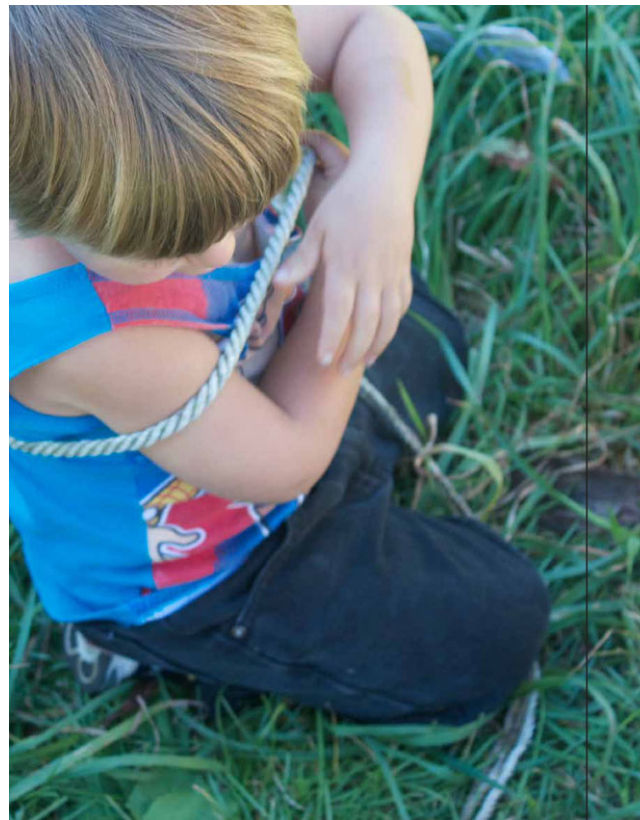


Danny Goes to the Hospital (1970), frontispiece.

The inside flap of *J.T.* reads:
To the guys on the block, J.T. is the kid who stole the radio out of the red convertible before they could get to it. His neighbor, Mrs. Morris, declares him a first-class nuisance. His mother is bewildered – "He's just gone bad, that's all ... Stealin' and lyin' and I don't know what all." But all the sensitivity, responsibility, and care of which ten-year-old J.T. Gamble is capable emerges when he finds an old, one-eyed, badly hurt alley cat. J.T. takes on a new dimension as he lavishes all the love he is unable to express to



08/12



Jess wonders where the ghost sister is.
Maybe Lee had forgotten about the ghost sister for a while.
"Ghost sister has her own things to do!" Lee hastily explains.
"She returns when I call her...if I need her."

proliferation of other kinds of nonhuman Users (including sensors, financial algorithms, and robots from nanometric to landscape scale), any combination of which one might enter into a relationship with as part of a composite User. This is where the recent shift by major Cloud platforms into robotics may prove especially vital, because – like Darwin’s tortoises finding their way to different Galapagos islands – the Cambrian explosion in robotics sees speciation occur in the wild, not just in the lab, and with “us” on “their” inside, not on the outside. As robotics and Cloud hardware of all scales blend into a common category of machine, it will be unclear in general human-robotic interaction whether one is encountering a fully autonomous, partially autonomous, or completely human-piloted synthetic intelligence. Everyday interactions replay the Turing Test over and over. Is there a person behind this machine, and if so, how much? In time, the answer will matter less, and the postulation of human (or even carbon-based life) as the threshold measure of intelligence and as the qualifying gauge of a political ethics may seem like tasteless vestigial racism, replaced by less anthropocentric frames of reference.

The position of the User then maps only very incompletely onto any one individual body. From the perspective of the platform, what looks like one is really many, and what looks like many may only be one. Elaborate schizophrenias already take hold in our early negotiation of these composite User positions. The neoliberal subject position makes absurd demands on people as Users, as Quantified Selves, as SysAdmins of their own psyche, and from this, paranoia and narcissism are two symptoms of the same disposition, two functions of the same mask. For one, the mask works to pluralize identity according to the subjective demands of the User position as composite alloy; and for another, it defends against those same demands on behalf of the illusory integrity of a self-identity fracturing around its existential core. Ask yourself: Is that User “Anonymous” because he is dissolved into a vital machinic plurality, or because public identification threatens individual self-mastery, sense of autonomy, social unaccountability, and so forth? The former and the latter are two very different politics, yet they use the same masks and the same software suite. Given the schizophrenic economy of the User – first over-individuated and then multiplied and de-differentiated – this really isn’t an unexpected or neurotic reaction at all. It is, however, fragile and inadequate.

In the construction of the User as an aggregate profile that both is and is not specific to any one entity, there is no identity to deduce

09/12

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Benjamin Bratton
The Black Stack

other than the pattern of interaction between partial actors. We may find, perhaps ironically, that the User position of the Stack actually has far less in common with the neoliberal form of the subject than some of today’s oppositionalist formats for political subjectivity that hope (quite rightly) to challenge, reform, and resist the State Stack as it is currently configuring itself. However, something like a Digital Bill of Rights for Users, despite its cosmopolitan optimism, becomes a much more complicated, fragile, and limited solution when the discrete identification of a User is both so heterogeneous and so fluid. Are all proxy composite users one User? Is anything with an IP address a User? If not, why not? If this throne is reserved for one species – humans – when is any one animal of that species being a User, and when is it not? Is it a User anytime that it is generating information? If so, that policy would in practice crisscross and trespass some of our most basic concepts of the political, and for that reason alone it may be a good place to start.

In addition to the fortification of the User as a geopolitical subject, we also require a redefinition of the political subject in relation to the real operations of the User, one that is based not on *homo economicus*, nor on parliamentary liberalism, nor on post-structuralist linguistic reduction, nor on the will to secede into the moral safety of individual privacy and withdraw from coercion. Instead, this definition should focus on composing and elevating sites of governance from the immediate, suturing, interfacial material between subjects, in the stitches and the traces and the folds of interaction between bodies and things at a distance, congealing into different networks demanding very different kinds of platform sovereignty.

The Black Stacks

I will conclude with some thoughts on the Stack-we-have and on the Black Stack, the generic figure for its alternative totalities: the Stack-to-come. The Stack-we-have is defined not only by its form, its layers, its platforms, and their interrelations, but also by its content. As leak after leak has made painfully clear, its content is also the content of our daily communications, now weaponized against us. If the panopticon effect is when you don’t know if you are being watched or not, and so you behave as if you are, then the inverse panopticon effect is when you know you are being watched but act as if you aren’t. This is today’s surveillance culture: exhibitionism in bad faith. The emergence of Stack platforms doesn’t promise any solution, or even any distinctions between friend and enemy within this optical geopolitics. At some dark day



<p>Lee asks: "Does my sister live here?" "Do you want her to?" asks Papa. "Well, she used to live in Mama and doesn't anymore. She doesn't live with us," Lee explains to Papa. "That's right," Papa softly affirms, "she briefly lived in Mama."</p>	<p>Lee has more to say: "She lived before me, but Mama couldn't keep her. Mama says she is a ghost."</p>

overseeing children's books in New England libraries reported that the children's collections were "weeded." Unpopular or aging books were regularly discarded because of the prohibitive cost of archiving. Thus, there were no detectable remnants of sociopolitical literary memes within children's literature.

2. Adults fantasize that the production of children's books will allay the nightmare of the present or disrupt the ideological grounds informing the future. In glass vitrines at the Guggenheim, a visitor could glimpse several pages excerpted from a magazine for children called *Kirin* (Giraffe) produced by the Gutai group in the wake of World War II. In it, Shimamoto Shozo urges children to mischief, and then urges them against it. This missive to the infants cannot find its political footing. Hot potato, it leaps left to right.

3. Maya Deren also yearned to turn the genre, to base a children's book on the anthropological origin of movement, realized as a suite of drawings. Deren, then a filmmaker (but first a dancer), aspired to collaborate with Katherine Dunham, then a choreographer and dancer (but first an anthropologist). Dunham had previously urged Deren to consider the synthesis of movement and anthropology, and introduced her to the notion that Haiti could be the source and site of this fusion. Some claim Deren failed to acknowledge Dunham's contribution to Deren's *Divine Horsemen*. Where does the children's book fall in the Dunham/Deren timeline? The anti-process of their nixed collaboration outlines the phenomenon of a book made impossible by bad politics: Deren's attachment to the cult of genius as well as hierarchies scored by sex and race.

A Random and Incomplete Annotated Bibliography

Surrealist Imaginary Photo-Illustrated Children's Book:

Le Coeur de Pic (1937)

Photographs: Claude Cahun

Author: Poemilise Deharme

Photo-Illustrated Children's Literature / Adult Picture Books:

The Lonely Doll (1957)

Author and Photographer: Dare Wright

The virgin author models the doll after herself (which is a self that appears to be modeled after dolls). Does sublimated child-woman effectively operate as child narrator? Also note: the psychosexual depictions of play, punishment, and punishment-as-play become incidentally, retroactively political – at best, these function as faint introductions to sexual transgression (if one reads "the Papa Bear" as a naked, authoritative proto "furry" in the subculture of animal role-playing; if one chooses to transmute the spank

from assault to the liberatory charms of S/M; and if one wishes to entertain the notion that the Papa Bear and his cub can be hallucinated as the breaking and entering of queer working class masculinities within upper middle class environs; *if*).

Inner City Mother Goose (1969)

Graphic Design: Lawrence Ratzen

Author: Eve Merriam

A version of Mother Goose including police brutality, job discrimination, urban segregation within a greater structure of racial inequality. Is there an audio record of these poems being read to children?

Socially Motivated, Photo-Illustrated Children's Literature (Late 1950s / Early '60s):

The earliest example readily accessible via the internet is Cornell Capa's unpublished *Mario*. The mock-up is lodged within an unnamed collection (no explanation is provided as to why it was never published). The singular and visually seductive web representation features the "dummy" resting in a denim lap held by white hands. Whose hands? (The borrower's hands.) The narrative does not definitively belong to Mario, a Quechuan boy, the child of farmers in mid-century Peru. Sam Holmes "ghost writes" the subaltern (uh ...) and the story that unfurls follows Mario's trajectory from mountain village farm to the home of an affluent expatriate American boy:

A phone began ringing in the bedroom

– "What is that," Mario asked.

– "The telephone," Simon said. "Answer it." [Simon is naked in the tub.]

– "Which is the telephone? What do you mean answer it?"

– "It's the black thing on the table near the end of the bed," Simon said. "Go pick it up and put the little end to your ear and talk into the big end."

Holmes imagines that Mario imagines that Simon's mother is somehow *in* the phone, requesting that Mario summon Simon from the bath. Bodies imagining some bodies inside of things. Some Americans encrusted in luxury objects.

Capa and Holmes expose the hegemonic power structure that attaches Mario's fate to Simon's actions; however, the seemingly unconscious manner in which insidious play suffuses Mario's lack of agency undermines "the concerned photographer's" ideological agenda.

1970s Explosion/Fruition (Ripening, Decay) of Genre in USA:

Subgenres: "Ecology," "Inner City," "Back to the Land," "Gender Equality" Markers:

– Second-person child narrative

– Second-person child narrative

– Emphasis on daily condition of the child (as imagined by adults)

in the future, when considered versus the Google Caliphate, the NSA may even come to be seen by some as the "public option." "At least it is accountable in principle to some parliamentary limits," they will say, "rather than merely stockholder avarice and flimsy user agreements."

If we take 9/11 and the rollout of the Patriot Act as Year Zero for the USA's massive data gathering, encapsulation, and digestion campaign (one that we are only now beginning to comprehend, even as parallel projects from China, Russia, and Europe are sure to come to light in time), then we can imagine the entirety of network communication for the last decade – the Big Haul – as a single, deep-and-wide digital simulation of the world (or a significant section of it). It is an archive, a library of the real. Its existence as the purloined property of a state, just as a physical fact, is almost occult. Almost.

The geophilosophical profile of the Big Haul, from the energy necessary to preserve it to its governing instrumentality understood as both a text (a very large text) and as a machine with various utilities, overflows the traditional politics of software. Its story is much more Borges than Lawrence Lessig. As is its fate. Can it be destroyed? Is it possible to delete this simulation, and is it desirable to do so? Is there a trash can big enough for the Big Delete? Even if the plug could be pulled on all future data hauls, surely there must be a backup somewhere, the identical double of the simulation, such that if we delete one, the other will forever haunt history until it is rediscovered by future AI archaeologists interested in their own Paleolithic origins. Would we bury it, even if we could? Would we need signs around it like those designed for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste disposal site that warn off unknowable future excavations? Those of us "lucky" enough to be alive during this fifteen-year span would enjoy a certain illegible immortality, curiosities to whatever meta-cognitive entity pieces us back together using our online activities, both public and private, proud and furtive, each of us rising again centuries from now, each of us a little Ozymandias of cat videos and Pornhub.

In light of this, the Black Stack could come to mean very different things. On the one hand, it would imply that this simulation is opaque and unmappable – not disappeared, but ultimately redacted entirely. It could imply that, from the ruined fragments of this history, another coherent totality can be carved against the grain, even from the deep recombinancy at and below the Earth layer of the Stack. Its blackness is the surface of a world that can no longer be composed by addition because it is so absolutely full, overwritten, and overdetermined, that to add more is just so much ink in the ocean.

Instead of *tabula rasa*, this *tabula plenus* allows for creativity and figuration only by subtraction, like scratching paint from a canvas – only by carving away, by death, by replacement.

The structural logic of any Stack system allows for the replacement of whatever occupies one layer with something else, and for the rest of the architecture to continue to function without pause. For example, the content of any one layer – *Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, User* – could be replaced (including the masochistic hysterical fiction of the individual User, both neoliberal and neo-other-things), while the rest of the layers remain a viable armature for global infrastructure. The Stack is designed to be remade. That is its technical form, but unlike replacing copper wire with fiber optics in the transmission layer of TCP/IP, replacing one kind of User with another is more difficult. Today, we are doing it by adding more and different kinds of things into the User position, as described above. We should, however, also allow for more comprehensive displacements, not just by elevating things to the status of political subjects or technical agents, but by making way for genuinely posthuman and ahuman positions.

In time, perhaps at the eclipse of the Anthropocene, the historical phase of Google Gosplan will give way to stateless platforms for multiple strata of synthetic intelligence and biocommunication to settle into new continents of cyborg symbiosis. Or perhaps instead, if nothing else, the carbon and energy appetite of this ambitious embryonic ecology will starve its host.

For some dramas, but hopefully not for the fabrication of the Stack-to-come (Black or otherwise), a certain humanism and companion figure of humanity still presumes its traditional place in the center of the frame. We must let go of the demand that any Artificial Intelligence arriving at sentience or sapience must care deeply about humanity – us specifically – as the subject and object of its knowing and its desire. The real nightmare, worse than the one in which the big machine wants to kill you, is the one in which it sees you as irrelevant, or as not even a discrete thing to know. Worse than being seen as an enemy is not being seen at all. As Eliezer Yudkowsky puts it, "The AI does not hate you, nor does it love you, but you are made out of atoms which it can use for something else."⁶

One of the integral accidents of the Stack may be an anthrocidal trauma that shifts us from a design career as the authors of the Anthropocene, to the role of supporting actors in the arrival of the Post-Anthropocene. The Black Stack may also be black because we cannot see our own reflection in it. In the last instance, its accelerationist geopolitics is less eschatological

05/11

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Mary Walling Blackburn
Sister Apple, Sister Pig: Speculative Annotations

10/12

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Benjamin Bratton
The Black Stack

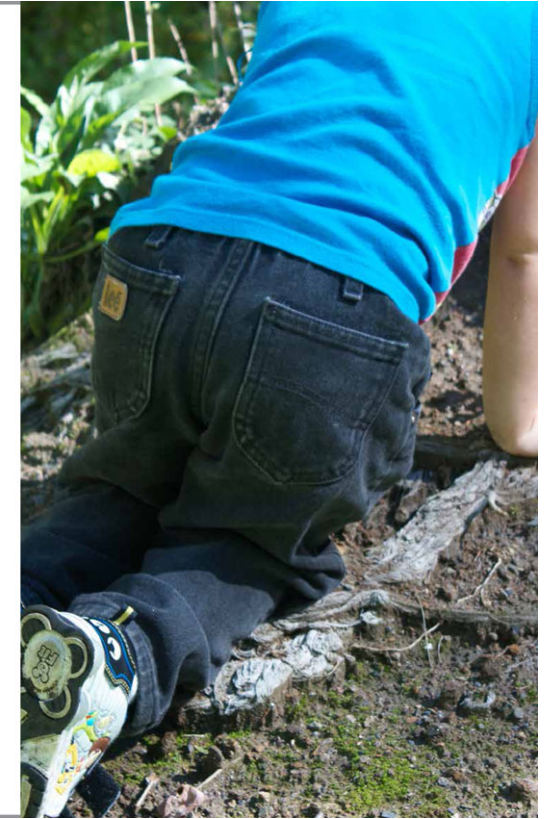
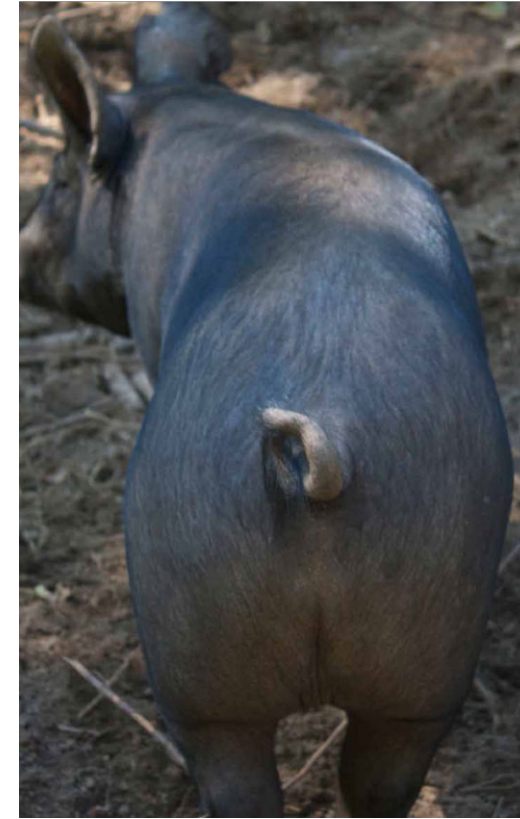
than chemical, because its grounding of time is based less on the promise of historical dialectics than on the rot of isotope decay. It is drawn, I believe, by an inhuman and inhumanist molecular form-finding: pre-Cambrian flora changed into peat oil changed into children's toys, dinosaurs changed into birds changed into ceremonial headdresses, computation itself converted into whatever meta-machine comes next, and Stack into Black Stack.

x

An earlier version of this text was presented as a keynote lecture at *Transmediale: Afterglow*, January 31, 2014, in Berlin. Its presentation shared the stage with another keynote by Metahaven (Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk) and was given at the curatorial invitation of Ryan Bishop and Jussi Parikka, along with Kristoffer Gansing and *Transmediale*. My thanks to each of them. The title, "The Black Stack," was coined by Metahaven and I to conjoin two current projects: my forthcoming book *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT Press) and Metahaven's book *Black Transparency* (Sternberg Press). I chose to take up the figure of the "Black Stack" as an alternative to the current system of global calculation.

11/12

Benjamin H. Bratton is a theorist whose work spans philosophy, art, and design. He is Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Director of D:GP, The Center for Design and Geopolitics at the University of California, San Diego. His research is situated at the intersections of contemporary social and political theory, computational media and infrastructure, architectural and urban design problems, and the politics of synthetic ecologies and biologies. Current work focuses on the political geography of cloud computing, massively granular universal addressing systems, and alternate models of ecological governance. His next book, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, is forthcoming.



e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 [Benjamin Bratton](#)
The Black Stack

<p>Lee asks: "Does my sister live here?" "Do you want her to?" asks Papa.</p> <p>"Well, she used to live in Mama and doesn't anymore. She doesn't live with us," Lee explains to Papa.</p> <p>"That's right," Papa softly affirms, "she briefly lived in Mama."</p>	<p>Lee has more to say: "She lived before me, but Mama couldn't keep her. Mama says she is a ghost."</p>

life poster. Instead of an image of death, Walling Blackburn invites us to observe “the fetus” as constant deflection and change. It is a lateral image, a shifting presence: in short, an undeath.
– Katie Anania

Download *Sister Apple*, *Sister Pig*.

Impossible Books in the Hands of Notional Readers

To *Little Friends*, earthly and unwordly. *Masochists*, look elsewhere; between these pages you will not find the “luxury of grief,”⁶ culpability’s sharp sting or salty guilt.

Cast out of the limpid topic, reject what you know, select the subject unreasonable. A confused children’s book is a mighty children’s book. A self-righteous book is a boring book. Do not please the schools. Do not please the mothers and fathers. Do not please the spiritual nut jobs. Amuse, confuse, rile the children, and you will be exalted by the most infantile. Is that a bad thing? Reject sanctified avenues of distribution (exhume the ghosts of paperboys, develop a fleet of delivery kids, sneak your books into stacks, encourage the babies to make and circulate their own).

The Conjuring of a Fetal Antagonist within the Narrative Limits of a Kids’ Book

How can the protagonist conceive of a form s/he has never seen nor heard described? Is a gnostic structure central to the protagonist’s mending of its sister’s eschatological end? Or is it animism that activates visible and invisible forms throughout the tale (sister fetus as tree, apple, spirit companion)? (The child longs for the divine companion more equal than God.) If the fetal antagonist possibly resides in all things, which heretic doctrine of immanence supports this? Does she call to her sibling or do they listen for one another? Where in the body is the call felt and does it lodge itself within its host?

– The fetal protagonist is neither legally or illegally dead because the medical act has been absented from the narrative.

– The subtracted child remains abstract (it was previously hidden within the body and posthumously exhumed without photograph) and therefore open to divine ends.

– The presumption is that we are a culture of life, but American culture is suffused with death. We are murdered all the time: overseas, within the home, snuffing out land, animals, and human bodies.

– This fetal antagonist does not cleave away but offers intimacy with death. It offers

love, not in spite of violation, but anyway. Maybe some fear the godless love of the fetus who sticks around. This protagonist does not fear the antagonist. The protagonist is like a bat that uses echolocation to detect invisible objects. Exploratory sound bounces off matter and upon returning describes the form. Our heretic protagonist/bat has detected a soul and flies towards it. The protagonist knows it was once this same form. There is recognition, even in the spiritual skein of a corpse displaced.

The Constructions of a Child Protagonist within the Polemical Dimensions of Abortion

Reasons for The Conscious Absence of the Protagonist’s Face:

- A. Protection of subject
- B. The history of the blank face and child represents:
 1. The blank-faced carved pioneer doll
 2. The blank-faced cloth Amish doll
 3. The blank-faced digital image from a crime scene
- C. To release the viewer from assigning a specific gender
- D. The grace of projection

The Ethnic Markers of Protagonist and Antagonist:

The visual marker that categorizes the child protagonist as “white” was deliberately chosen to reflect the dominant anti-choice demographic as represented by mainstream US media. It would follow that Sister, Lee’s aborted sibling, is also read as white. This decision to portray Sister as white aims to move against the historical forced sterilizations of poor women, which overtly targeted indigenous women. Additionally, it is my hope that the provocation is more acute when the (white) pro-life poster child is retained but morally resituated.

Dead Ends, Empty Libraries, Abandoned Projects

Theses on socially motivated, photo-illustrated children’s books; photo-illustrated, socially motivated, pro-choice children’s books; and pro-choice children’s books authored and illustrated by children. Anti-choice children’s books authored and illustrated by children could not be located. Search conducted from 2010 to 2013:

1. Digital archives were a bust. The Brooklyn Public Library’s children’s room librarian (main branch) communicated that photo-illustrated books were not identified as such in the card catalog, that they were indeed the minority of their holdings, and that to her recollection there were no socially motivated, photo-illustrated children’s books in their holdings. Rural collections did not diverge. The librarians

1
Software (and hardware) stacks are technical architectures which assign inter-dependent layers to different specific clusters of technologies, and fix specific protocols for how one layer can send information up or down to adjacent layers. OSI and TCP/IP are obvious examples.

2
See Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 2006).

3
The reference is to James Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*, but the term seems to have expanded and migrated beyond his antigovernmental thesis. See also, for example, Bruno Latour’s lecture “How to Think Like A State” (“in the presence of the Queen of Holland” <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/357>). For this text, I mean to tie one thread to Scott’s connotation (how states see everything available to their schemes) and to a more Foucauldian sense of the actual optical technologies that conjure forms of governance in their own image. Today, these privileges are also enjoyed by the hardware/software platforms that manufacture such optics and leverage them as the basis of their own exo-state governmental innovations.

4
I mean “Cloud” in a very general sense, referring to planetary-scale software/hardware platforms, supporting data centers, physical transmission links, browser-based applications, and so forth.

5
My ongoing discussion on the political economy of platforms with Benedict Singleton, Nick Srnicek, and Alex Williams informs these last remarks.

6
See his “Artificial Intelligence as a Positive and Negative Factor in Global Risk” in *Global Catastrophic Risks*, eds. Nick Bostrom and Martin Rees (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

03/11

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Mary Walling Blackburn
Sister Apple, Sister Pig: Speculative Annotations

12/12

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Benjamin Bratton
The Black Stack

Ane Hjort Guttu
**How to Become
 a Non-Artist**

01/12

In the winter of 2006, I started observing my son Einar's experiments with form. Einar was creating small arrangements around the house, combining objects or moving them to new places. I documented the arrangements, wondering if a four-year-old related more freely to objects and meaning, or if he had any concept of composition.

These are two egg cups. Einar arranged them on the edge of the sofa, unaware of his actions until I took out the camera:



Some days later, he hung a hanger from another hanger and held them up.



It was winter; that's the reason for the flat flash in the pictures. It seemed dark all the time, and there was no snow. It just rained and rained, and we were inside the apartment.

The egg cup and hanger arrangements have

<p>Lee is three. This is Lee.</p>	
	<p>Lee knows this: Vegetables makes a good mask or a good meal.</p> <p>Mama helps Lee make a mask from the chard by holding it up to Lee's face.</p> <p>Where are you Lee?</p>

	<p>Lee is held up to the apple.</p> <p>Lee knocks the fruit down, gathering the apple from the grass.</p> <p>"Nah!" exclaims Lee, "The apple is not my sister! The pigs will eat the apple but the apple is <i>not</i> my sister!"</p>

Mary Walling Blackburn
**Sister Apple,
Sister Pig:
Speculative
Annotations**

01/11

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Mary Walling Blackburn
Sister Apple, Sister Pig: Speculative Annotations

Sister Apple, Sister Pig, a book of images and text by Mary Walling Blackburn, emulates a lost literary genre: photo-illustrated children's books of the 1960s and '70s that cast the child as a protagonist, problem-solver, and model for action in the world. To use this genre is a radical gesture, as modern discourses on abortion have focused largely on the mother's experience. Nineteenth-century patent medicine companies, for instance, advertised pills for "female irregularity" and "complaints incidental to the female frame."¹ In the late 1960s, Western middle class consciousness-raising groups sought to understand abortion as an opportunity for women's self-knowledge.² Later third-wave feminists countered this argument by honoring the traumatic aspects of abortion for the mother, seeking to establish "the death of the fetus [as] a real death."³ Right-wing activists now concretize this "real death" in the form of bloody fetus photos. Children themselves, however – both living and dead – remained strangely voiceless.

For Mary Walling Blackburn, the child protagonist in Sister Apple Sister Pig does not seek to reclaim narrative power. Rather, this child's adventures and the photographs that depict them activate a cascade of contingent relations that displace subjectivity and voice altogether. Lee, the non-gendered main character, masks their own face with a leaf of kale and then proceeds to identify the objects that might house, represent, or capture an aborted sister (the titular apple and pig are two examples). No forms cohere; no identities are fixed. Even as Lee constructs and begins to master the surrounding space, superhero comics and costumes offer opportunities to become someone else. The speculative bibliography that follows the text below assures that another kind of shifting will take place: between the given narrative, where surfaces are not always as they seem, and the historical and visual precursors to Walling Blackburn's intervention.

The text, bibliography, and photographs facilitate brief "acts of noticing" that are much more slippery than the empirical observations generally associated with photography, or with the reasoned acquisition of knowledge.⁴ Throughout this text, we are invited to notice things, but since the things we notice are constantly changing, they discredit the idea of truly knowing anything.⁵ Thus, we do not properly learn about abortion, and this story reframes the visual politics of this charged topic. Walling Blackburn challenges the religious Right's positivistic assertion that the image of the bloody fetus – the child at its most literal deathpoint – activates understanding and salvation. The fetus here is neither living nor dead; it resides neither inside the uterus nor in bloody repose on a pro-

02/12





1
Throughout the text, the term “human” often appears without a definite article in order to emphasize its meaning as a singular universal which makes sense of its mode of being by inhabiting collectivizing or universalizing processes. This is “human” not by virtue of being a biological species, but rather by virtue of being a generic subject or a commoner before what brings about its singularity and universality. Accordingly, human, as Jean-Paul Sartre points out, is universal by the singular universality of human history, and it is also singular by the universalizing singularity of the projects it undertakes.

2
See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 387.

3
See Michael Ferrer, *Human Emancipation and 'Future Philosophy'* (UK: Urbanomic, 2015, forthcoming).

4
Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 191.

5
See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#Accelerate: Manifesto for An Accelerationist Politics,” in *Dark Trajectories: Politics of the Outside* ([Name] Publications, 2013). Also available online at <http://criticallegalthink.org.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>

6
See Paul A. Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

7
See Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

8
See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Pearson Education, 1973).

9
For an account of the connection between philosophy and artificial intelligence, see David Deutsch, “Philosophy will be the key that unlocks artificial intelligence,” *The Guardian*, October 3, 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/oct/03/philosophy-artificial-intelligence>

10
Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theater* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 52.

11
William C. Wimsatt, *Re-Engineering Philosophy for Limited Beings: Piecewise Approximations to Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

12
For detailed and technical definitions of processes and mechanisms, see Johanna Seibt, “Forms of emergent interaction in General Process Theory,” *Synthese* vol. 166, no. 3 (February 2009): 479–512; and Carl F. Craver, “Role Functions, Mechanisms, and Hierarchy,” *Philosophy of Science* vol. 68, no. 1 (March 2001): 53–74.

13
Manipulation conditionals are specific forms of general conditionals that express various causal and explanatory combinations of antecedents and consequents (if... then...) in terms of interventions or manipulable hypotheses. For example a simple manipulation conditional is: If x were to be manipulated under a set of parameters W, it would behave in the manner of y. For a theory of causal and explanatory intervention, see James Woodward, *Making Things Happen: A Theory of Causal Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

14
For a realist take on complexity, see James Ladyman, James Lambert, and Karoline Wiesner, “What is a complex system?” *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* vol. 3, no. 1 (January 2013): 33–67. And for more details, see Remo Badii and Antonio Politi, *Complexity: Hierarchical Structures and Scaling in Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

15
See William C. Wimsatt, *Re-Engineering Philosophy for Limited Beings*.

16
My thanks to Michael Ferrer, Brian Kuan Wood, Robin Mackay, Benedict Singleton, Peter Wolfendale, and many others who either through suggestions or conversations have contributed to this text. Whatever merit this essay might have is due to them, while its shortcomings on the other hand are entirely mine.

be found in reason. One must recognize the difference between a rational norm and a natural law – between the emancipation intrinsic in the explicit acknowledgement of the binding status of complying with reason, and the slavery associated with the deprivation of such a capacity to acknowledge, which is the condition of natural impulsion. In a strict sense, freedom is not liberation from slavery. It is the continuous *unlearning* of slavery.

The compulsion to update commitments as well as construct cognitive and practical technologies for exercising such feats of commitment-updating are two necessary dimensions of this unlearning procedure. Seen from a constructive and revisionary perspective, *freedom is intelligence*. A commitment to humanity or freedom that does not practically elaborate the meaning of this dictum has already abandoned its commitment and taken humanity hostage only to trudge through history for a day or two.

Liberal freedom, be it a social enterprise or an intuitive idea of being free from normative constraints (i.e. freedom without purpose and designed action), is a freedom that does not translate into intelligence, and for this reason, it is retroactively obsolete. To reconstitute a supposed constitution, to draw a functional link between identifying what is normatively good and making it true, to maintain and enhance the good and to endow the pursuit of the better with its own autonomy – such is the course of freedom. But this is also the definition of intelligence as the self-realization of practical freedom and functional autonomy that liberates itself in spite of its constitution.

Adaptation to an autonomous conception of reason – that is, the updating of commitments according to the progressive self-actualization of reason – is a struggle that coincides with the revisionary and constructive project of freedom. The first expression of such freedom is the establishment of an orientation – a hegemonic pointer – that highlights the synthetic and constructible passage that human ought to tread. But to tread this path, we must cross the cognitive Rubicon.

Indeed, the intervening attitude demanded by adaptation to a functionally autonomous reason suggests that the cognitive Rubicon has already been crossed. In order to navigate this synthetic path, there is no point in staring back at what once was, but has now been dissipated – like all illusory images – by the revisionary winds of reason.¹⁶

x

13/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

Reza Negarestani is a philosopher. He has contributed extensively to journals and anthologies and lectured at numerous international universities and institutes. His current philosophical project is focused on rationalist universalism beginning with the evolution of the modern system of knowledge and advancing toward contemporary philosophies of rationalism, their procedures as well as their demands for special forms of human conduct.



something in common aesthetically. They consist of two unitary objects placed together in a symmetrical relation. The objects are rendered more abstract and less functional, and consequently they become qualitatively different.

Both compositions express mirroring – perhaps a fundamental human experience of a relation?

We witness the same mechanism in the picture in the previous page. Einar has arranged the identical night lamps so that they illuminate each other, like one face looking at another face.

Einar could have been interpreting the lamps as faces, since he often pursues animate objects. We might suggest that these lamps are looking at each other, if that thought gives meaning to Einar's actions. However, to claim that this work *means* or symbolizes two faces is a total misunderstanding, and unfortunately too common in prevalent concepts of how art functions.

This work below looks much like the previous one. However, Einar doesn't understand it as a visual work at all. Rather, he is testing what it is like to blow into two balloons at the same time.



The act is not performative, because Einar doesn't intend to be noticed while acting. I nonetheless took the picture and thereby made it visual. Without this picture, Einar's act of blowing into two balloons would have been gone forever.

Below we can see a work that implies a kind of animism. The banana was tired and needed a kettle holder as a blanket.



This work started with lashing two-sided tape around the stereo rack. After a while, the paper on the outside of the tape was removed, exposing the sticky surface. Then you could stick things onto it:



On the left page is a worn sock and a receipt, but they can be swapped. For example, they can be swapped with ribbons.

A very different expression:

structure and function on the levels of economy, society, and politics. Therefore, only explanatory differentiation of levels and cross-level manipulations (complex heuristics) are able to transform dreams of change into reality.

In a hierarchical scenario, lower-level dimensions open upper levels to possibility spaces, which simultaneously expand the possibility of construction and bring about the possibility of revision. At the same time, descriptive plasticity and stabilized mechanisms of upper-level dimensions adjust and mobilize lower-level constructions and manipulations. Combined together, the abilities of lower-levels and upper-levels form the revisionary-constructive loop of engineering.

The engineering loop is a perspectival schema and a map of synthesis. As a map, it distributes both across different levels and as a multitude of covering maps with different descriptive-prescriptive valences over individual levels. The patchwork structure ensures a form of descriptive plasticity and prescriptive versatility, it reduces incoherencies and explanatory conflations and renders the search for problems and opportunities of construction effective by tailoring descriptive and prescriptive covering maps to specificities. As a perspectival compass, it passes through manifest and scientific images (stereoscopic coherence), assumes a view from above and a view from below (telescopic deepening), and integrates various mesoscales which have their own specific and nonextendable explanatory, descriptive, structural, and functional orders (nontrivial synthesis). The revisionary-constructive loop always institutes engineering as *re-engineering*, a process of re-modification, re-evaluation, re-orientation and re-constitution. It is the cumulative effect of engineering (Wimsatt) that corresponds to the functional and structural accumulation of complex systems,¹⁵ as that corrosive substance that eats away myths of foundation and catalyzes a cumulative escape from contingently posited settings.

The error-tolerant and manipulable dimensions of treating the system as a hypothesis and engineering epistemology are precisely the expressions of revision and construction as the two pivotal functions of freedom. Any commitment that prevents revision and does not maintain – or more importantly, expand – the scope of construction ought to be updated. If it cannot be updated, then it ought to be discarded. Freedom only grows out of functional accumulation and refinement, which are characteristics of hierarchical, nested, and therefore decentralized and complex systems. A functional organization consists of functional hierarchies and correct inferential links between

them that permit nontrivial orientation, maintenance, calibration, and enhancement, thereby bringing about opportunities for procedurally turning supposed necessities and fundaments associated with natural causes into manipulable variables of construction.

In a sense, a functional organization can be interpreted as a complex hierarchical system of functional links and functional properties related to both normative and causal functioning. It is able to convert the given order of “is” into the intervening and enabling order of “ought,” where contingently posited natural limits are substituted by necessary but revisable normative constraints. It is crucial to note that construction proceeds under normative constraints (not natural constraints) and natural determinations (hence, realism) that cannot be taken as foundational limits. Functional hierarchies take on the role of ladders or bootstraps through which one casual fabric is appropriated to another, one normative status is pushed to another level.

This is why it is the figure of the engineer, as the agent of revision and construction, who is public enemy number one of the foundation as that which limits the scope of change and impedes the prospects of a cumulative escape. It is not the advocate of transgression or the militant communitarian who is bent on subtracting himself from the system or flattening the system to a state of horizontality. More importantly, this is also why freedom is not an overnight delivery, whether in the name of spontaneity or the will of people, or in the name of exporting democracy. Liberation is a project, not an idea or a commodity. Its effect is not the irruption of novelty, but rather the continuity of a designated form of labor.

Rather than liberation, the condition of freedom is a piecewise structural and functional accumulation and refinement that takes shape as a project of self-cultivation. Structural and functional accumulation and refinement constitute the proper environment for updating commitments, both through the correcting influence of levels over one another and the constructive propensity inherent in functional hierarchies as engines of enablement.

Liberation is neither the initial spark of freedom nor sufficient as its content. To regard liberation as the source of freedom is an eventalist credulity that has been discredited over and over, insofar as it does not warrant the maintaining and enhancing of freedom. But to identify liberation as the sufficient content of freedom produces a far graver outcome: irrationalism, and as a result, the precipitation of various forms of tyranny and fascism.

The sufficient content of freedom can only

12/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

been done or has taken place (or is supposedly the case) and what ought to be done. It is only the sharpening of this distinction that is able to augment the demands of reason and, correspondingly, propel rational agency towards new frontiers of action and understanding.

Augmented rationality is the radical exacerbation of the difference between ought and is. It thereby, from a certain perspective, annuls the myth of restoration and erases any hope for reconciliation between being and thinking. Augmented rationality inhabits what Howard Barker calls the “area of maximum risk” – not risk to humanity per se, but to commitments which have not yet been updated, because they conform to a portrait of human that has not been revised.¹⁰ Understood as the labor of the inhuman, augmented rationality produces a generalized catastrophe for unupdated commitments to human through the amplification of the revisionary and constructive dimensions of “ought.” If reason has a functional evolution of its own, cognitive contumacy against adaptation to the space of reason (the evolution of ought rather than the natural evolution of is) ends in cataclysm.

Adaptation to the evolution of reason – which is the actualization of reason according to its own functional needs – is a matter of updating commitments to the autonomy of reason by way of updating commitments to human. The updating of commitments is impossible without translating the revisionary and constructive dimensions of reason into systematic projects for the revision and construction of human through communal assessment and methodological collectivism. Even though rationalism represents the systematicity of revision and construction, it cannot by itself institute such systematicity. To rephrase, rationalism is not a substitute for a political project, even though it remains the necessary platform that simultaneously informs and orients any consequential political project.

8. A Cultivating Project of Construction and Revision

The automation of reason and discursive practices unlocks new vistas for exercising revision and construction, which is to say, engaging in a systematic project of practical freedom. This is freedom as both the systematicity of knowledge, and as knowledge of the system as a prerequisite for acting on the system. In order to act on the system, it is necessary to know the system. But insofar as the system is nothing but a global integration of tendencies and functions, and insofar as it has neither an intrinsic architecture, nor an ultimate foundation, nor an extrinsic limit, it is imperative

to treat the system as a constructible hypothesis in order to know it. In other words, the system should be understood by way of abductive synthesis and deductive analysis, methodic construction as well as inferential manipulation of its variables distributed at different levels.

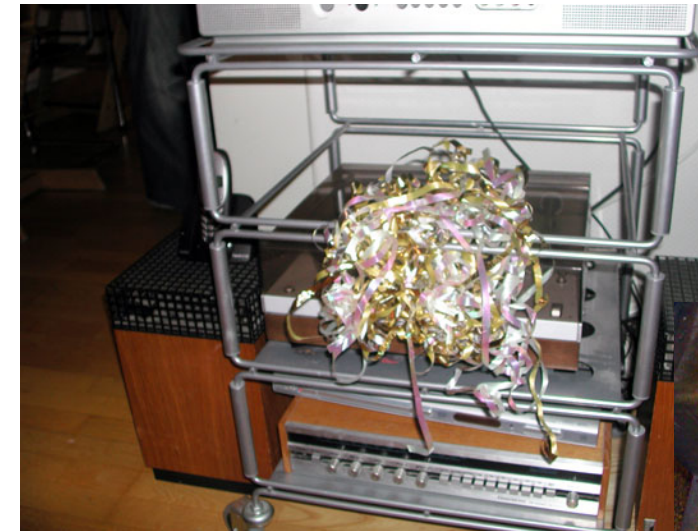
Knowledge of the system is not a general epistemology, but rather, as William Wimsatt emphasizes, an “engineering epistemology.”¹¹ Engineering epistemology – a form of understanding that involves the designated manipulation of causal fabric and the organization of functional hierarchies – is an upgradable armamentarium of heuristics that is particularly attentive to the distinct roles and requirements of different levels and hierarchies. It employs lower-level entities and mechanisms to guide and enhance construction on upper levels. It also utilizes upper-level variables and robust processes to correct lower-level structural and functional hierarchies,¹² but also to renormalize their space of possibilities so as to actualize their constructive potentials, yielding the observables and manipulation conditionals necessary for further construction.¹³

Any political project aimed at genuine change must understand and adapt to the logic of nested hierarchies that is the distinctive feature of complex systems.¹⁴ This is because change cannot be effected except through both structural modifications and functional transformations across different structural layers and functional levels. Numerous intricacies arise from the distribution of nested structural and functional hierarchies. Sometimes, in order to make change at one level, a structural or functional change at a different, seemingly unrelated level must be made. Moreover, what is important is to change functions (whether at economic, social, or political levels). But not every structural change necessarily leads to a functional change, while every functional change – by virtue of functions playing the role of purpose-attainment and dynamic stabilization for the system – results in a structural change (although such an alteration in structure might not take place in the specific structure whose function has just changed).

The significance of nested hierarchies for the implementation of any form of change on any stratum of our life makes the knowledge of different explanatory levels and cross-level manipulation a necessity of utmost importance. Such knowledge is yet to be fully incorporated within political projects. Without the knowledge of structural and functional hierarchies, ambition for change – whether through modification, reorganization or disruption – is misguided by the conflation between different strata of

11/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman



Here tape has been used to attach a book to a chest and to close the lid of the chest. However, the primary intention was probably not to attach the book or to close the lid, and definitely not to create an abstract composition, but to practice taping.



One might call the work on the opposite page performative. During the performance, it was announced that the lopsided frying pan was Finland, while the level frying pan was Norway. Could this be interpreted as Norway being more “proper” than Finland?

Einar has never been to Finland and he doesn't know what a nation is. He probably doesn't have any associations whatsoever with the concept of Finland. “Finland” must be an empty word, useful only as a parallel to the word “Norway,” of which Einar has a fuller understanding – he knows, for instance, that we

live in Norway. Unfortunately, it is still not very clear what makes the level frying pan Norway here.

A less interesting work: it's like someone arranged something without any distinct purpose.



In my opinion, the combination of rubber boots and tiles above has no clear meaning. However, it illustrates a tendency in Einar's installations: an exaggerated principle of order and symmetry, where the symmetry is superior to the logic. It is irrelevant whether the objects have a connection, as long as they're arranged symmetrically.



Einar believes objects only become interesting when photographed. It is therefore less important to spend a lot of time creating a form, and more important to take a snapshot as quickly as possible.

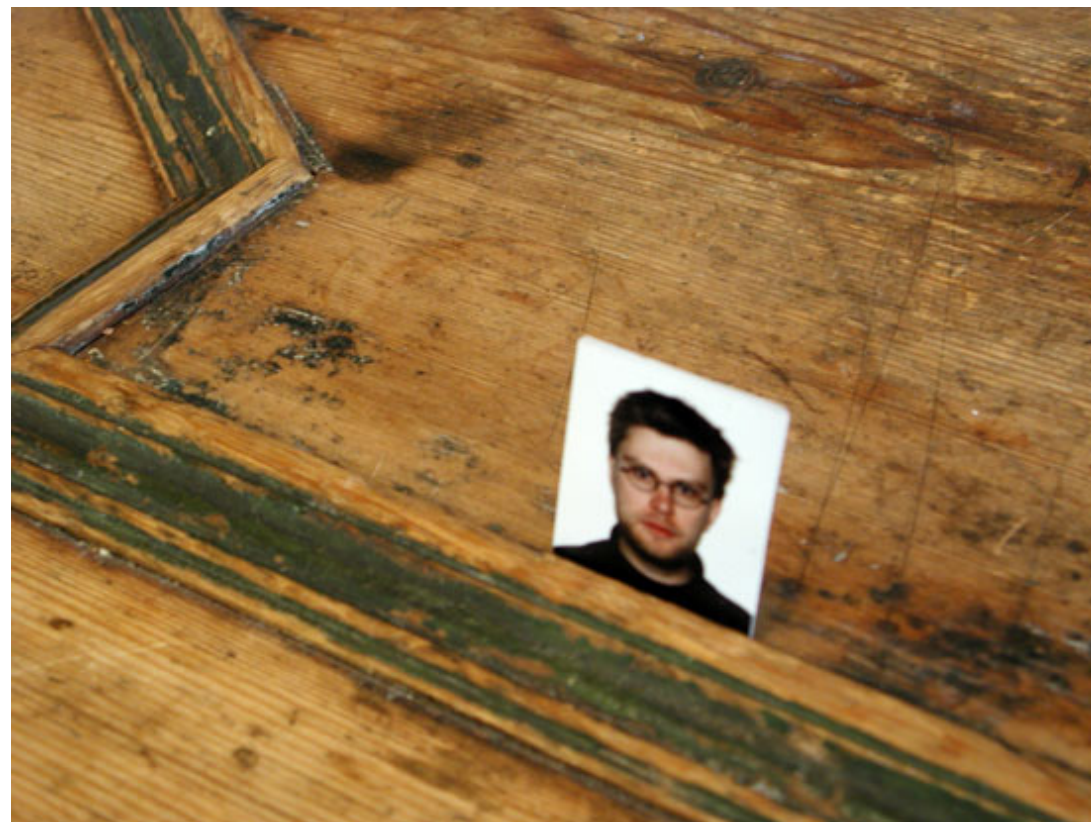
For Einar, initially the point was to *create* a composition. After a while, this shifted to the action of *photographing* the composition. In an artistic context, this shift would have significant meaning. But in the process used by Einar and I, it didn't make much difference whether the point was to create works or to photograph them. The mediated reality and the reality itself were equally real and interesting.

Einar's interventions in the apartment were increasingly imperceptible, like this (a photo of Einar's father placed in the chest) ...

And the image on the next page, a variation on the hanger composition, questionable because I believe Einar copied his earlier work to meet certain expectations.

This principle of order is evident in the image of the candle, too. A washer is placed on top of a candle, not because this combination is interesting or logical, but because the hole in the washer fits the candlewick.

I gave this cauliflower to Einar and asked him to make a sculpture out of it. He just placed it on the table and said it was done. Then he said he wanted to photograph it. This might imply that



something essentially special and non-constructible about thought.

Pragmatic functionalism is concerned with the pragmatic nature of human discursive practices, that is, the ability to reason, to go back and forth between saying and doing *stepwise*. Here, "stepwise" defines the constitution of saying and doing, claims and performances, as a condition of near-decomposability. For this reason, pragmatic functionalism focuses on the decomposability of discursive practices into nondiscursive practices. (What ought one to do in order to count as reasoning or even thinking?). Unlike symbolic or classic AI, pragmatic functionalism does not decompose implicit practices into explicit – that is, logically codifiable – norms. Instead, it decomposes explicit norms into implicit practices, *knowing-that* into *knowing-how* (which is the domain of abilities endowed with bootstrapping capacities – what must be done in order to count as performing something specific?).

According to pragmatic or rationalist functionalism, the autonomy of reason implies the automation of reason, since the autonomy of practices, which is the marker of sapience, suggests the automation of discursive practices by virtue of their algorithmic decomposability into nondiscursive practices. The automation of discursive practices, or the feedback loop between saying and doing, is the veritable expression of reason's functional autonomy and the telos of the disenchantment project. If thought is able to carry out the disenchanting of nature, it is only the automation of discursive practices that is able to disenchant thought.

Here, automation does not imply an identical iteration of processes aimed at effective optimization or strict forms of entailment (monotonicity). It is a register of the functional analysis or practical decomposability of a set of special performances that permits the autonomous bootstrapping of one set of abilities out of another set. Accordingly, automation here amounts to practical enablement or the ability to maintain and enhance the functional autonomy or freedom. The pragmatic procedures involved in this mode of automation perpetually diversify the spaces of action and understanding insofar as the non-monotonic character of practices opens up new trajectories of practical organization and, correspondingly, expands the realm of practical freedom.

Once the game of reason as a domain of rule-based practices is set in motion, reason is able to bootstrap complex abilities out of its primitive abilities. This is nothing but the self-actualization of reason. Reason liberates its own spaces and its own demands, and in the process

fundamentally revises not only what we understand as thinking, but also what we recognize as "us." Wherever there is functional autonomy, there is a possibility of self-actualization or self-realization as an epochal development in history. Wherever self-realization is underway, a closed positive feedback loop between freedom and intelligence, self-transformation and self-consciousness, has been established. The functional autonomy of reason is then a precursor to the self-realization of an intelligence that assembles itself, piece by piece, from the constellation of a discursively elaborative "us" qua *an open-source self*.

Rationalist functionalism, therefore, delineates a nonsymbolic – that is, philosophical – project of general intelligence in which intelligence is fully apprehended as a vector of self-realization through the maintaining and enhancing of functional autonomy. Automation of discursive practices – the pragmatic unbinding of artificial general intelligence and the triggering of new modes of collectivizing practices via linking to autonomous discursive practices – exemplifies the revisionary and constructive edge of reason as sharpened against the canonical self-portrait of human.

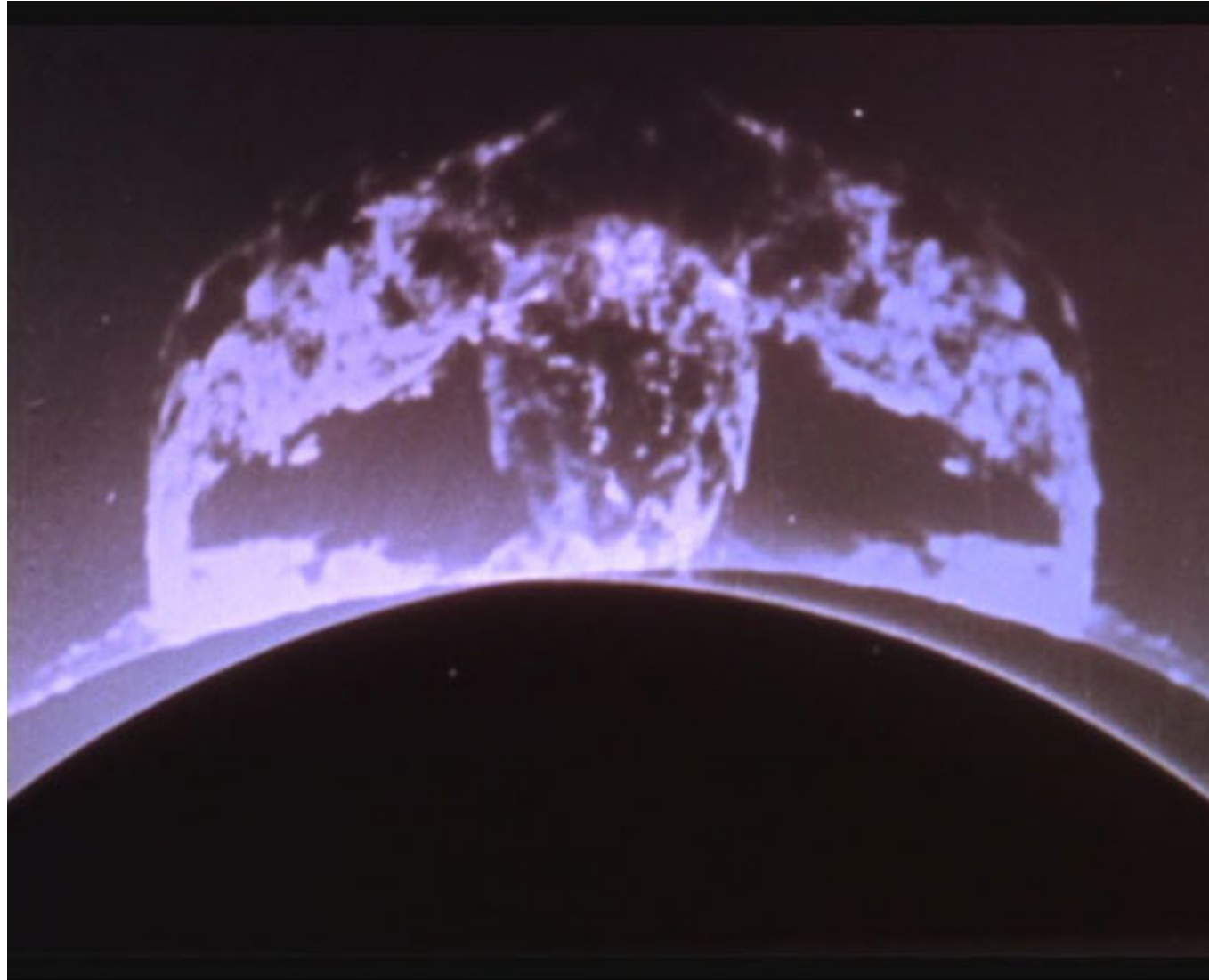
To be free one must be a slave to reason. But to be a slave to reason (the very condition of freedom) exposes one to both the revisionary power and the constructive compulsion of reason. This susceptibility is terminally amplified once the commitment to the autonomy of reason and autonomous engagement with discursive practices are sufficiently elaborated. That is to say, when the autonomy of reason is understood as the automation of reason and discursive practices – the philosophical rather than classically symbolic thesis regarding artificial general intelligence.⁹

7. Augmented Rationality

The automation of reason suggests a new phase in the enablement of reason's revisionary edge and constructive vector. This new phase in the enablement of reason signals the exacerbation of the difference between rational compulsion and natural impulsion, between "ought to" as an intervening obligation and "is" as conformity to what is supposedly or naturally the case (contingency of nature, necessity of foundation, dispositions, conventions, and allegedly necessary limits).

The dynamic sharpening of the difference between "is" and "ought" heralds the advent of what should be called an *augmented rationality*. It is augmented not in the sense of being more rational (just like augmented reality that is not more real than reality), but in the sense of further radicalizing the distinction between what has

09/14



Stan Brakhage, *Prelude: Dog Star Man*, 1962.

03.06.14 / 19:33:30 EST

08/12



03.07.14 / 17:51:45 EST

09/12



08/14



Stan Brakhage, *Twenty-Third Palm Branch*, 1967.

or future-oriented perspective, any political philosophy that boasts of commitments without working out inferential problems and without constructing inferential and functional links suffers from an internal contradiction and an absence of connectivity between commitments. Without inferential links, there is no real updating of commitments. Without a global program of updating, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to prevent humanism from stagnating as an organ of conservatism, and Marxism from sliding into a burlesque of critique, a grab bag of cautionary tales and revolutionary bravado. No matter how sociopolitically adept or determined a political project appears, without a global updating system, such an enterprise is blocked by its own internal contradictions from prescribing any obligation or duty.

Indeed, in its commendable attempt to outline “what ought to be done” in terms of functional organizations, complex hierarchies, and positive feedback loops of autonomy, the recent “#Accelerate Manifesto” signifies a Marxian project that is in the process of updating its commitments.⁵ It should come as no surprise that such an endeavor receives the most derision and scorn from those strains of Marxism which have long since given up on updating their cognitive and practical commitments.

5. Functional Autonomy

The claim about the functional autonomy of reason is not a claim about the genetic spontaneity of reason, since reason is historical and revisable, social and rooted in practice. It is really a claim about the autonomy of discursive practices and the autonomy of inferential links between oughts, that is to say, links between constructive abilities and revisionary obligations. Reason has its roots in social construction, in communal assessment, and in the manipulability of conditionals embedded in modes of inference. It is social partly because it is deeply connected to the origin and function of language as a de-privatizing, communal, and stabilizing space of organization. But we should be careful to extract a “robust” conception of the social, because a generic appeal to social construction risks not only relativism and equivocation but also, as Paul Boghossian points out, a fear of knowledge.⁶ The first movement in the direction of extracting this robust conception of the social is making a necessary distinction between the “implicitly” normative aspect of the social (the area of the consumption and production of norms through practices) and the dimension of the social inhabited by conventions, between norms as intervening attitudes and normalizing norms as conformist dispositions.

07/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

Reason begins with an intervening attitude toward norms implicit in social practices. It is neither separated from nature nor isolated from social construction. However, reason has irreducible needs of its own (Kant) and a constitutive self-determination (Hegel), and it can be assessed only by itself (Sellars). In fact, the first task or question of rationalism is to come up with a conception of nature and the social that allows for the autonomy of reason. This question revolves around a causal regime of nature that allows for the autonomous performance of reason in “acknowledging” laws, whether natural or social. Therefore, it is important to note that rationality is not conduct in accordance with a law, but rather the acknowledging of a law. Rationality is the “conception of law” as a portal to the realm of revisable and navigable rules.

We only become rational agents once we acknowledge or develop a certain intervening attitude toward norms that renders them binding. We do not embrace the normative status of things outright. We do not have access to the explicit – that is, logically codified – status of norms. It is through such intervening attitudes toward the revision and construction of norms through social practices that we make the status of norms explicit.⁷ Contra Hegel, rationality is not codified by explicit norms from the bottom up. To confuse implicit norms accessible through intervening practices with explicit norms is common and risks logicism or intellectualism, i.e., an account of normativity in which explicit norms constitute an initial condition with rules all the way down – a claim already debunked by Wittgenstein’s regress argument.⁸

6. Functional Bootstrapping and Practical Decomposability

The autonomy of reason is a claim about the autonomy of its normative, inferential, and revisionary function in the face of the chain of causes that condition it. Ultimately, this is a (neo)functionalist claim, in the sense of a pragmatic or rationalist functionalism. Pragmatic functionalism must be distinguished from both traditional AI-functionalism, which revolves around the symbolic nature of thought, and behavioral variants of functionalism, which rely on behaviors as sets of regularities. While the latter two risk various myths of pancomputationalism (the unconditional omnipresence of computation, the idea that every physical system can implement every computation) or behavioralism, it is important to note that a complete rejection of functionalism in its pragmatic or Kantian rationalist sense will inevitably usher in vitalism and ineffabilism, the mystical dogma according to which there is

10/12



To me, these repetitions of hangers in different contexts do not seem very inspired.

The picture on the previous page shows a remote control on top of a computer bag's shoulder strap. It's an important work because it's uncertain whether it was deliberately made like this, or whether the objects were randomly tossed there. I couldn't get any certainty on this, and when I thought about it, it suddenly didn't matter anymore. The meaning was equally clear or unclear regardless of whether it was a conscious work or not. I no longer saw the difference in principle between the egg cup arrangement, the cauliflower, and the remote control. One of the egg cups was turned upside down, thus representing a more original aesthetic choice. They looked more like art, and this was intriguing. But, after a while I understood that even if some of these objects looked like art, they weren't art. Or if they were, then the cauliflower and the remote control also had to be art. The placement of the remote control, communicating in some way with the shoulder strap, had an aesthetic dimension.

We had come full circle. We had moved from functional objects, to sculptures, to ready-mades, and then back to functional objects. Neither Einar nor I had noticed any differences, any breaks or borders.

This is Einar's photograph of his toy car. It is nothing special, but there wasn't anything special about the egg cups either.



Everything became equally valid: aesthetic or non-aesthetic, art or non-art, form and content or no form and no content. Many things

look like art, but are not. And many things do not look like art, but are art, or not.



As we traveled down this road toward the abolition of the universal idea of good and bad form, this new attitude toward things infected my surroundings, as if I were inside a zone where all things could be the result of a higher formal awareness: the roads, the chewing gum on the sidewalk, the yellow light over the city on our way home from the kindergarten. Or it could not be; it didn't matter anymore. Everything became art, and in the same moment, nothing.



×
How To Become A Non-Artist is excerpted from a 2007 video by the author.

the past.

To act in tandem with the revisionary vector of the future is not to redeem but to update and revise, to reconstitute and modify. As an activist impulse, redemption operates as a voluntaristic mode of action informed by a preservationist or conserved account of the present. Revision, on the other hand, is an obligation or a rational compulsion to conform to the revisionary waves of the future stirred by the functional autonomy of reason.

4. Autonomy of Reason

But what exactly is the functional autonomy of reason? It is the expression of the self-actualizing propensity of reason – a scenario wherein reason liberates its own spaces despite what naturally appears to be necessary or happens to be the case. Here “necessary” refers to an alleged natural necessity and should be distinguished from a normative necessity. Whereas the given status of natural causes is defined by “is” (something that is purportedly the case because it has been contingently posited, such as the atmospheric condition of the planet), the normative of the rational is defined by “ought to.” The former communicates a supposedly necessary impulsion while the latter is not given,

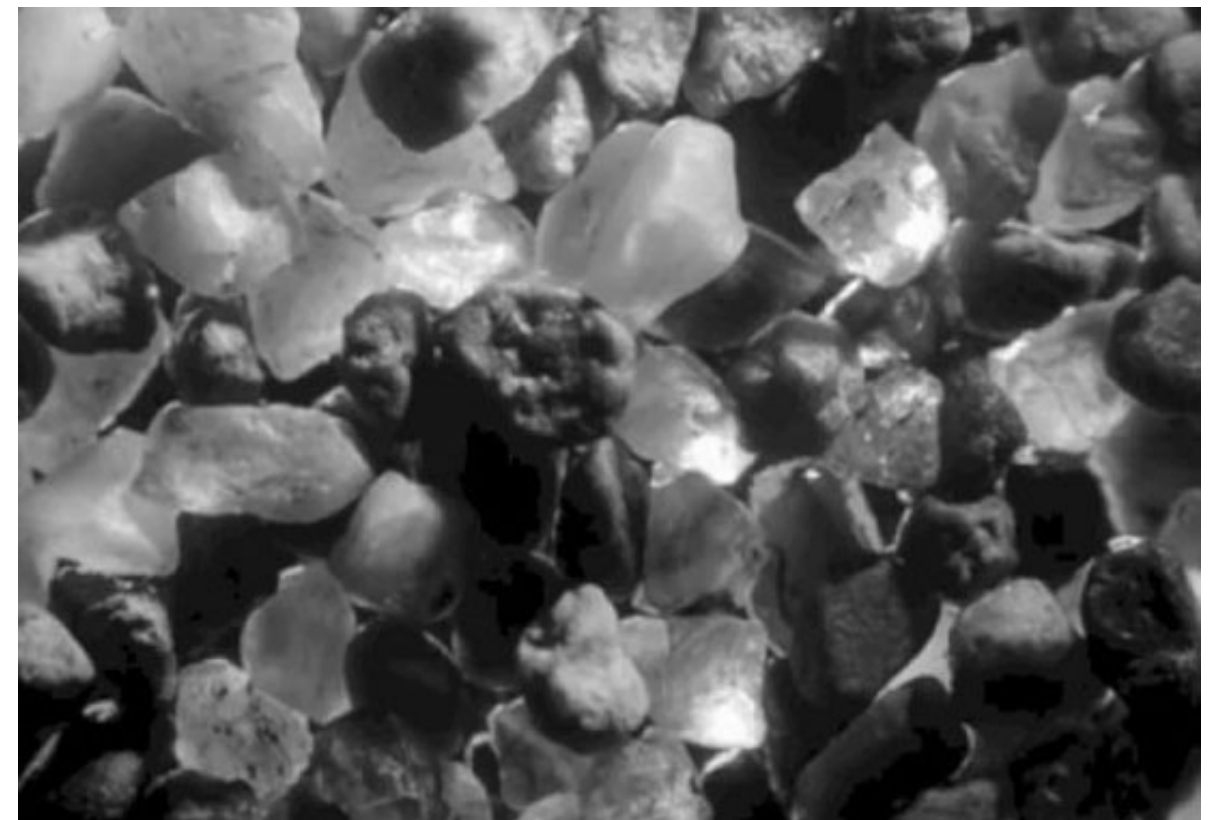
but instead generated by explicitly acknowledging a law or a norm implicit in a collective practice, thereby turning it into a binding status, a conceptual compulsion, an ought.

It is the acknowledging, error-tolerant, revisionary dimension of ought – as opposed to the impulsive diktat of a natural law – that presents ought as a vector of construction capable of turning contingently posited natural necessities into the manipulable variables required for construction. In addition, the order of ought is capable of composing a functional organization, a chain or dynasty of oughts, that procedurally effectuates a cumulative escape from the allegedly necessary *is* crystalized in the order of here and now.

The functional autonomy of reason consists in connecting simple oughts to complex oughts or normative necessities or abilities by way of inferential links or processes. A commitment to humanity, and, consequently, the autonomy of reason, requires not only specifying what oughts or commitment-abilities we are entitled to, but also developing new functional links and inferences that connect existing oughts to new oughts or obligations.

Whether Marxist agenda, humanist creed,

06/14



Magnified grains of sand are shown in the opening sequence of Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes*, 1964.

construct points of liaison – cognitive and practical channels – so as to enable communication between *what we think of ourselves* and *what is becoming of us*.

The ability to recognize the latter is not a given right or an inherent natural aptitude; it is, in fact, a labor, a program, that is fundamentally lacking in current political projects. Being human does not by any means entail the ability to connect with the consequences of what it means to be human. In the same vein, identifying ourselves as human is neither a sufficient condition for understanding what is becoming of us, nor a sufficient condition for recognizing what we are becoming, or more accurately, what is being born out of us.

A political endeavor aligned with antihumanism cannot forestall its descent into a grotesque form of activism. But any sociopolitical project that pledges its allegiance to conservative humanism – whether through a quasi-instrumentalist and preservationist account of reason (such as Habermasian rationality) or a theologically charged meaning of human – enforces the tyranny of here and now under the aegis of a foundational past or a root.

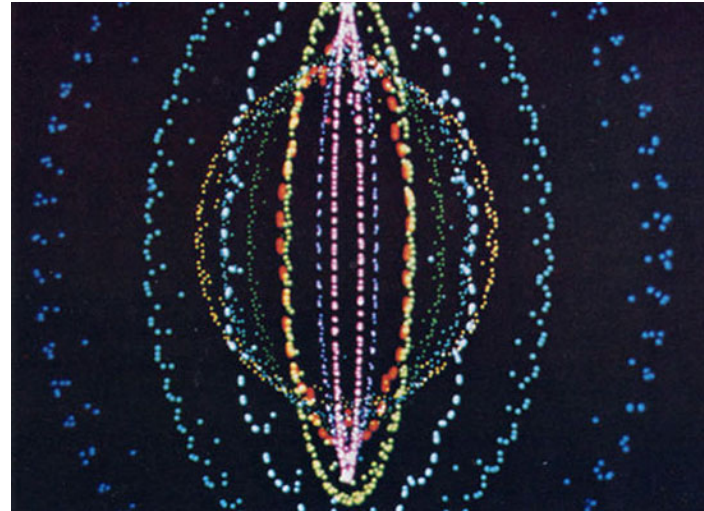
Antihumanism and conservative humanism represent two pathologies of history frequently appearing under the rubrics of conservation and progression – one an account of the present that must preserve the traits of the past, and the other an account of the present that must approach the future while remaining anchored in the past. But the catastrophe of revision erases them from the future by modifying the link between the past and the present.

3. The Revisionary Catastrophe

The definition of humanity according to reason is a minimalist definition whose consequences are not immediately given, but whose ramifications are staggering. If there was ever a real crisis, it would be our inability to cope with the consequences of committing to the real content of humanity. The trajectory of reason is that of a general catastrophe whose pointwise instances and stepwise courses have no observable effect or comprehensive discontinuity. Reason is therefore simultaneously a medium of stability that reinforces proceduralism and a general catastrophe, a medium of radical change that administers the discontinuous identity of reason to an anticipated image of human.

Elaborating humanity according to the discursive space of reason establishes a discontinuity between human's anticipation of itself (what it expects itself to become) and the image of human modified according to its active content or significance. It is exactly this discontinuity that characterizes inhumanism as

the general catastrophe ordained by activating the content of humanity, whose functional kernel is not just autonomous but also compulsive and transformative.



John Whitney, *Permutations*, 1966.

The discernment of humanity requires the activation of the autonomous space of reason. But since this space – qua the content of humanity – is functionally autonomous even though its genesis is historical, its activation implies the deactivation of historical anticipations of what humanity can be or become at a descriptive level. Since antihumanism mostly draws its critical power from this descriptive level either situated in nature (allegedly immune to revision) or in a restricted scope of history (based on a particular anticipation), the realization of the autonomy of reason would restore the nontheological significance of human as an initial necessary condition, thus nullifying the antihumanist critique. What is important to understand here is that one cannot defend or even speak of inhumanism without first committing to the humanist project through the front door of the Enlightenment.

Rationalism as the compulsive navigation of the space of reason turns commitment to humanity into a revisionary catastrophe, by converting its initial commitment into a ramified cascade of collateral commitments which must be navigated in order for it to be counted as commitment. But it is precisely this conversion, instigated and guided by reason, that transforms a commitment into a revisionary catastrophe that travels backward in time from the future, from its revisionary ramifications, in order to interfere with the past and rewrite the present. In this sense, reason establishes a link in history hitherto unimaginable from the perspective of a present that preserves an origin or is anchored in

Ane Hjort Guttu, (b. 1971), is an artist and curator based in Oslo. In recent years she has explored issues of power and freedom in the Scandinavian post-welfare state through video works, picture collections, sculpture, and photography. Guttu also writes critical as well as poetic texts, and several of her projects discuss art and architectural history. Recent projects and exhibitions include: *Bergen Assembly*, Bergen, 2013; *Society Without Qualities*, Tensta konsthall, Stockholm, 2013; *Learning for Life*, Henie Onstad kunstsenter, 2012–2013; *The Rich Should be Richer*, Kunsthall Oslo, 2012; and *West of the East*, Y Gallery, Minsk 2012. Her forthcoming projects include: Sydney Biennial, Australia, 2014; *In These Great Times*, Kunstnerens hus, Oslo; *Les Ateliers de Rennes*, France, 2014; and a new short film for Tensta konsthall, Sweden.

Kim Turcot DiFruscia Shapes of Freedom: A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli

01/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 — Kim Turcot DiFruscia
Shapes of Freedom: A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli

Kim Turcot DiFruscia: Liberalism’s “work” on the body is at the heart of your thought. In your book *The Empire of Love* (2006), you make a conceptual distinction between “carnality” and “corporeality.” How do you pose the sexual body through that distinction?

Elizabeth A. Povinelli: *Empire of Love* makes a distinction between “carnality” and “corporeality” for a set of analytical reasons: to try to understand materiality in late-liberal forms of power and to try to make the body matter in post-essentialist thought. If we think with Foucault then we understand that objects are object-effects, that authors are author-effects, that subjects are subject-effects, and that states are state-effects. And if we think after the critique of metaphysics of substance – say, with Judith Butler – then we no longer think that the quest is to find substances in their pre-discursive authenticity. Instead, we try to think about how substances are produced. I believe we are now accustomed to thinking like this. But something paradoxical happened on the way to learning about object-effects and learning how to critique the metaphysics of substance: the world became rather plastic and the different “modalities of materiality” were evacuated from our analysis. It left some of us with questions like: How can we grasp some of the qualities of a material object that is nevertheless a discursive object? How can we talk about subject-effects and object-effects without making materiality disappear or making its different manifestations irrelevant to the unequal organization of social life? How can we simultaneously recognize that discourse makes objects appear, that it does so under different material conditions, and that the matter that matters from discourse is not identical to discourse? Of course, this is a slippery path; the peril is that we will fall back into metaphysics of substance.

“Corporeality” would be the way in which dominant forms of power shape and reshape materiality, how discourses produce categories and divisions between categories – human, nonhuman, person, nonperson, body, sex, and so forth – and “carnality” would be the material manifestations of that discourse which are neither discursive nor pre-discursive. When we talk about sexuality, but also about race and the body, I think this analytic distinction matters. In *The Empire of Love*, I first try to show how it matters and second how difficult it is to speak about those material matters without falling back into a metaphysics of substance. For instance, in the first chapter, “Rotten Worlds,” I track how a sore on my body is discursively produced, and how the multiple discursive productions of this sore are simultaneously a production of socialities and social obligations.

prescriptions provided by a conservative humanism. Conservative humanism places the consequentiality of human in an overdetermined meaning or an over-particularized set of descriptions which is fixed and must at all times be preserved by any prescription developed by and for humans. Inhumanism, on the other hand, finds the consequentiality of commitment to humanity in its practical elaboration and in the navigation of its ramifications. For the true consequentiality of a commitment is a matter of its power to generate other commitments, to update itself in accordance with its ramifications, to open up spaces of possibility, and to navigate the revisionary and constructive imports such possibilities may contain.

The consequentiality of commitment to humanity, accordingly, lies not in how parameters of this commitment are initially described or set. Rather, it lies in how the pragmatic meaning of this commitment (its meaning through use) and the functionalist sense of its descriptions (what must we do in order to count as human?) intertwine to effectuate broad consequences that are irreconcilable with what was initially the case. It is consequentiality in the latter sense that overshadows consequentiality in the former sense, before it fully proves the former’s

descriptive poverty and prescriptive inconsequentiality through a thoroughgoing revision.

As Robert Brandom notes, every “consequence is a change in normative status” that may lead to incompatibilities between commitments.⁴ Therefore, in order to maintain the undertaking, we are obliged to do something specific to resolve the incompatibilities. From the perspective of inhumanism, the more discontinuous the consequences of committing to humanity, the greater are the demands of doing something to rectify our undertakings (ethical, legal, economic, political, technological, and so forth). Inhumanism highlights the urgency of action according to a tide of revision that increasingly registers itself as a discontinuity, a growing rift with no possibility of restoration.

Any sociopolitical endeavor or consequential project of change must first address this rift – or discontinuity effect – and then devise a necessary course of action in accordance with it. But doing something about the discontinuity effect – triggered by unanticipated consequences and, as a result, the exponentially growing change in normative status (that is, the demands of what ought to be done) – is not tantamount to an act of restoration. On the contrary, the task is to

04/14



Food rations transported in an assembly line in Richard Fleischer’s 1973 movie, *Soylent Green*.

argued – is the initial condition of inhumanism as a force that travels back from the future to alter, if not to completely discontinue, the command of its origin.

1. The Picture of “Us” Drawn in Sand

The practical elaboration of making a commitment to humanity is inhumanism. If making a commitment means fully elaborating the content of such a commitment (the consequent “what else?” of what it means to be human), and if to be human means being able to enter the space of reason, then a commitment to humanity must fully elaborate how the abilities of reason functionally convert sentience to sapience.

But insofar as reason enjoys a functional autonomy – which enables it to prevent the collapse of sapience back into sentience – the full elaboration of the abilities of reason entails unpacking the consequences of the autonomy of reason for human. Humanism is by definition a project to amplify the space of reason through elaborating what the autonomy of reason entails and what demands it makes upon us. But the autonomy of reason implies its autonomy to assess and construct itself, and by extension, to renegotiate and construct that which distinguishes itself by entering the space of reason. In other words, the self-cultivation of reason, which is the emblem of its functional autonomy, materializes as staggering consequences for humanity. What reason does to itself inevitably takes effect as what it does to human.

Since the functional autonomy of reason implies the self-determination of reason with regard to its own conduct – insofar as reason cannot be assessed or revised by anything other than itself (to avoid equivocation or superstition) – commitment to such autonomy effectively exposes what it means to be human to the sweeping revisionary effect of reason. In a sense, the autonomy of reason is the autonomy of its power to revise, and commitment to the autonomy of reason (via the project of humanism) is a commitment to the autonomy of reason’s revisionary program over which human has no hold.

Inhumanism is exactly the activation of the revisionary program of reason against the self-portrait of humanity. Once the structure and the function of commitment are genuinely understood, we see that a commitment works its way back from the future, from the collateral commitments of one’s current commitment, like a corrosive revisionary acid that rushes backward in time. By eroding the anchoring link between present commitments and their past, and by seeing present commitments from the

perspective of their ramifications, revision forces the updating of present commitments in a cascading fashion that spreads globally over the entire system. The rational structure of a commitment, or more specifically, of commitment to humanity, constructs the opportunities of the present by cultivating the positive trends of the past through the revisionary forces of the future. Once you commit to human, you effectively start erasing its canonical portrait backward from the future. It is, as Foucault suggests, the unyielding wager on the fact that the self-portrait of man will be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.² Every portrait drawn is washed away by the revisionary power of reason, permitting more subtle portraits with so few canonical traits that one should ask whether it is worthwhile or useful to call what is left behind human at all.

Inhumanism is the labor of rational agency on human. But there is one caveat here: the rational agency is not personal, individual, or necessarily biological. The kernel of inhumanism is a commitment to humanity via the concurrent construction and revision of human as oriented and regulated by the autonomy of reason, i.e., its self-determination and responsibility for its own needs. In the space of reason, construction entails revision, and revision demands construction. The revision of the alleged portrait of human implies that the construction of human in whatever context can be exercised without recourse to a constitutive foundation, a fundamental identity, an immaculate nature, a given meaning, or a prior state. In short, revision is a license for further construction.

2. When We Lost Contact with “What Is Becoming of Us”

Whereas, as Michael Ferrer points out, antihumanism is devoted to the unfeasible task of deflating the conflation of human significance with human veneration, inhumanism is a project that begins by dissociating human significance from human glory.³ Resolving the content of conflation and extracting significance from its honorific residues, inhumanism then takes humanism to its ultimate conclusions. It does so by constructing a revisable picture of us that functionally breaks free from our expectations and historical biases regarding what this image should be, look like, or mean. For this reason, inhumanism, as it will be argued later, prompts a new phase in the systematic project of emancipation – not as a successor to other forms of emancipation but a critically urgent and indispensable addition to the growing chain of obligations.

Moreover, inhumanism disrupts a future anticipation built on descriptions and

Sores are endemic in the indigenous communities in which I have been working for the last twenty-five years or so in northern Australia. If I put my trust in the people whom I have known better than almost anybody else in my life, I would say that my sore came from contact with a particular Dreaming, from a particular ancestral site – which is actually not ancestral because it is alive. But this belief – or stating this belief as a truth – isn’t supported by the world as it is currently organized; or, it is supported only if they and I agree that this truth is “merely” a cultural belief. But if the sore is thought of as staphylococcus or as anthrax or as the effect of the filthiness of Aboriginal communities, as it has been by physicians in Montreal or Chicago or by Darwin, then this thought meets a world which treats it as truth, as fact. These ways of examining the sore would fall under the concept of corporeality: How is the body and its illnesses being shaped by multiple, often incommensurate discourses? How are these discourses of inclusion and exclusion always already shaping and differentiating bodies, socialities, and social obligations – mine and those of my indigenous colleagues?

And yet the concept of corporeality is not sufficient. Whether the sore is an eruption of a

Dreaming or the effect of poor health care and housing and structures of racism, it still sickens the body – and depending how one’s body has been cared for, or is being cared for, it sickens it in different ways and to different degrees. Over time, sores such as the one I had on my shoulder, as discussed in *Empire of Love*, often lead to heart valve problems, respiratory problems, and other health problems for my indigenous friends. In other words, no matter what the sore is from a discursive point of view, no matter what causes it to appear as “thing,” the sore also slowly sickens a body – a material corrodes a form of life. And this slow corrosion of life is part of the reason why, if you are indigenous in Australia, your life runs out much sooner than non-indigenous Australians. And if the state provides you rights based on longevity – think here of the stereotype of the old traditional person – but you are dying on average ten to twenty years sooner than nonindigenous people, then the carnal condition of your body is out of sync with the apparatus of cultural recognition. But this body-out-of-sync is a more complex matter than merely the discourse that has produced it, nor is it going merely where discourse directs it. Carnality therefore becomes vital to understanding the dynamics of power. I would say that Brian

03/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

02/10



Aboriginal activists protested outside Parliament House in Canberra on Australia Day, 1972. The police eventually attempted to dismantle violently the tents that made up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, an event which attracted the media, and an outraged public expressed its disgust to the federal government.

Massumi and Rosi Braidotti are engaged in similar projects.¹ But my theoretical, conceptual interlocutors are a more motley crew: American pragmatism, Chicago metapragmatics, Foucault, Deleuze, late Wittgenstein, Heidegger and his concept of precognitive interpretation, what Bourdieu borrowed and turned into *doxa*. All of these folks are in a conversation in two important ways: first, they assume the immanent nature of social life, and second, they are interested in the organization and disorganization, the channeling and blockage, of immanent social life. I take for granted that an *otherwise* exists everywhere in the world, but my question is: What are the institutions that make certain forms of *otherwise* invisible and impractical? And one answer takes me to the corporeal and the other to the carnal.

When I think about sexuality and race I think about them through this dual materiality. I think about sexuality and race primarily as corporeal regimes. And when I think of them as corporeal regimes, then the question for me is, what are the discourses that shape and reshape the flesh and its affects? This is where the civilizational division between the autological subject and the genealogical subject comes into the picture. Your body and mind might be female, but this

03/10

discursive fold is apprehended differently than my female friends in Australia because, striated through gender, sexual, and racial difference is another discursive division of late liberalism: the divide between the autological subject and the genealogical subject.

KTD: To say that the autological/genealogical divide is the configuration of institutional power prior to the sexual divide seems confrontational to feminism ...

EP: Certainly in *The Empire of Love*, but also across my writings, I have kind of stubbornly refused to say how my work relates to feminism. In fact, *Empire of Love* begins in a somewhat confrontational way, not exactly with feminism, but with sexuality, sexual theory, and queer theory. I say that I am not interested in sexuality or the woman question or for that matter the race question in the abstract. I am interested in them only insofar as they are what organizes, disorganizes, and distributes power and difference. Of course, I think this makes me a feminist – and certainly a queer! But when I think about what organizes, disorganizes, and distributes power and difference, I am led to a set of more intractable issues, below a certain field of visibility as defined by identity

02/14



A Land Rights demonstration parade took place at Parliament House, Canberra, 1972. Photo: National Library of Australia/Ken Middleton.



God Told Me To, a 1976 Larry Cohen film, follows a detective trying to solve a series of murders whose perpetrators claim to have been ordered by God. This still is from the opening sequence of the movie.

Reza Negarestani

The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

01/14

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Reza Negarestani
The Labor of the Inhuman, Part II: The Inhuman

Continued from “The Labor of the Inhuman, Part I: Human”

Enlightened humanism as a project of *commitment to humanity*, in the entangled sense of what it means to be human and what it means to make a commitment, is a rational project. It is rational not only because it locates the meaning of human¹ in the space of reasons as a specific horizon of practices, but also and more importantly, because the concept of commitment it adheres to cannot be thought or practiced as a voluntaristic impulse free of ramifications and growing obligations. Instead, this is commitment as a rational system for navigating collateral commitments – their ramifications as well as their specific entitlements – that result from making an initial commitment.

Interaction with the rational system of commitments follows a navigational paradigm in which the ramifications of an initial commitment must be compulsively elaborated and navigated in order for this commitment to make sense as an undertaking. It is the examination of the rational fallout of making a commitment, the unpacking of its far-reaching consequences, and the treating of these ramifications as paths to be explored that shapes commitment to humanity as a navigational project. Here, navigation is not only a survey of a landscape whose full scope is not given; it is also an exercise in the non-monotonic procedures of steering, plotting out routes, suspending navigational preconceptions, rejecting or resolving incompatible commitments, exploring the space of possibilities, and understanding each path as a hypothesis leading to new paths or a lack thereof – transits as well as obstructio-ns.

From a rational perspective, a commitment is seen as a cascade of ramifying paths that is in the process of expanding its frontiers, developing into an evolving landscape, unmooring its fixed perspectives, deracinating any form of rootedness associated with a fixed commitment or immutable responsibilities, revising links and addresses between its old and new commitments, and finally, erasing any image of itself as “what it was supposed to be.”

To place the meaning of human in the rational system of commitments is to submit the presumed stability of this meaning to the perturbing and transformative power of a landscape undergoing comprehensive changes under the revisionary thrust of its ramifying destinations. By situating itself in the rational system of commitments, humanism posits itself as an initial condition for what already retroactively bears a minimal resemblance, if any at all, to what originally set it in motion. Sufficiently elaborated, humanism – it shall be

categories. And these issues cut across liberal forms of intimacies, the market, and politics. These concrete formations of liberal power took me to the division of the autological subject and genealogical society rather than to the sexual division.

KTD: Is it because you feel that the sex/gender question is a liberal question?

EP: What I find a liberal question is not the sex/gender question but the organization of “identity” (whether sex, sexuality, gender, or race) on the basis of a fantasy of self-authorizing freedom. By self-authorizing freedom I mean the bootstrap relationship between the “I” of enunciation and the “I” enunciating – what do I think, what do I desire, I am what I am, I am what I want. And the trouble with this form of bootstrap performativity is not merely that it is a phantasmagorical figure of liberalism but that it continually projects its opposite into the worlds of others. What is projected is the equally phantasmagorical figure of the genealogical society – society as a thing that threatens to control and determine my relation to myself. Thus “freedom” and its “threat” are co-constituted. The freedom of the autological subject, on which demands for same-sex marriage or self-elaborated gender identity are based, is always pivoted against fantasies of communities lacking this performative form of freedom. And just to be clear, I do not believe that there are actually genealogical societies and autological societies. Instead, there is a demand that one give an account of what she is doing in terms of this discursive division. In other words, the division of the autological subject and genealogical society is not about differences in the world. It is about a differential spacing of the world. Thus, sex/gender, sexuality, and other forms of difference aren’t liberal per se. They become liberal when they are organized through this late-liberal division and become legitimate vis-à-vis this division.

KTD: Why did you choose love and intimacy as the place from which to discern these liberal processes of legitimation?

EP: When liberals experience themselves as facing an instance of a so-called morally repugnant form of life, they insist that not all forms of life should be allowed to exist – or to be given the dignity of public reason. Too much difference is said to lie outside reasonable disagreement. The political theorist Michael Walzer’s work is exemplary of these approaches, for instance.² This is an irresolvable limit internal to liberalism’s account of itself. In *Cunning*, I was interested in how recognition projects this internal liberal tension between public reason and moral sense onto the subject of recognition and says to her, “You figure out how to be

different enough so we can feel you are not me, but not so different that I am forced to annihilate you and thereby fracture the foundation of my exceptionalism.”

In *Empire* I became more interested in the discursive content of the liberal governance of difference rather than merely its interactional dynamic, and in the dispersed sites of liberal governance. This is why I ask, how do we practice our deep, thick everyday lives so that we continually perpetuate the way that liberalism governs difference, even when we seem to be doing nothing more than kissing our lover goodbye? Every time we kiss our lover goodbye within liberal worlds, we project into the world the difference between the autological subject (the recursive ideology of the subject of freedom, the subject that chooses her life), and the genealogical society (the supra-individual agency threatening to condition our choice). The intimate event is an anchor point because it seems to me to be the densest, smallest knot where the irrevocable unity of this division is expressed. What do I mean by an irrevocable unity? In the intimate event the subject says two things simultaneously. On the one hand, the subject says, “This is my love, nobody can choose it for me, I am the author of my intimacy.” Love is thereby treated as uniquely and unequivocally autological.

Forget Marx – the only thing that we have that is really ours is love! But at the same time, the subject also thinks, feels, evaluates love in terms of its radical, unchosen quality: “Love happens, I fall in love, I hope it happens to me,” like I were struck by lightning. And the intimate event is an unavoidable anchor point. Even those people who might say that they will not love, that they hate love, that they do not want to love, must have to have a relationship to love.

KTD: We understand that liberalism needs love to be projected in social forms of constraint such as marriage, but why is this particular metaphysical, almost magical ideology of love needed?

EP: In love, the subject paradoxically realizes that she is never only autological; that “something” like a lightning strike has to happen to her which is out of her control, whether this event comes from the outside or from an inside so internal that it might as well be outside. Love is where the autological subject expresses herself most profoundly and where genealogical constraint expresses itself more purely. It is right there that you can see the liberal division that organizes social life collapse into itself and then explode outward. Paradoxically, it is in the moment the divide collapses in the intimate event that the differences between civilizational orders seem clearest to liberal subjects. The

04/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014 Kim Turcott DiFruscia
Shapes of Freedom: A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli

moment the liberal subject of love, the liberal subject *in* love, experiences her inability to author the event of love, she insists there is a vast and insurmountable difference between societies of freedom and societies of social constraint. One is tempted to become a psychoanalyst to explain this. And no wonder it seems metaphysical. But it comes from within and sets up specific social orders.

KTD: Social orders such as the ones set up by identity politics?

EP: Yes. One of the reasons why I wanted to write *The Cunning of Recognition* (2002) was to start to push back against the seductions of identity. I started graduate school in the eighties with a background in philosophy. A while after, I went to Australia on a fellowship and the indigenous friends I made there needed an anthropologist. Under the Land Rights Act, a piece of legislation that allowed indigenous Australian's to sue for the return of their land, indigenous groups had to be represented by an anthropologist and a lawyer. I had no intention of becoming a lawyer! So I left aside my "great" books and entered graduate school at Yale in anthropology. This was in 1986, at exactly the moment when the field, like many other disciplines, was reflecting on its enmeshment in worlds of power, including colonialism and imperialism. And then the book *Writing Culture* came out. So huge fights were breaking out, with people accusing other people of racism, colonialism, homophobia, objectivism, scientism. One response to these charges was the collapse of the object of study into the identity of the studier. Many tremendous studies have come out of this maneuver. But what was lost was how the critique of power might impact at a deeper, richer level with immanent forms of social obligation beyond given articulations of identity. The threat was that everyone became merely what identity-form existed, and in the most deracinated of ways. No one is merely the given form of identity. Every identity is shot through with unnamable networks of deep unspecifiable, unnamable obligation. And these nonreferential forms of obligation were abandoned. The task isn't to think about oneself or one's personal history, but instead to remain in the obligations that we find ourselves responding to, while at the same time understanding the arts of governance that disrupt and contain and redirect these immanent modes of obligation.

KTD: In your last book, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), as well as in *The Empire of Love*, you specify that you are interested in late-liberal formations of power. Can you explain the relationship of late liberalism to neoliberal

modes of governance? How is the distinction useful politically?

EP: I have gone back and forth between reserving the phrase "late liberalism" for the liberal governance of difference that began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s as liberal governments responded to a series of legitimacy crises coming from anticolonial, anti-imperial, and new social movements, and using the same phrase to refer to the internal and external conditions and dynamics of contemporary European and Anglo-American governance as two of its key pillars, neoliberalism and multiculturalism, emerged in the 1970s and are now undergoing significant stress. My vacillation is symptomatic of the absolute need to distinguish these two modes of governance, to never let either out of the sight of the other. From a political point of view of collective and legitimate action, the neoliberal governance of economies and the multicultural governance of difference were always about the conservation of a specific form of social organization and distribution of life and goods. How can this be when these two forms were new twists in liberal capitalism? How could they be conserving older forms of social organization and be a new form of social organization at the same time?

What interests me is the conservation of differential powers as capitalism was understood as liberation from the market and liberal values were liberated from liberalism. How are these changes conditioned by events inside and outside Europe and the Anglo-American region? How are the consequences of these changes reflected in the forms and affects of liberal governance? What forms of liberal economic and social governance are emerging as the center of economic vitality shifts from the US and Europe to Asia and South America? What is liberalism becoming as nondemocratic forms of capitalism are a central engine of the global economy; nonelected "technocratic" governments are proliferating in Europe; social protest and massive youth unemployment are ubiquitous; secular and religious imaginaries compete on the street; and slums proliferate as the major form of social dwelling in the south and suburbs become ghettos in the north?

KTD: You wrote about Genet's *Querelle de Brest* in "Notes on Gridlock: Genealogy, Intimacy, Sexuality."³ If we cut ourselves from thoughts on identity, recognition, or deliberative democracy, how can an experiment in the ethics of radical loneliness similar to Querelle's still maintain roots or connections in these obligations?

EP: Lee Edelman, and Leo Bersani, who has written so provocatively about Genet, thinks the queer against the common, the communitarian.⁴

1
See, among others, Brian Massumi, "Introduction: Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't," in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1–22; and Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

2
See, among others, Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward A More Egalitarian Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

3
Public Culture vol. 14, no. 1 (2002): 215–238.

4
See Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

5
Social Analysis vol. 49, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 173–181.

recent federal intervention has conserved this division, even as it has inverted the value of genealogy. The federal intervention maintained the distinction between the people of freedom and the people of cultural determination. But now indigenous culture is the cause of indigenous pathology rather than the cure for it.

09/10



Anton Weber Junior, *Untitled*, 1960. The doll pictured here is by artist and puppeteer Martha Khun-Werber.

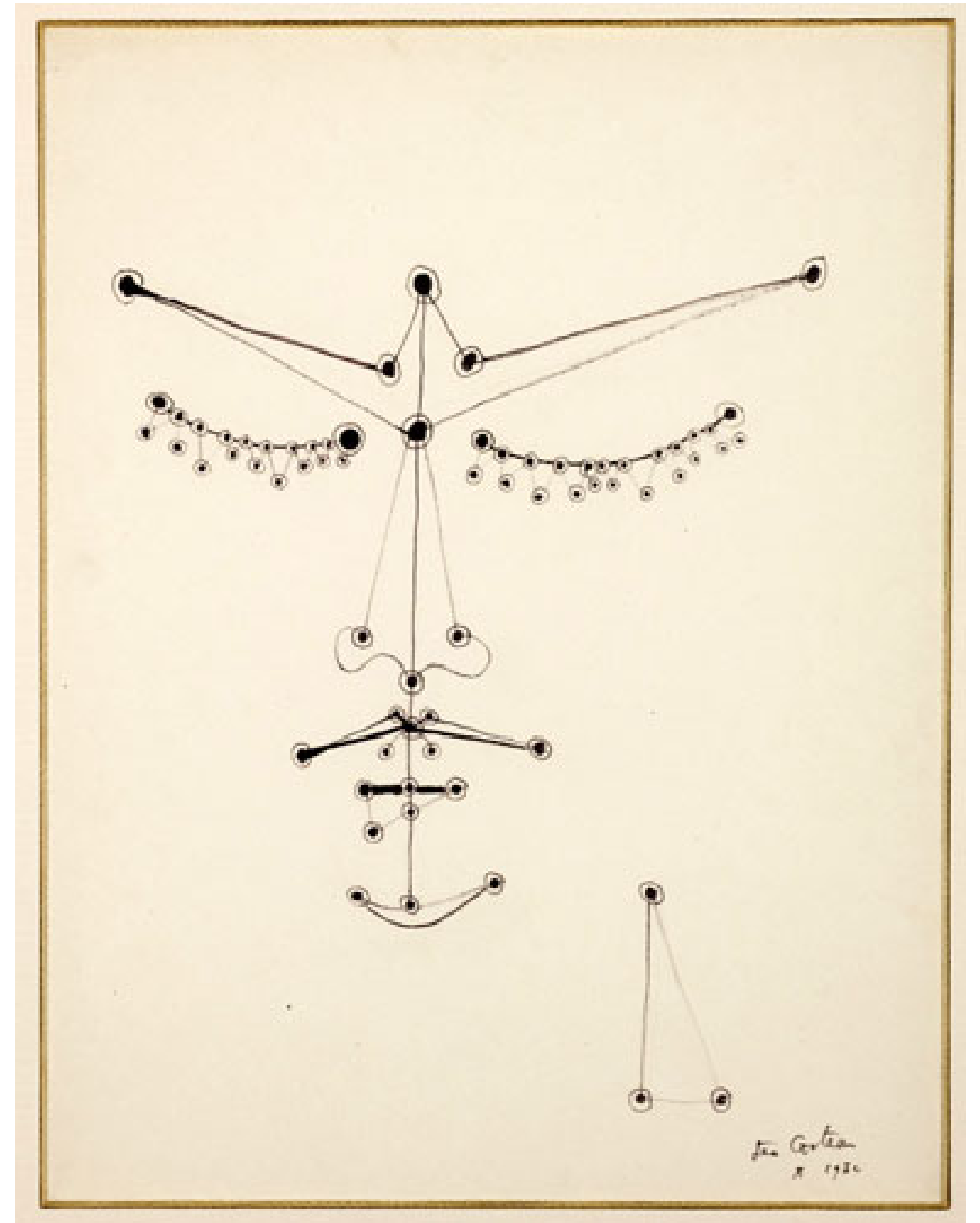
So a good question for me would be one that opened a new line of thinking, such as, how might we rethink the spaces of the *otherwise* in terms of obligation and care, or exhaustion and persistence?

x

A longer version of this interview was originally published as "A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli" in the second volume of *Tran-Scripts*, an interdisciplinary online journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences based at the University of California, Irvine.

Elizabeth A. Povinelli is Professor of Anthropology and Gender Studies at Columbia University. Her works include *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006), and *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (2002).

Kim Turcot DiFruscia is a Ph.D Candidate and Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Université de Montréal. Her research interests include the political experience of management, the history of corporate subjectivation, human resource management, and psychological governmentality under late liberalism.



Jean Cocteau, *Orphée Aux Yeux Perlés* [Orpheus with pearl eyes], 1950. Drawing.

The queer for them refers to the practices or events of radical social, psychic, and epistemological disruption. They understand the queer to be located in (or to be) the unclosable gaps that open in discourse, psyche, and epistemology – say, between rhetoric and grammar. In these spaces, all forms of normality are shattered and no new hegemonic forms have yet emerged. So, queering would be the shattering of a given sociality, identity, or community without the desire or promise of a new sociality, identity, or community. In Bersani's way of putting it, queer moments are moments in which the self is liquified.

07/10



Querelle de Brest (1947), frontispiece of an unidentified edition of the book.

Honestly, I personally find these spaces, these moments, exhilarating. But I worry that a blanket valorization of these moments of liquification, shattering, and dissolving dangerously under-theorizes the unity of such shattering. What are the consequences of this kind of shattering if you are indigenous in Australia, when your life is already shattered, is shattering all of the time, and not because you are Querelle perusing the docks but because the liberal structures, said to recognize your worth, are instead constantly shattering your life-world? Thus, I think queer theory needs to do two

things. First, yes, it needs to define queer on the basis of the shattering of subjectivity and the sheering of normativity, but also, second, it needs to demonstrate how this shattering is not itself a unified phenomenon. Indigenous friends of mine might live in zones of liquification, but their “queerness” is of a very different sort than my queerness. My liquifications might well help enhance my life, whereas theirs might not.

KTD: So do you wish to add a little incommunicability?

EP: And stir? Well. I wish to understand the goods and harms of *in*communicability itself and to understand how these goods and harms are always already socially distributed. So, some groups seek to be incommunicable – or incommensurate – while others are structurally located within the incommensurate spaces of late liberalism. Their *logos* are made noise, made incommunicable, even if they are trying to communicate. And you see how different this is from Querelle's queer cultivating of an incommunicable self. And if queer theory doesn't acknowledge this difference, it flattens the social field. I love Genet's *Querelle*, but one must understand that the benefits and harms of living a shattered life are socially distributed. Again, this is why I am interested in both corporeality and carnality. One can celebrate Querelle's life on the docks. One can celebrate the docks in New York in the seventies. One can celebrate the various *otherwise*s that emerge in indigenous communities. But what is it to live these various forms of life from a carnal point of view? What are the outcomes for bodies and assemblages of bodies?

KTD: In “What's Love Got to Do with It?,” you wrote about how “violence against women” is used as an excuse for genealogizing indigenous communities.⁵ Can you explain how you understand this resort to violence and sexual violence in liberal arguments?

EP: Let me answer that question by first providing a certain intellectual history to how I think about violence. At the University of Chicago there was a group called the Late Liberalism Group. The members were Michael Warner, Saba Mahmood, Lauren Berlant, Candace Vogler, Elaine Hadley, Rolph Trouillot, Patchen Markell, and myself. One of the things we were puzzling about was how to think about violence diagonally to liberal accounts of violence. How do we refuse the way liberalism divides violence and nonviolence? How do we penetrate violence, acknowledge it outside of definitions of violence engendered by liberal arts of governance? That was the framework within which I began to think about violence, which is such a sticky matter. Violence is not – any more than the queer – an ontological category that we can define and then

correlate to objects in the world according to how well they fit the definition. Violence is organized by liberal discourses, such as the autological/genealogical divide. And one of the ways I try to angle into violence is by moving away from violence and thinking about care, and how forms of what constitutes care have shifted in late liberalism. For one thing, there is a shift in the location of care – from the Keynesian state, which provided a minimal level of care, a minimal level of vitality, to those most in need, to the current neoliberal state, which removes this cellar of care and shifts the responsibilities of care from the state to the individual. Foucault began teasing out this shift in *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1979). He argued that neoliberalism is not laissez-faire anymore. It is not about leaving the market alone. It is about aggressively expanding the logic of the market to all aspects of life so that market principles actually become human principles that organize life, government, intimacy, and so forth. Thus, in neoliberalism, “caring for others” involves removing the social resources of care and inserting market evaluations and values. The arts of governance use the same word across the shift – “care” – but the social organization of care has changed dramatically.

This shift makes certain statements impractical and infelicitous. Certain statements do not have practical traction in the world. Why don't we think that removing social welfare is a form of state killing? Especially when the neoliberal state says that its way of “caring” will make life unviable for many. “Life is going to get much worse,” we are told, “but just wait and then things will get better.” Why do we think of this as care and not as state abuse? How long are we willing to give late-liberal forms of care-as-enervation before we are willing to call them a form of killing? But even if we did name this form of care as a form of abuse, our statement could not do anything practical in the world if all the social fields of that world – intimacy, market, child rearing, and so forth – are organized around the same late-liberal model of care.

When it comes to the difference between, say, feminists who oppose violence against women, and Querelle, who craves violence as a form of de-subjectification, we must be extremely careful to differentiate the social grounds of these desires. Take, for example, how violence against women was used as a justification for attacking Afghanistan. One reason it was difficult to mobilize a counter-discourse was that opposing the government's protection of women was treated as if it were support for violence against women, as if these were two sides of the same coin. Of course, violence against women is not acceptable. But if

we turn away from the problem of violence and look at the social grounds and purpose of violence, we see something quite different. Take another example. We are currently witnessing a radical federal intervention in indigenous governance in Australia. A government report noted the horrific conditions of life in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The report stated that *in the worst cases* these horrific conditions have led to child sexual abuse – more or less than anywhere else? Nobody knows. And the report didn't say. Nor did it quantify its claim about child sex abuse. But the conservative federal government stoked a sex panic to legitimate a late-liberal reorganization of social welfare and a seizure of indigenous lands. It sent troops into indigenous communities to take control of community affairs. It is hard to explain how, in such a short interview, but the federal government and its policy supporters were able to convince the public that the cause of this sexual abuse was traditional indigenous culture. As a result, the government was extremely successful in disrupting hegemonic alliances on the Left, because the only question that could be asked or answered became, are you for or against indigenous child sex abuse? Of course, it is not about that, but there was no escape. No matter what you say and no matter how you say it, you are read in relation to the sex panic. When you say it is a sex panic used to justify a governmental intervention, people answer, “So you are for sexual abuse of children!” Exactly like violence against women and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. So these are the kinds of liberal and neoliberal imaginaries of violence and care against which we need to think.

KTD: Violence and sex!

EP: Yes. So the question for me is, like sex, how do you tackle the problematic of violence without already acceding to the terms that liberalism sets for what is violent and what is nonviolent, even as liberalism itself shifts forms – classical laissez-faire liberalism to Keynesian liberalism to neoliberalism?

KTD: Clearly the agency/constraint, individual/society question is not a pertinent question for anthropology to ask. What is a good question, according to you?

E.P.: If we take the example of this federal intervention in Australia, we see clearly how shifts occur in the definitions of both the agency/constraint and individual/society division. Liberal recognition first stated that it cared for indigenous people by enclosing them in culture. But the form of “culture” liberalism recognized was genealogical. Members of Aboriginal communities were cared for through culture, but this was culture as determination and as opposed to subjects of freedom. The

08/10

e-flux journal #53 — march 2014. Kim Turcott DiFruscio
Shapes of Freedom: A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli