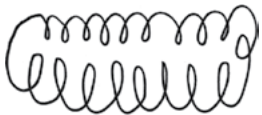A SOLID INJURY TO THE KNEES

A SOLID INJURY TO THE KNEES

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A SOLID INJURY
TO THE KNEES

Contents

**Introduction
Playing with Purpose**

*By
Maya Tounta*

In my late night sojourns with our first computer – sitting nestled under a duvet, pressed to contain the screech of the modem, fearing that I would be found out – I remember being enamoured with Lara Croft. I would continue playing afterhours when all us kids had to go inside. What a privilege! But online games like Tomb Raider, in all their pretence of 'bringing reality in' – with all the limping, bleeding, yelping and crying, didn't quite compete with those bodily experiences that left me physically and emotionally spent, in a perfect restful state. Living in a city where public space was manically reclaimed and contested, as kids we had to be resourceful. My favourite places to play: concrete parking lots, rooftops of apartment buildings, our neighbourhood park of Dexameni (Δεξαμενή) built on top of Emperor Hadrian's aqueduct. Every moment of play, I remember, ended with injury and the taste of blood on my lips. I was accustomed to licking my wounds to

conceal them from my parents. Once after a long minute of hiding in the bushes during a game of hide and seek, a colony of ants made its way across my body. I distinctly remember that laboured walk home and the cold shower that relieved me.

We all have a sense for what playing feels like but when it comes to making theoretical statements about it we tend to fall into silliness.[1] Commonly play is seen as a counterpart to work – a luxury form of distraction exclusively engaged in by children to escape mundane realities at school or at home. However, some scholars of play such as Brian Sutton-Smith have demonstrated children are in fact not innocent in their play and adults are indeed guilty in theirs.[2] Sutton-Smith writes:

> 'One of the biases of an information-oriented age is the tendency to neglect the fact that, throughout history, the adaptive advantage has often gone to those who ventured upon their possibility with cries of exultant commitment. What is

adaptive about play, therefore, maybe not only the skills that are a part of it but also the wilful belief in acting out one's own capacity for the future. *The opposite of play, in these terms, is not a present reality or work, it is vacillation, or worse, it is depression*. To play is to act out and be wilful, as if one is assured of one's prospects. A weakness of many of the self-oriented play theories is that they often sound too much like vain consumerism instead of being about the more passionate and wilful character of human play, which involves a willingness, even if a fantasy, to believe in the play venture itself.'[3]

I became interested in play theory as I began reading about depression a couple of years ago during a bout of depression. I found that games and play had a prominent role in current debates about depression and other forms of mental illness. I looked at different methodological approaches to understanding and exploring depression from neuroscientific research, psychology, historical enquiry and literary speculation, to video games. I was surprised to find that despite

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[1] Sutton-Smith, B. (2006). Play and Ambiguity. In: K. Salen, Er. Zimmerman, ed., *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, 1st ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 297.

[2] Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

[3] Sutton-Smith, B. (2001). *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

their differences, all seemed to recognize depression's extended relationship to lost motivation and unproductivity. Furthermore, it became apparent that when knowledge of depression was shared with an audience, whether through psychological experiments, literary accounts or online game simulations, a feeling of anxiety would surface in the audience, which in some cases further articulated itself through aggression.

An encounter with the online game *Depression Quest* peaked my curiosity regarding depression's precarious social standing and what I presumed to be an underlying anxiety of confronting a latent depression within all of us. Among the other three well-known video games that deal with depression: *Elude, Actual Sunlight* and *Inner Vision* and the many less known, and significantly cruder versions, such as *Billy Suicide*, *Depression Quest* is most laudable in its effort to sensitively grapple with depression whilst also respecting and acknowledging the futility of ever attempting to distil depression into the format of a game.[4] Its project is to create awareness:

'It's early on a Monday morning. You are a mid-twenties human being. You are dealing with motivation issues that sometimes makes dealing with things difficult. You feel like this is probably your fault, and on bad days can feel inwardly angry and down on yourself for being "lazy", but you're not quite sure how you can break out of it, or how other people deal with these feelings and seem so very functional.'[5]

Depression Quest calls itself 'an interactive (non) fiction about living with depression created to show sufferers of depression that they are not alone in their feelings'.[6] Its structure echoes that of a questionnaire or interactive novel where players are faced with a seemingly unending succession of hypothetical scenarios to which they must respond via multiple choice. There are no right or wrong decisions, though as the game progresses

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[4] Cognizant of the lurking threats contained within *Depression Quest*, its developer Zoe Quinn warns prospective players from the get–go: ... →

[4] 'If you are currently suffering from the illness and are easily triggered, please be aware that this game uses stark depictions of people in very dark places. If you are suicidal, please stop playing this game and visit this link to talk to someone.'

[5] Quinn, Z. (2013). *Depression Quest: An Interactive (non) fiction About Living With Depression: Next* [online] Depression Quest. Available at: http://www.depressionquest.com/dqfinal.html#2n.1e [Accessed 12 March 2016].

[6] Ibid.

players are denied access to certain narrative pathways, which continue to remain visible, as if to make present the could-have-beens. Without a clear end in sight, time decelerates while very little actually happens. Effect and affect are surreptitiously disguised as inaction, unveiling a metaphysics of torpor and a persisting feeling of belatedness.

Given the sensitivity and level of engagement with the complexity of depression that characterises *Depression Quest,* it's disconcerting that it became the subject of abuse. In 2014, the game's developer Zoe Quinn received a message from an anonymous author via the discussion-board website 4chan saying that: 'Next time she shows up at a conference we [will]… give her a crippling injury that's never going to fully heal … *a good solid injury to the knees.*'[7] This abusive statement was in collusion with what was later called the Gamergate controversy (#GamerGate), a harassment campaign that targeted many women in the video game industry including Brianna Wu and cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian. Purportedly, a disparaging blog post by Quinn's former boyfriend instigated the campaign. Those who organised themselves under the hashtag, claimed they were campaigning against political correctness and poor journalistic ethics in the industry. However, with a majority of posts openly claiming to be anti-feminist and opposing the rise of 'social progressivism' in video game culture, the campaign seemed to articulate itself around a shared contempt for female visibility.[8] This could be seen as a systemic grievance against the infiltration of female influence in an industry otherwise dominated by men. But when considering the further implication of the campaign in the politics of depression and *Depression Quest*'s particular project of making depression decidedly public, a more pointed question one could ask is why and how patriarchy feels threatened by a public display of depression, specifically considering depression's links to unproductivity and slumber?

In that initial month of discovering *Depression Quest*, I played the game a lot. With each consecutive plunge into its muddy

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7   Parkin, S. (2014). Zoe Quinn's Depression Quest. *The New Yorker*, [online]. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/zoe-quinns-depression-quest [Accessed 10 April 2016].

8   Wingfield, N (2014). Feminist Critics of Video Games Facing Threats in 'GamerGate' Campaign. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/16/technology/gamergate-women-video-game-threats-anita-sarkeesian.html?_r=0 [Accessed October 24, 2014.]

world, pre-existing feelings of depression exponentially grew. My experience of *Depression Quest* became one of artificially induced, consciously inflicted feelings of anxiety, confused thinking, decreased self-esteem, fatigue and sleep disturbances. There was nothing extraordinary or melancholic about it. Primarily, the experience was one of social exclusion, low productivity and inability to perform simple tasks – more than anything it was an experience of enduring restlessness. Many of these feelings I recognized from my previous encounters with depression, though I have never struggled with it chronically nor experienced it in its heart-wrenching form summoned up by David Foster Wallace in his novel *Infinite Jest*. Wallace describes depression ('that dead-eyed anhedonia'!) as 'a nausea of the cells and soul. It is an unnumb intuition in which the world is fully rich and animate and un-map-like and also thoroughly painful and malignant and antagonistic to the [depressed] self.'[9] 'It billows on and coagulates around and wraps in its black folds and absorbs into Itself, so that an almost mystical unity is achieved with a world every constituent of which means painful harm to the self.'[10] I had recently been watching a short clip from Ben Rivers' *Two Years at Sea* (2012) on YouTube. A scene with a gliding raft was half present in my mind offering itself as an interesting parallel to thinking about time and its connection to purpose, or in this case purposelessness. I remember reading an article about it in The Guardian where the author, a man called Steve Rose, wrote: 'Ben Rivers' film is about a man who lives in a remote Scottish house. We follow his daily life *but don't know why*. Welcome to slow cinema.'[11] Looking at Rivers' raft, faced with choices that seemed utterly absurd in their existence, I was estranged from myself; a mid-twenties human devoid of purpose. I couldn't see reason behind those simple daily motions. It was precisely this amnesia of instincts that further alienated me from others around me, who seemed attuned to a shared inner rhythm of activity – the same rhythm that makes kitchens and bedrooms seem like reasonable things.

9   Foster-Wallace, D (2006). *Infinite Jest*. Boston, Massachusetts: Back Bay Books.
10   Ibid.
11   Rose, S (2012). Two Years at Sea: little happens, nothing is explained. *The Guardian*, [online]. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/apr/26/two-years-at-sea-little-happens [Accessed 4 January 2015]

Up to that point, I had thought of depression like most people do, as a pathology; a medical illness that is preideological, pre-social and individual. *Depression Quest* had changed that. Not only had it artificially induced depressive symptoms, and accentuated pre-existing ones (thereby revealing to an extent the social, ideological and collective nature of depression), it had also re-constituted depression within a literary framework. It had offered the opportunity to regard it with the distance permitted by fiction. Liberating depression from the confines of a pathologised illness, problem or failure, it proposed depression as an intermediary step or gateway experience with the function of a literary ploy. Much like the death of a character in a novel, I started to wonder whether depression could have a purpose, beyond that of 'singling out the weak'.

When we think of physical illness, we are inclined to attribute it to infection. A bacteria or virus, something from without is often held accountable, and when we are not able to locate the cause of infection, we turn the world upside down until we can confidently assign blame to some extraneous maligning substance. In the process, we rarely regard the infected subject as blameworthy. Yet when it comes to depression or other psychological illnesses, the patient is often conceived as the source, a biological subject constituted independently of broader forces. Perhaps it is this myopic attitude that is challenged by a literary re-conception of depression. Perhaps depression itself is a symptom of an underlying infection, and if that infection is not a virus or bacteria, it could be social, political and economic.

At about the same time I was introduced to *Depression Quest*, my friend Matt recommended I read a book by Ann Cvetkovich called *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012) that rigorously attempted to de-pathologise depression.[12] In it, Cvetkovich claimed that 'feeling bad' was a direct outcome of being a subject in a neo-liberal society. Like many of her literary peers influenced in their thinking by the affective turn of the 90s, Cvetkovich looked at depression's emotional character within a framework that regards emotions as not only individual but also public. She looked at depression as a political phenomenon (in its coextensive relation to things that are concretely public such as economic

[12] Cvetkovich, Ann. (2012). *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press.

depression but also in terms of its 'interior' life). She set aside preconceptions informed by depression's purported predecessor, namely melancholia, and the highly romanticised traditions yielded thereof (fin de siècle melancholy and the four humors of Hippocratic medicine for example) and instead regarded depression unsentimentally, claiming that if depression manifests itself primarily as an attack on *productivity*, and if it is indeed, as numbers suggest, becoming a silent epidemic affecting increasing amounts of people each year, then perhaps we should think about *systemic* causes to depression and indeed consider depression itself as systemic.

In seeking greater ontological and definitional clarity, one must look at depression as a physical process in the brain (with specific neurological manifestations) and as a social construct. Common understandings of depression as personal failure, weakness or defect, reinforce the silent assumption that depression is located in the individual whilst refusing to acknowledge the full extent in which sociopolitical factors directly generate it. Though it might seem counter-intuitive to regard depression as a structural disease, such a conception can offer a far

more mutable and responsive understanding of mental illness that is coextensive to the successes and failures of a sociopolitical system – a political depression!

This more systemic understanding of depression can be traced to the monastic concept of acedia that describes a state of being in which one is unconcerned with one's position in the world and unable to perform one's duties.[13] 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas aligned acedia with sloth, one of the seven deadly sins. He further characterised it as 'the sorrow of the world' – a removal of the self from public affairs characterised not only by not caring about said removal, but also in not caring about not caring...a vortex of listlessness leading to despair and even suicide.[14] Acedia holds an important place in early monastic demonology and proto-psychology. In the late fourth century John Cassian depicted the apathetic restlessness of acedia ('the noonday demon') in the coenobitic monk: 'He looks about anxiously this way and that, and sighs that none of the brethren come to

[13] Accidie. In: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* [online] Oxford: Oxford University Press. Oxford Reference Online. Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY. html?subview=Main&entry=t95.e35> [Accessed 3 January 2016]
[14] Ibid.

see him, and often goes in and out of his cell, and frequently gazes up at the sun, as if it was too slow in setting, and so a kind of unreasonable confusion of mind takes possession of him like some foul darkness.'[15]

As much as acedia is enveloped in a moralising religious history, it provides a useful alternative to melancholia when it comes to historically contextualising depression, in so far as it firmly embeds depression within a framework of public subjectivation (the process in which identity is constantly negotiated in the public arena). The acedic subject faces an identity crisis that manifests in an inability to act – to perform the self. Though acedia cannot be necessarily equated to depression, nor fully capture depression's nebulous psychological character, it urges us to consider depression through more contemporary contexts of subjectivation and 'successful subjecthood'; notions that within a neoliberal economy merge with processes of commodification, accumulation and consumption, all of which are further informed by impositions and negotiations of intersectional struggle. In these terms, an anxiety to engage with depression can be seen as indicative of a more profound anxiety about the self being threatened.

These compounding anxieties are reflected within the structure of *Depression Quest*. Most online games, from a neurological perspective, operate on the basis of offering players the opportunity to pursue a goal. The effect this has on the brain is to activate the reward pathways (when goals are achieved) and the hippocampus.[16] When the game has no clear goal or when actions within the game do not reveal clear patterns or rules, the player is thereby kept in a state of restlessness fuelled by an inability to detect an end goal, and consequently an inability to detect a means to that absent goal. This has the opposite effect on the brain. Reward pathways and the hippocampus are under-stimulated. Interestingly, this neurological state is exactly what neuroscientific study regards as 'depression'.[17] In other words, depression, from a neuroscientific standpoint is the opposite of 'game' and 'play'. It is a lack of purpose.

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15   Cassian, J. *The Institutes*, (Boniface Ramsey, tr.) 2000:10:2, quoted in Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: how the world became modern*, 2011:26.

16   *McGonigal, J.* (2015). How Video Games Can Teach Your Brain to Fight Depression. *Slate*. Available at: http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2015/11/how_video_games_can_teach_your_brain_to_fight_depression.html [Accessed 21 April 2016].

17   Ibid.

We're hardwired to act purposefully – reasonably – effectively; to attribute clear cause to phenomena, human or not. It is not a new habit. It is not a recent need. The Ancient Mesopotamian might find Rivers' film or *Depression Quest* equally disquieting.[18] It's embedded in us to be effective, pragmatic – maximally so. Even if we've long since abandoned the idea of life being synonymous with survival and have instead dedicated time, bricks and mortar, to other things that make life worthwhile (love, freedom, pleasure and so on), now that the work/leisure distinction is coming undone and work is overtaking our lives, purpose itself is becoming a valuable commodity.

In that sense, depression as it is symbolically constituted, does not only represent a failing within a person, but a fundamental antagonism to being a successful contemporary subject – to being a subject that conforms to those pernicious processes that have become constitutive of identity. The profound anxiety that comes with confronting depression perhaps comes from intuitively understanding the fact that depression is by its nature antagonistic to the social constituents of selfhood currently in place. And so, we can either further reinforce the idea of depression as a pathology or allow ourselves to think of depression as a form of resistance – an impetus for change! It is the taste of blood from a good solid injury to the knees brought about by a hard day's work or a hard night's play.

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18   Though for a Mesopotamian the slow locomotion of a raft and shifting waters might seem purposeful in a way it no longer does for us...Mesopotamians lived their lives according to the ebbs and flows of the two great Mesopotamian rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates. One would imagine them observing Rivers' shifting waters with an expectation for foreplanning.

Feeling Things: Or, What Would Be Some Contemporary Pathos-Forms?

By
Marina Vishmidt

'The wish in thinking cannot be deleted by labouring towards indifference; rather it will be at work anyway but not properly thematised. If reason is ever to become more than a court "Where passions have the privilege to work/ And never hear the sound of their own names" then this much "utopianism" at least will never be liquidable from thinking.'[1]

This text will represent an attempt to weave something like a symptomatology of contemporary theory, both as formulated in the academy and as diffused in the informal outlets of theory culture, principally the sphere of art-related critical discourse. Key to this will be the tracing of some contemporary 'pathos-forms'. In what sense, however, can we take 'pathos-form', which initially sounds familiar but is actually a neologism? It pivots on both an affinity and a distinction between the 'pathos formula'

discussed in Aby Warburg's image theory as an emotionally charged visual trope which occurs in different modes of graphic representation across time, and a speculative 'form' which indicates recurrent affective tropes as the relation between emotion and profit we experience in the present.[2] This 'pathos-form' would be modelled at least semantically on the 'value-form', which refers to the logic of capitalist exchange mediated by money that organizes social and political relations from labour to education to intimacy through modalities of power and exploitation both direct and indirect. The aim would thus be to combine the logical understanding of 'form' operative in Marxist value theory with the aesthetic one of Aby Warburg that could enable us to read pathos in its articulations of being a hegemonic affect *and* a hegemony of affect in a specific historical epoch. Thus it's a way of thinking about the historical present, as Lauren Berlant calls it, and also using affect to think about

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[1] Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: a critical introduction*, New York: Routledge, 1998, p.231.

[2] See Colleen Becker's interesting extension of 'pathos-formula' into a historical and collective dimension, writing on how the emblem of the mythical 'Germania' 'gave physical form to a collective crisis surrounding the promise and prospect of assimilation within a newly minted German state.' 'Aby Warburg's *Pathosformel* as methodological paradigm', *Journal of Art Historiography* Number 9 December 2013, pp. 1-25

history, in the sense of mood, sentiment or attunement that characterizes a particular historical epoch – the relation of subjectivity to power, for ex., or to economic rationality, and the reciprocality between them.

Taking this idea of the 'pathos-form' as a key to analysing manifestations of affect as it comes to constitute a cultural logic, the project initially elaborated in this essay departs from observing a broad bifurcation – in the academy and in its more populist fringes in art and activism – between tendencies which group themselves under the banner of 'affect' and ones that embrace instead a newfound idea of 'rationalism'. While most of the varieties of 'new materialism', as well as the innumerable fields which the master signifier of affect has inflected, from law to archaelogy, cluster around the first, it is to the latter that the until relatively recently much-hyped philosophical movements of 'speculative realism' and 'object-oriented ontology' declare their allegiance. Publications such as the new reader *Realism, Materialism and Art*, or the high profile of the *Accelerationist Reader* show that varieties of neo-rationalism are gaining ground in the critical field around art practice and curation, in line with

the enthusiastic takeup of 'object-oriented' and 'speculative realist' paradigms over the past few years.

In examining the centrality of these two discourses of affect and rationalism, the long-established philosophical category of 'positivism' seems to re-appear. Positivism, in the most succinct terms, has been usually identified with the notion that knowledge is self-sufficient and it is pointless to inquire into its conditions of production – the decidedly non-reflexive stance denounced by critical theory (which defined itself as 'critical' precisely in opposition to this stance). The dichotomy between 'positivism' and 'critical theory' is familiar from the 20th century as the stakes for 'theory wars' whose political implications are likewise more or less patent, at least historically, in which it was roughly the role of the humanities to be critical and the empirical sciences to be 'value-free' (and

[3] A scheme reflected in C.P. Snow's infinitely much cited 'Two Cultures' lecture from 1959. Norms and values are assigned to the side of the humanities by Snow, and something like a pursuit of pure knowledge to the side of science. This split is seen as harmful and an impediment to social development. Frankfurt School critical theory, and many of its descendants, would not accept the neat division, but agree that in actuality the bourgeois disciplines tended to reflect it. See C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, London: Cambridge University Press, (2001) [1959].

thus, in critical theory's terms, ideological).[3] The use of the charge of 'positivism', in a number of ways, is one key way that legacy of critical theory in the humanities has manifested, persisting into post-structuralism and deconstruction, and critical paradigms including psychoanalytic, post-colonial, de-colonial, critical race, feminism, queer theory. It has had some impact on nearly every humanities and social science discipline somewhere along the line. It even made its impact in the 'other' culture of science, which fostered inquiries such as the sociology of science and technology and actor-network theory; all projects concerned to attenuate the 'ideological' rigidity of academic and laboratory science and contribute to making it a more reflexive site of knowledge production.

The 'affect/rationalism' bifurcation looks rather different, however, inasmuch as both of these can present as varieties of positivism from the perspective of critical theory. Which is to say, affect theory and the notion of reason valorised in the speculative realisms are allied in referencing scientific phenomena, primarily neurology and a monolithic concept of 'hard sciences', rather than mutable social or historical institutions as the

firm basis for their argumentation. From the angle of critical theory, this move appears as *pre-critical* in its reification of the social as the natural. More broadly, however, there seems to be a curious reversion to an apparently uninhibited dualism that obtains on the axiomatic use of terms such as affect and reason on the other.[4] The question of positivism, then, can be situated anew in this kind of use, meaning the ways in which such incipient polarities come to be generalised and accepted as references to *actual* rather than *symbolic* distinctions. Further distinctions then need to be drawn between how the affect:reason distinction plays out in the variants of academic theory that aggregate close to one or the other side of the polarity, and how this diffuses into a common-sense that then starts to define political response and critical debate beyond those sites.[5]

4   Not to mention the 'pre-critical' dismissal of Kant and Kantian legacies of critique as 'correlationism', i.e. the circumscription of the possibility of knowing a world by the constitution of human (social) capacities of cognition. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier, London: Continuum, 2009

5   We could consider the pop-science understanding of qualities which are 'hardwired' into differently gendered brains as the classic example of the hardening of cognitive and evolutionary biology into 'common sense'. Further examples more pertinent to the topics of this essay are explored below.

However, the intention of the text is rather to derive a reading of the cultural logics that get articulated through this bifurcation as an expression of specific desires, which is to say, how its two poles are *overdetermined* by the conditions of social relations and political capacities in the current moment, that is, the problems set by these conditions for thought and action and the desire to get beyond them. In looking at 'desire', there is of course a risk of choosing and confirming affect as the explanatory principle, inasmuch as the desire for affect and the desire for the rational are shown to be desires borne out of a sense of socio-political standstill. These desires can then be read as performative and reactive to their conditions of (im)possibility as much, if not more than, they are proposing anything novel or distinct in *themselves*. This risk is acknowledged, but will also be easily navigated if the distinction between affect and desire is maintained. Likewise, 'rationality' should not be rejected in a reified manner, even if its own contractual terms are reified ones; a contingency which wouldn't be averted by locating it in a more expansive concept of 'reason', even if it were to be as expansive as Hegel's World Spirit. As Lauren Berlant writes, if in a vocabulary more symptomatic than explicatory of my claims, 'the desire for the political' can act as a flexible and lucid prism to orient an inquiry into the continuous present.' Further, attending to desire is intended to forego an analysis oriented to the cataloguing of theoretical 'things' in favour of seeing how a thought of things can hide the relations that make this thought possible or actual at a given moment.[6]

Vagaries of Division

Before proceeding further, it may be valuable to pick out the *anoriginal* disposition which drives affect and rationality, respectively, as tropes in contemporary scholarship and beyond.[7] This is the felt need for a corrective to what is perceived as the dominance of linguistic and semiotic approaches in the

[6] '[D]arkest of all are the scenes bleached out by the light thrown over them.' Stewart Martin, 'A gallery closed in spring', talk at '5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours' symposium, Chisenhale Gallery, 23 April 2016.
[7] 'Anoriginal' is a term that often appears in the writing of poet and literary theorist Fred Moten, where it indicates the dissolution of origins and the dissolution of an ontology that calls upon an origin. For example, 'blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology, that it is ontology's anti- and ante-foundation, ontology's underground, the irreparable disturbance of ontology's time and space.' 'Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:4, Fall 2013, 737-780.

humanities over recent decades, and the corresponding thirst for something like an 'underlying' to orient the 'derivatives' of the theory market, to use the financial locution; something in any case that can be gauged as more substantial than the 'social'.[8] There is thus a hoped-for element of authenticity to this re-centering, or a 'passion for the real', to echo Alain Badiou's phrase. Yet, unlike in Badiou's scenario, this is a real that bypasses politics, aiming straight at a non-negotiable principle of life or intelligence as a framework for human and non-human agency alike.

This 'real' importantly, for both orientations, is the space of transformation, whether it's the immersive space of performative, pre-cognitive and even pre-emotional forces detailed by affect theory or the analytic constructivism of neo-rationalism. To take some examples, Reza Negarestani has been using e-flux, among other platforms, to proselytize in favour of a concept of rationalist universalism refurbished for the era of artificial intelligence.[9] The position owes something to the hectoring tones of the 'militant atheism'

of Richard Dawkins, though ranging itself not only against the evident irrationalism of faith but also in what it deems the underdeveloped faith in reason of what it calls 'kitsch Marxism' in what might appear as a classic positivist move redolent of the likes of Karl Popper. In this light, he observes in a footnote, 'It is no secret that the bulk of contemporary socio-political prescriptions are based on a conception of humanity that has failed to synchronize itself with modern science or take into account social and organizational alterations effected by technological forces.' Negarestani is clear about his commitments: sense and sensibility, life and intelligence, (or what he calls 'sapience' and 'sentience') are utterly distinct, and the project of humanity is constituted by the latter.[10] This is a set of commitments echoed across the speculative

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8 The reference here is to the language of derivatives trading – an underlying is a commodity and a derivative is the instrument used to speculate on the price movements of that commodity.

9 The 'artificial intelligence' at issue here, in distinction from earlier eras of development of artificial intelligence in cognitive science and robotics projects, has to do with the emergent qualities of a networked array of constantly adapting and evolving cognition shaped by algorithmic mechanisms – such as those used by Google or Facebook. The actualization of 'artificial intelligence' in these cases, and in the accelerated development of related research programmes, means that discussions of intelligence separable from their human species substrate can make a claim to realism they formerly did not possess.
10 http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-i-human

realist spectrum, of which the most unjustifiably superficial survey would throw up a vein of passionate pro-Enlightenment polemic in the emblematic work of Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier, where 'reason' is the byword for control over human destiny at not merely social but cosmic scales, and the irrationalism of phenomenology, structuralism, etc. also represent a political conservatism, a reactionary endorsement of the status quo by philosophy.

The dichotomy is reproduced exactly in the 'political wing' of speculative realism, which has been dubbed 'accelerationism'. This tendency has sprouted its own further neologism of 'Prometheanism' to evoke the tragic species-destiny of humanity to unleash progress rather than be bound by convention, prejudice or the 'folk politics' – another term of art in this discourse – of the small, ethical and different rather than the large canvas of the universal.[11] Universalism is a byword for the unifying role of reason across disparate forms-of-life and social formations, a practical ontology of exceptionalism – an exceptionalism of 'intelligence' per se, not the human species as an ethological or social entity. It is the access to this intelligence, which ties humanity to technologically evolved cognition

via the 'programming' faculty of reason, and not to animality through the undifferentiated 'common sense' of sensation. Such Cartesian distinctions are of course familiar, and a familiar object of critique, as being part of the class and empire project of the early modern West, but one which, like modernity in general, harboured a radical tradition of Enlightenment-as-emancipation whose consequences were largely repressed then and remain so now.[12] Their return now within the project of 'speculative rationalism', outfitted with up-to-date references to cognitive

11 The term 'folk politics' should not be bypassed as simply an offhand coinage in which 'folk' refers to the charming or the quaint. However patronizing such a usage may seem, it's even worse. The term rather derives from 'folk psychology', which is analytic philosophy's term of condescension for how things seem to non-philosophers. Its conversion into 'folk politics' then highlights the propensity for technocratic elitism sewn into the fabric of accelerationism's emancipatory zeal. For 'prometheanism', see Alberto Toscano, 'The Prejudice Against Prometheanism' at https://cengizerdem.wordpress.com/2013/10/25/the-prejudice-against-prometheus-alberto-toscano/, and for critical approaches and useful references, see Anthony Galluzzo, 'A Tale of Two Prometheuses (II): Against the False Idols of Accelerationism', at http://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/tale-two-prometheuses-ii-against-false-idols-accelerationism

12 As T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer outline, rationality tips over into irrationality insofar as it has been unable to emancipate itself from social domination and comes to support it instead. See *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 2010.

science and post-humanism, can strike one as nothing so much as an especially rancid swing of theoretical fashion much as other aspects of material culture have brought the 1990s back. Particularly it evokes the 1990s cyber-dystopians turned 2000s racist pundits like Nick Land, whose legacy is rather incompletely re-purposed by the 'accelerationist' theorists.[13]

The specificity of how reified oppositions operate in this idiom is nonetheless hard to tackle without engaging its presumed other, the post-structuralist naturalism of affect theory. It is clear that it is this latter which is far more established in the academy and across the humanities and social science disciplines. Figures like Brian Massumi, Patricia Tintineto Clough, Eve Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, Ann Cvetkovich or Lauren Berlant are unavoidable in the Anglophone curriculum and further afield, especially as 'affect theory' does not at all circumscribe the disciplinary reach of their respective dense and highly elaborated bodies of work, taking in arenas like philosophy, psychoanalysis,

queer theory, comparative literature and performance studies. An overt focus on feeling within public culture, history, aesthetics and the 'political' on the one hand, and a neuro-scientific bent towards the non-conscious dynamics framing personhood and sociality describes the parameters of affect theory as it is shaped by and reproduced within the projects that identify with 'affect' as an organizing concept.[14]

Even at this initial stage of description, we can propose that both affect theory and the 'new rationalisms' can be seen as 'post-critical' enunciations of what remain in essence projects of critique, questioning notions of the human, the social and the constitution of 'affect' as a mediation between these, but often resorting to a naturalistic framework to ground their critical inquiries. If the neo-rationalism of speculative realism / materialism exhibits its 'reparative' (a term of art from affect theory, e.g. Eve Sedgwick's writing on 'reparative readings') impulse in terms of correcting the course from the imprimatur of signification and culture to a reckoning with the neuro-facts which undergird 'our' ability

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[13] Curious also is the ingenuously re-surfaced 1990s cyberfeminism of the Xenofeminist manifesto by the collective author Laboria Cuboniks, though it advances a far cruder division between nature and culture than the writers of 25 years ago would have permitted themselves.

[14] Ann Cvetkovich, 'Public Feelings', The South Atlantic Quarterly, 106:3, (2007): 459-468; Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual: movement, affect, sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

to mobilize thought to order and transform planetary existence, the corrective exhibited by affect theory is to move from critique based on empirical and social 'knowledge' to critique predicated on 'feeling'. The numinous and 'lively' is discovered at the heart of technoscience, yet this chaotic circulation of affect is not located as proper to a human subject who can be used to nail down an ontology. Notably, both affect theory and (neo-) rationalism are much more secure in their fairly traditional concepts of reason – pro and con – than they are in their approach to the 'human'. We can then start to see that affect and rationalism both are concerned with a re-assessment of the subject and object of critique, and its support: what counts as human, what counts as reason. Finally, the question animating both seems to be one of political desire – a search for efficacy for theory, a purpose, which it needs to discover outside itself, in some master discourse which is de facto exempt from discursive critique – which has normatively established itself as 'science', Donna Haraway and many other critical scholars notwithstanding.

In the words of Suhail Malik and Armen Avanessian from their introductory essay to the *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity since Structuralism* (Bloomsbury, 2016), the 'schematic discrepancies and adversarial stances' which characterize not just the reception of speculative realist and materialist discourses in the academy but internal wrangles within each of these, go against the pursuit of research programmes and rather serve to point to the conditions of reproduction of academia, with its relentless jockeying for position and the search for distinction and novelty as the main means of performing politics. The implication that the rift between new realisms / materialisms and post-structuralism can be healed is a valuable one to consider, as it unfolds a dimension already several steps beyond the one explored in this essay; on those terms, in fact, the quarrel between affect theory and rationalism is a phoney war, given they can both be placed on the side of the 'new realisms / materialisms'. We can acknowledge this but still ask how it is that affect vs. reason could ever come to pose as a serious ground of contestation, were it not for a shared commitment to a (neuro-) positivism which frames the debate between advocacy of non-cognisable affects and rational thought structures largely as a sideshow

to the determined bracketing of social, historical and economic totalities that pervades both perspectives. If the often socio-critical agendas of many of the affect theorists mentioned above serve to render this positivism more residual than actual, it only takes a scan across the disciplinary spectrum to the astronomical levels of funding and recognition accruing to the newly enthroned fields of 'neuro-' and 'cognitive aesthetics' to understand just what's so rational about working with feelings.

But perhaps naturalised ontologies of feeling are actually a more compelling phenomenon when explored outside theoretical debates and rather in the landscape of political dispositions. The truth of feeling is widely affirmed, from the pointed opposite to the arch-neoliberal form of the policy 'think tank', the Chicago queer and critical theorist-initiated Feel Tank, to Stephen Duncombe's paradigmatic *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in the Age of Fantasy* (New Press, 2007). As notably, the performance of affect as the baseline for any political positioning hypertrophically defines the ambits of discourse on social media, where political feelings jostle mercilessly on

Twitter and take stances on countless tumblrs and personal channels. The conjunction of affect and algorithm seems to dominate the platforms of social expression no less than the expressions performed on them, as evidenced in the outcry over Facebook secretly modifying the happy/sad content of its customers' newsfeeds in aid of a scientific trial at a U.S. university.[15] Just as the 'culture wars' were once seen as a displacement of political-economic agendas, becoming the favourite tool of elites to manipulate gullible post-industrial electorates, as perhaps most typically detailed over the years by commentators such as Thomas Frank, there is something comparable about the way 'affect' situates the socially produced as highly individual and uncontrollable (while utterly exploitable).[16] Theoretical orientations are likewise filtered through the politics of affect, hence the increasing familiarity of

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[15] Vindu Goel, 'Facebook Tinkers With Users' Emotions in News Feed Experiment, Stirring Outcry', June 29, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/30/technology/facebook-tinkers-with-users-emotions-in-news-feedexperiment-stirring-outcry.html

[16] See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004. For 'utterly exploi able', see the flourishing industries of 'neuro-marketing' as well as the 'affective data' harvesting of the social graph noted above.

'pessimism', 'optimism' and 'nihilism' as descriptors for critical projects that increasingly inform resistance movements against white patriarchal domination.[17] At the same time, the currency of class-political orientation also gets a boost from the self-explanatory status of affect as a prism for assessing the political situation. One example is the new UK-based journal of political and cultural analysis *Salvage*, whose libertarian socialist outlook takes its compass from the 'pessimism of the will' attendant on the hard labour of reckoning with decades of defeat for progressive politics in the West and worldwide. UK autonomist group Plan C would be another example, seeing 'affect' as principle of organizing otherwise resigned and disaffected subjects in the UK austerity-scape. Here, affect is seen as both a guide for developing a politics and a lens for re-examining history from the standpoint of the 'below' or the 'margins'– speaking both in terms of power,

and the hierarchies of political rationality, especially for feminized and racialized subjects whose rational analysis of their situation was often converted into eminently insignificant, narrow and personal 'emotions' in the grammar of the former workers' movement. Thus affect is seen as redressing historical injustice, and providing a language for communication across vastly disparate positions of advantage and interest – but also redressing something else: a perceived over-emphasis by formations on the 'left' side of the political spectrum on reason as against the 'base passions' of fear and greed appealed to by conservatives from time immemorial (or from the time of the Enlightenment, perhaps). This emphasis on reason, on knowledge and critique as the forces of collective and individual liberation – in line with Kant's injunction to abandon self-imposed immaturity and dare to question – are now seen as an Achilles' heel, whether it's for consistently electorally failing social democracy, with few exceptions even in times of economic crisis, or as shown by the marginality of more thoroughgoing critiques of the capitalist mode of production and the state form to be found on the non-party left.

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[17] Though the debates addressed here are the respective ones of 'afro-pessimism', 'black optimism' and 'queer nihilism', an apposite reference which is located somewhat to the side of this work but can be placed in dialogue with it, though chronologically preceding the current wave of Black Lives Matter struggles is the late performance theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz's "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2006; 31(3), 675-688.

The counter-argument to this shift would not be confined to highlighting the fact that the shift of emphasis is a reactive one, and thus more informed by tactical goals than political epiphanies. It would rather be that affect as such has no political character whatsoever. If anything, taking 'affect' for a core principle of political composition highlights the openness to manipulation, to *conditioning*, so indispensable in the consolidation of authoritarian politics no less than the totalitarianism of the market. Social media would form the theatre of this performativity of affect in its repressive no less than emancipatory dimensions, inasmuch as it unavoidably shifts the focus to representation and expression, even if it can also be very useful for organizing. It is thus rather the appeal to an identification with power and narratives that cohere in terms of power relationships that the key consequences of affect in the political field can be said to dwell – but an analytic of power that splits feeling and thinking in a way that tends to support the exercise of 'power over' rather than 'power to'.[18] The link between feeling and truth, is, in other words, a rather tenuous one – insofar as it implies an authenticity for feeling that reason is no longer

able to supply, on the basis of a polarization between them as specious as the one we saw fuelling the theory polarities unfolded in the first part of the essay. The reification of affect in the field of politics thus, if anything, exacerbates the gestural and foreclosed element of those debates in academia given that the practical-political courting of authenticity or a return to the 'real' has, to speak plainly, never ended well. Without undertaking a critique as reified in its own right, it could be ventured that a readiness not only to dissolve the link between thinking and feeling in a reified way, but to occlude the histories of reification that each term contains, cannot but lead to a flattened ontology where anything deeply felt is equally valid, a flatness itself nurturing 'micro-fascisms' of indisputable feeling which cannot but amalgamate damage with politics, recognition with justice, and abstraction with obfuscation.[19]

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[18] This is reflected in the centralized structure of social media platforms where profits accrue to a few mega-corporations while the source of the profits, the data, are generated by many but are turned into 'alien property' and feed the valorisation cycles of this sort of enterprise.

[19] Sianne Ngai, 'Visceral Abstractions', GLQ: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21:1, January 2015, 33-63, esp. 46.

Coda: Accumulation of Affect

The concept of the pathos-form can arguably help pin down conjunctions between authenticity, the individual, affect and money, describing the contours of affect as it proliferates around subjectivity as both innermost and (or thus) always at the point of sale. It is thus an example of 'form-determination' in the sense discussed by the 'value-form' strand of Marxist critical theory, which, when applied to capitalist institutions such as money or the commodity, means the conceptual separation between the 'content' or 'natural form' (the practical, empirical operation of such an institution – say the commodity as any particular commodity, e.g. chair) and its 'social form', i.e. how it operates on a systemic basis to reproduce capital and its relations of production.[20] With the 'pathos-form' as a description of the prevalence of affect as a sense-making technology in today's society, we could point, if a bit obviously, to a

historical moment where the deadly neutrality of institutions like the commodity, the state and money function all-too-evidently as an instrument of the ruthless class power such neutrality was always designed to legitimate, the drive for the 'masses to express themselves' without thereby changing relations of power and property in the least seems to echo with the diagnosis of fascism, and capitalism as usual if at a slightly lower ebb, as made by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s. But as affect is said to constitute something far more micrological, and indeed micropolitical, it is at that level of granularity that analysis should be pitched if it is to draw any systemic conclusion adequate to this moment, rather than be content with a generalized distillation of it.

The 'pathos-form' should thus rather be taken to index the specific means whereby affect is integrated into accumulation, in all its incertitude, brokenness and ambiguity. This has to start with exhorted/extorted performance of the self across all levels of the economy, including the 'work-readiness' and service industry, where the self as a brand is but a distant point on the horizon and the activation of personality is simply the first barrier against worse forms of economic relegation,

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20 'That the chair is a commodity is not a characteristic of the chair itself as a thing, but rather of the society in which this thing exists'. Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012, p. 41. Such a distinction can be explored further in the relationship between use value and exchange value in any commodity.

dispossession and social despair. This is affect as compulsory, a standardised form of acquiescence that brings the sunshine to barbarism. The writer Robbie Ellen published a striking account of this forced cathexis in his worker's inquiry as one of Tino Seghal's 'participants' at *These Associations* at Tate Modern a few years ago and its unmistakable echoes with the position of the service worker, spotlighting how contemporary art both feeds off and services the skills demanded by the low-wage economy, emulating its managerial tactics and blurrings between self and other in the cash nexus. He writes, 'A work that pretends to deposit "real life experiences" and conversations to its visitors, immaculately shuts off access to its own organisation and structure. This is the commodity form of customer service: an infinite and infinitely exchangeable front of personal warmth. Workers are not permitted to talk about the structures of their work or commands from management, but they are permitted (coerced) very strongly to play at being themselves. [...] a work that pivots around whether or not a visitor decides to engage with it at the total expense of a reduced and exposed participant is kind of wonderfully

illustrative of the imbalance of power in a culture that provokes and defends the identity and rights of the social type "consumer."' If such a habituation to performance-as-service and service-as-performance is familiar to us as the worker-repressing dogma of the 'experience economy', it cannot go without saying, especially in a conclusion, that this 'pathos-form' which neutralises the capital:labour relation as a site of codified affect, exacerbates its indignity by eliciting the measureless by measure. Further, it makes resistance look redundant, as resistance only seems to intensify 'bad affects'. The crucial insight of 'the personal is political' was that the personal is socially conditioned – or, in important ways, 'form-determined' in the way outlined earlier – and thus must be transformed. The current emphasis on affect in political articulation and organizing, on the other hand, often falls behind this concept of the personal, collapsing the political into the immutable truth of experience, with the corresponding propensity for both sectarianism and self-advancement, again as virulently evidenced in social media, and especially in some 'post-internet' art practices.[21]

[21] One acerbic reflection on this point could engage the plethora of career paths in the cultural sector ... →

The knowing disavowal of political dimensions to personal truth thus arrives full circle with what I have been calling 'reproductive realism', which is to say, a variant of capitalist realism that takes the insights of radical feminism, affect theory and post-autonomist Marxism to license enthusiastic accommodation to existing forms of valorisation.[22] In light of the earlier discussion, then, of affect as a bypassing of the subjective and the social in favour of a political ontology of *conditioning*, the bifurcation between affect and rationality, both in their theoretical impasse and political chasm, is a sign of reactionary times, but it is also a buried recognition of the 'pathos-form' of those times: nothing can be changed except how you feel about it.

21 ... springing from Chris Kraus's recent apotheosis as a practitioner of elaborated, highly theorised self-narration as a feminist model. This is exemplary because it testifies to the intertwining of a long-term, multi-form and *sui generis* practice marginalised for decades with a cultural moment in which the 'pathos-form' of the individual messily acting out her contradictions (*Girls*) comes to eclipse, with all the force of its ready-to-hand commodity logic, the fractured and obscured histories of collective formations in the trajectory of the feminist movement, then and now. Kraus is not entirely blame-free of course – let us not forget that her source

of wealth has for years been real-estate speculation (as detailed in *Summer of Hate*), which proves that the bracketing of the political (or social) by the personal in the politics of self-narrative is a constant, if deliberately courted, danger. This, as well as other rather tone-deaf public statements regarding Occupy, depict Kraus as a participant in and not merely source material for the tendencies diagnosed here.

22 For a nuanced inquiry into these forms of life as they predominate in the younger echelons of London's art world, see Lizzie Homersham's 'Artists Must Eat', *Art Monthly* 384, March 2015. The article explores how a fetishism of 'material conditions' acts to excuse its subjects from any political agency whatsoever. The classic statement of 'reproductive realism', in all its frantic self-promotion and crass obliviousness to the realities of class and race, could be Amalia Ulman's insistence that were it not for light sex work, young artists like her and her peers would starve to death in London's hostile environment for creativity.

The Object Too

By
Travis Jeppesen

Will he ever begin to write about the object. The object there before him – and not. A writing-in-the-dark. How can that be, that state of simultaneity. Oh very simple: it isn't. He drinks up his thoughts, visits his feelings. Feeling a place to run away from. Objects have no feelings; objects are *all* feeling. The object, contend with it. Let this moment be defined by it. The object's thingness contaminating this temporal structure, the code behind the context. Give rise to the formation of a moment. The beauty of a moment is that it passes a delightful turd. The turd is an object, but it is not the object he is now contending with. Contend with the non-turdness of the current object. In the moment of running away. Running away from feeling – from all knowing. Knowing and feeling the same. The moment he finds himself facing the object, seated before it, forcing his thoughts to coalesce into something. Words. Words, the physical manifestation of *something*. The something is the object.

The object's bluntness. Not a copy, not a simulacrum, for that is something *his* words could never be. (His fantasy.) His words, he thinks, he knows (he fantasizes), are always something else, even when they purport to represent, to *critically engage with* (a phrase he despises, but finds himself occasionally using nonetheless) the object and its thingness. What purportedly is outside of all possible and potential representation, contextualization. And yet he – not subject (for he recognizes the imperative to momentarily suspend his own agency in order to engage with the task to be elucidated henceforth), but another object, another possible thing that things outside its particulate thingness – is, in a sense, not there. Not in the sense in which the object (the originary object, made originary by our writing of his writing of it, naturally) is there. The thing is, the goal he has set himself (his manic delirium, his sense of physicality, his manifestation of doom – his own private version thereof – through his manifestation of time, his awareness of spatio-temporal limitation) is to get *beyond* both facile representation but also and even mostly that "critical engagement" that the majority dismiss as the only possibility of *interacting*

(he hates this word) with the object, and to enter into a state that would actually enable him to *inhabit* the object. And this, through writing. And for him, this writing, this striving-for-inhabiting, resonates with his current concern, to get beyond all the materiality – the thingness, the objectness – of writing – to contend with writing's failed project of transmitting meaning.

How do *I write myself* into the object? he asks himself.

(Always a failure, then, every instance of writing, and yet how to overcome.)

Describe the object in its thingness. No. Not "describe."

In his mind, he traverses all the pathways through which one might approach it. Positioned as it currently is. In this room, on the floor, at the center of the black cloth, not far from where his feet rest. A kind of hunger, this desired transformation, transmutation, transubstantiation. But then no, that's not it, for then what would the writing be. Putting the writing inside the object vs. making the writing come *out of* the object.

No eating, no shitting.

To inhabit: it requires some encoding. Break that code in order to re-seal it. That's what the process should look like. The thing things itself thingingly, he quotes Heidegger. A certain bluntness of proprieties: yes, that will do.

He steps outside to get some air. Fat man in a wig out there, screaming. The fat man's name is Leibniz. He hoists a big book over his head. That book, it is filled with word-objects. "Eat my monads!" screams the fat man. He slams the door in the philosopher's face.

He runs back in, to the object. *Into* the object, he would like, but can't. The object willing itself. But its will does not extend beyond its present placedness. Its motionlessness an act. The will to sit there and how should it be transcended. There it sits, playing out the eternal return. "My thingness is not for you to take," it seems to call out. Or did that voice come from Leibniz, out there in the street, tormenting him with his wails. The object he was waving in his hand, with all the words inside. The words attached to his hand. Handbrain.

Is he still out there? Go take a look.

A glance through the window. Leibniz is gone. You will never know what book it was.

Is it better that way? Can substance be defeated? One can attain a state of total selflessness through the act of desiring. The room is bereft of objects. Except for the one. Only maybe this is something imagined. Therefore it is real. The object writes itself. The object writing itself is a propagation of excess.

Reception: the majority. Call them readers; those willing to accept this. Only to reject it. For the way their substance has been programmed. Bureaucrats of the soul.

He initially wanted to call it *object-oriented criticism*, until he realized – not just that he had the terminology wrong – but that his misuse of the word *criticism* would only serve to confuse this invisible majority for whom he was writing against. For this, this obviation of the decision-making process via the thereness of the object, it is to be an *act* of writing: a writing to come. No, *criticism*, *critique*, too specific, the terminology. What it need be is a *wild writing*; reach toward the impossible state of lawlessness.

Against control. We live in a society of total control, and so it is only psychologically natural that the bureaucrats of the soul seek out means of (what they perceive to be)

control in art, and that *authorial exercise* (as opposed to insane or otherworldly *channeling*) constitute the normative definition of genius.

Thus, in writing the object (never writing *of* the object): Deny all perimeters. Get rid of the container. So that the object might be freed.

The object and its mysterious anti-nature..., he thinks. Object as manifestation of mind – no.

Object and world: okay. That is something he can do. Hesitating to proclaim it in these terms, but since so many mispronouncements have already polluted the stratosphere, perhaps his will serve as a cleansing agent. (Or else risk collapsing the unity of the entire multiverse by further polluting. A risk taken every time one opens one's mouth and squeaks.)

It is a question of domains, he proclaims. The object doesn't respond.

When we *write the object* (and here, the definitionality of what's being said matters, for we are not channeling classical exchanges of phenomenological wankery) we trans-enunciate the resonant hallway of

psychology to verify the made (constructed) status of objectitude (in its pure sense) and effectively emerge from this processual act as producers of a reality. He sees this as a completely viable anarcho-individualism that resists the fetishization of edges that gives the object its definitional status in our limited perceptuo-tactile exchange field therewith, and thus unleashes the animality that resides within the object's previously controlled essence. And within that animality resides a will...

Once the object is written – and liberated thus – we may begin to speak of objectity, he reasons. Now, objectity goes beyond mere thingness in its necessitude to claim a spectral identity. Identity, in *their* way of thinking of it, always comes with an I. Expend your shit logic across the evening sky. Objectity combines the object with identity, but also reality, to lay claim to a *scape* that evades the perceptual diminutive that typically derogatorizes the object in the field where dwell the soul bureaucrats. The object, then, *is* vision; a surface covered in ego eyes. Its constructedness matters less than the way it goes about reconceiving our own willed surfaces.

But of course, he reasons, his object thus edified will most certainly clash and cocirculate concurrently with others' edification of the object. And so the route becomes shortwinded, a show flourish – it is meant to be, in its measureless metonymity. No metaphoricity. Chains of difference overflowing – gather them up, if you want, into assorted cycles. Play god by defeating yesteryear. The answer, he suddenly conjectures, to Husserl dodging the inter-subjectivity bullet: Everyone produces their own reality through their reciprocal arrangement of object-perceiving. Thus, in concept production, each concept is only designated for use by its original creator/inhabitor. Use exhaustibility. There are limits to this applicability: Why I Am So Unpopular. All these different realities clashing into one another. And the sparks caused by the interaction. No more human/nonhuman divisions, a rebirth of agency. All this – through the writing. He closes his eyes and sees thick blobs of text on paper. Pen rolls out of hand. From across the galaxy, the room, the object stares at him and sighs.

Depression: Post-Melancholia, Post-Fluxus, Post-Communist, Post-Capitalist, Post-Digital, Post-Prozac

*By
Florian Cramer*

Abstract

'Depression' has two conventional meanings: It can refer to an individual state of mind or to such collective conditions as economic crises. Each yielded their own visual languages and performances in the arts. With today's entrepreneurship of the self, the two states seem to have converged. The fall of the wall, the 1990s dotcom boom and bust, the global financial crisis, all suggest that cycles of euphoria and depression have become collective and hyper-individualized at the same time. Ultimately, depression concerns notions of past, present and future.

Risks and side effects

[See Figure 1: Prozac writing block, p.65]

A writer's block in every sense of the word: the Prozac logo placed above a clipped-on drawing depicting the writing block itself – a mise en abyme that infinitely sucks writers into a writing of writing of writing until conclusion seems impossible. Whether or not intentional in its dark humor, the block appears to be promotional merchandise designed by the marketing department of Eli Lilly, the company that produces the drug; unless of course it was created and planted there as a practical joke by students of the art school in the immediate neighborhood of the thrift store where it was found and bought, in the economically depressed Northern Dutch town of Groningen. The drug is now so commonly prescribed that in 2004, the British Environment Agency 'revealed that Prozac is building up both in river systems and groundwater used for drinking supplies'.[1] According to the newspaper report, 'overall prescriptions of antidepressants rose from nine million to 24 million a year' in the UK between 1991 and 2001.[2] By 2013, this number had increased to 50 million.[3]

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[1] Townsend, Mark. "'Hidden Mass Medication' As Prozac Found In Drinking Water." *The Observer*, 8 Aug. 2004. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. http://www.rense.com/ general56/hiddenmassmedication.htm.

[2] ibid.

[3] "Landmark Moment as Antidepressant Prescriptions Top 50 Million." *Mind*. Mind.org.uk"... →

This essay was not written by a mental health professional, therefore its discussion of depression should be regarded more as pop psychology. No antidepressants were taken during its writing; it involved two periods of procrastination and writer's block.

[See Figure 2: Kodak advertising, 1889 and Figure 3: Muzak Corporation advertising, 1959, p.65-66]

From Kodak to Prozac

The brand name Prozac, coined in 1987 for the drug Fluoxetine, evokes associations with Muzak, registered as a trademark by the Muzak Corporation in 1922 for its easy listening orchestral background music for factories, hotel lobbies, elevators and supermarkets. 'Muzak' had been branded as a riff on 'Kodak'. The consumer-oriented industrialization of image production that Kodak described in its advertising slogan 'You press the button, we do the rest' was supposed to have its equivalent in Muzak Corporation's industrial production and distribution of music. With Prozac, this principle proliferated

to psychotropic drugs: 'The name Prozac was picked for its zap: it sounded positive, professional, quick, proey, zaccy. It was marketed in an easy-to-prescribe "one pill, one dose for all" formula and came when the medical profession and media were awash with horror stories about Valium addiction.'[4]

Prozac demonstrates that the notions of 'mass media' and 'creative industries' have shifted. These industries are no longer just producers of industrialized image and sound, but have become cybernetic producers in the most comprehensive sense of the word – which includes psychotropic drugs. In their historical succession, Kodak, Muzak and Prozac even suggest a shift from semio- to bio-business. The first two brands have gone through bankruptcy (Kodak) or faltered (Muzak) while Prozac remains and prospers. Alternatively, their lineage could be interpreted as a shift from leisure as a strictly separate sphere from work (Kodak with its focus on amateur photography) to blurring the lines between leisure and work (Muzak's entertainment for factories, elevators and supermarkets) to optimizing oneself

[3] 30 July 2013. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/landmark-moment-as-antidepressant-prescriptions-top-50-million.aspx.

[4] Moore, Anna. "Eternal Sunshine." *The Guardian.* Guardian News and Media, 13 May 2007. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/may/13/socialcare.medicineandhealth.

for a labor world (Prozac) where depression and self-blockade keep individuals from being productive.

'Muzak is more than music' was the subtitle of 1984 West German post-punk movie *Decoder*. The film offers little more than (often ludicrous) radical chic, featuring what was to become iconic underground figures including members of Einstürzende Neubauten, William S. Burroughs, Genesis P-Orridge and ex-junkie Christiane F. Yet it deserves credit for the speculative links it creates between media technology, Muzak and the industrial production of happiness. Minute 25:00 of the film shows the staff of H-Burger, a McDonalds-like burger chain, being drilled by a manager to 'smile, smile, because we're selling happiness'. At 31:00, customers happily eat their burgers while the film's main protagonist (played by F.M. Einheit) dismantles the simulacrum by listening to a cut-up Muzak tape on his portable cassette player.

[See Figure 4: Photo montage based on *They Live,* p.66]

With this story, *Decoder* preempts a similarly themed yet better known film, John Carpenter's *They Live* from 1988. In *They*

Figure 1: Prozac writing block

Figure 2: Kodak advertisement, 1889

Figure 3: Muzak Corporation advertisement, 1959

Figure 4: Photo montage based on *They Live*

Figure 5: Shepard Fairey's *OBEY* street art

Figure 6: Knock-off *OBEY* street cap

Figure 7: Student project by R. Beckford for the class Art and Society, CUNY LaGuardia Community College, 2014

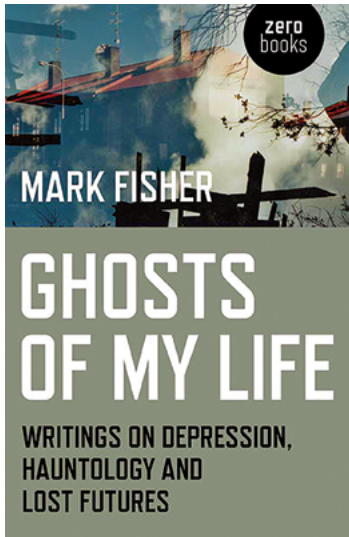Figure 8: Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514

Figure 9: Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, book cover, zero books, 2014

The Psych|OS Cycle
UBERMORGEN
2001-2010

Psych|OS, Digital Cocaine - Children of the 1980s
DVD, 01:00:01, 2005 - VIDEO DE/EN - VIDEO JP
VIDEO DESCRIPTION - SLIDESHOW - TOKYO INSTALLATION

Psych|OS, Digital Cocaine - Children of the 1980s
Catalogue Text, 2005 - TEXT

Psych|OS - Hans 1 and 2
Photos, 2004 - PHOTOS

Psych|OS - Hans 1 bw and 2 bw
Photos, 2004 - PHOTOS - REVIEW IN GERMAN

The Psych|OS Generator
Software, 2006 - SOFTWARE

Psych|OS - Zyprexa Lilly 1112 & 4117
Paintings, 2006 - PAINTINGS

Psych|OS - hansbernhardblog
Blog, 2005-2010 - BLOG (disabled)

Psych|OS - Psychotropic Drug Karaoke
Splashscreen, 2007 - SPLASHSCREEN

Psych|OS - Self Portrait
Photo, 2002 - PHOTO - SPLASHSCREEN

Psych|OS - Lilly controls my Foriginals
Exhibition text by Domenico Quaranta, 2006 - TXT
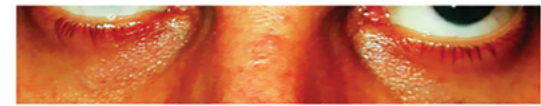
Hans Bernhard is a chemical cyborg.

Hans Bernhard has been exposing, pushing, augmenting and enhancing his body with synthetic drugs for 25 years.

From 1984 to 1999 through the intense use of synthetic drugs such as LSD, ecstasy, meth, speed, fentanyl, angel dust, dextroamphetamine and nitrous oxide to explore, interact with and absorb contemporary digital networks and become part of them by zooming into techno music, digital art and mass media.

Since 2000, he has been protecting and enhancing his brain and body by the use of prescribed psychotropic drugs: Benzodiazepines, Olazapine, Seretide, Prothipendyl, Valproic Acid, Carbamazepine, Chlorprothixen, Zotepin, Oxymetazoline, and Salbutamol; all interacting with one another.

During his 25 years of substance abuse and after a series of brain upgrades, one day in march 2002, Hans experienced a manic outbreak and total mental meltdown in South-Africa.

This would later on be diagnosed as bipolar affective disorder and Hans would learn that he had prevented the outbreak of the illness for almost 15 years by means of self-medication.

Hans Bernhard's neuro-networks and brain structures are similar to the global synthetic TCP/IP networks he helped to build and to which he kept a close and subversive relationship. Both are highly unstable. And now, these networks are infected and contaminated by waves of mania and depression. WHO ICD-10, F31.1.

Contemporary high-tech societies deal with hardcore brains using bio-chemical agents to enhance & control the internal information flow, we call them psychotropic drugs.

We are all chemical cyborgs.

Figure 11: Hans Bernhard/ubermorgen.com, *Psych|OS*, 2001-2010

Figure 10: Hans Bernhard/ubermorgen.com, *PsychOS*, 2004

PsychIOS-Generator

[Select Sickness ▼] [<------------------ ▼] [show diagnosis criteria]

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

- BETTER THAN USUAL
- OK
- WORSE THAN USUAL

CURRENTLY DISABLED
TO GET THE PSYCHIOS GENERATOR OFFLINE VERSION:
CLICK HERE.ZIP FILE

ICD-10
The PSYCH I OS Generator uses a strict set of numbering for all the diseases, it is the so-called ICD-10 which has been developed by the WHO/UN. Diagnostic guidelines are the key to the ICD-10, we use them here too, and have added some additional information from the DSM-IV (a national system in use in the USA and Germany).

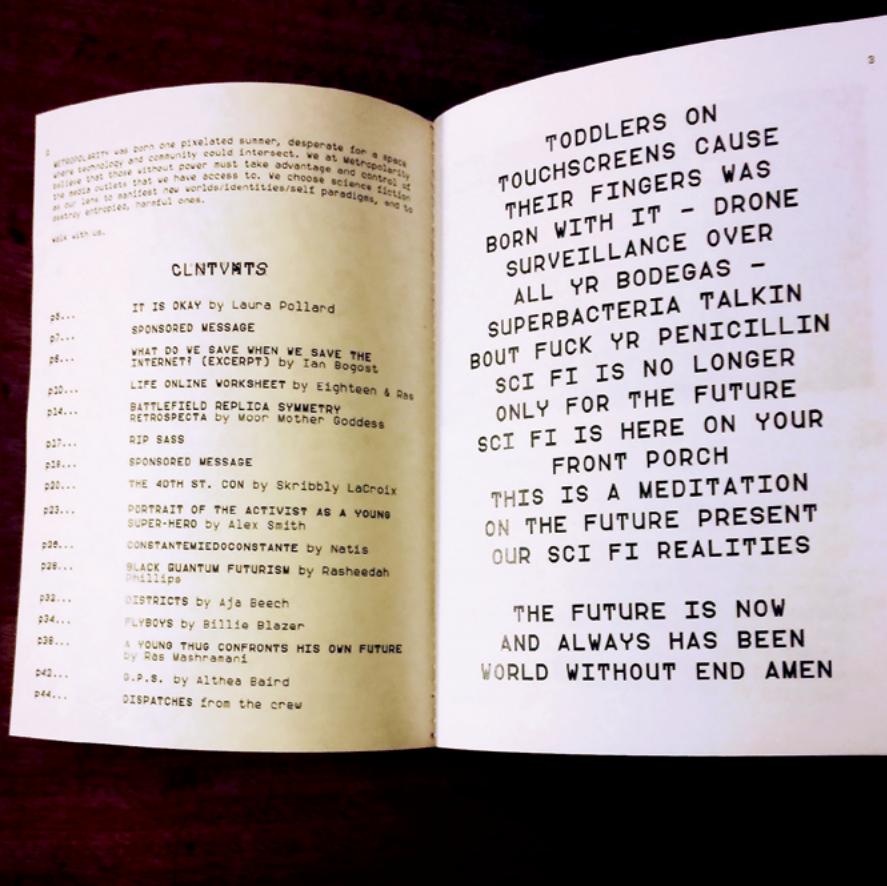Figure 12:Hans Bernhard/ubermorgen.com, *The Psych|OS Generator*, 2006

Figure 13: Metropolarity Collective,
The Future Now Never Present, 2014

Live, the once again, white male protagonist unveils the hidden reality of a city that has been invisibly taken over by aliens. Its streets are covered with subliminal propaganda messages that tell people to 'OBEY'. The production design of the film took obvious inspiration from the work of American artist Barbara Kruger and its characteristic montage of political slogans on top of low-resolution black and white photographs. With the cult film status of *They Live*, the visual language of Kruger's appropriation art eventually became better known as Hollywood's appropriation of the appropriation. In 1989, street artist Shepard Fairey turned the 'OBEY' sign from the film into his street art tag, which he later developed into a world-famous fashion brand. Dystopian depression ended up as manic upbeatness. In critical theory terms, the four successive appropriations – Kruger's, Carpenter's, Fairey's tag, the fashion brand – could be classically described as four successive commodifications. In French Situationist terms, as progressive recuperation of a détournement in which even the critique of spectacle ends up as spectacle. The latest reworking of the 'OBEY' sign however, namely the Chinese (Shanzhai) 'OBEY'

[See Figure 5: Shepard Fairey's *OBEY* street art and
Figure 6: Knock-off *OBEY* street cap, p.67]

base cap knock-offs sold worldwide at street markets (including Vilnius's central market hall), differs from previous ones. Kruger, Carpenter and Fairey's successive appropriations, used the sign in iconographic terms to create protected brands for specific targeted markets and creative industries. In contrast, the producers of the Chinese 'OBEY' caps looked at these former appropriations as free-market imitations, to which they added their own free-markt imitation (as trademark-infringing goods). In the copy shown here, Kruger's, Carpenter's and Fairey's visual language dissolves with the word 'OBEY' shining in bright yellow and pink colors.

Each appropriation of the 'OBEY' sign could be read as two stories: one told by the visual content of the image and one told by its reworking of the previous image. At first glance, all 'OBEY' signs express a critical distrust in images as propaganda. But at second glance, they tell a story of circulationism of images, to use a term coined by Hito Steyerl.[5] *Decoder* and *They Live* use an

established trope of dystopian science fiction literature, that of biopropaganda forcing people into conformism while grim reality is covered with masking agents. In Stanislaw Lem's 1971 novel *The Futurological Congress*, the protagonist realizes that his perception is manipulated by 'mascons', psychoactive drugs that mask ugly reality: anything from facial blemishes to non-working elevators. However, mascons have negative side-effects that cause even more ugliness so that another layer of mascons is needed to cover them up, creating a vicious circle of mascon-taking.[6] Philip K. Dick's 1966 short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* (adapted twice by Hollywood as *Total Recall*) plays with conflicting artificially implanted memories.[7] This recurring trope boils down to a variation on Plato's cave, whose shadow theatre deceives its inmates just like mascons deceive the protagonist of Lem's novel. Invisible messages manipulate the city of *They Live* and Muzak manipulates H-Burger eaters in *Decoder* ("h" being 1970/80s slang for heroin).

[5] Steyerl, Hito. "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" *e-flux journal* 49 (2013). Web. 10 Feb. 2016. http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/.

[6] Lem, Stanislaw. "The Futurological Congress. 1971." Trans. Michael Kandel. New York: Avon (1976).

[7] Dick, Philip K. We can remember it for you wholesale. Vol. 2. Citadel Press, 2002.

If one ignores this Platonic epistemological critique, then the typographic visuals from Kruger to the Shanzhaid base cap simply tell viewers, in different degrees of irony and affirmation, to get over their depression and circulate those visuals. The sign to 'OBEY. MARRY. AND REPRODUCE', from *They Live*, does not only address people but also addresses itself.[8] In today's language, the Barbara Kruger 1980s visuals were image memes, the kind of low-resolution, mass media-appropriating, text-and-image-combining, virally disseminated images that constitute a major popular culture of the Internet. As if to corroborate this reading, the meme creation web site *quickmeme.com* includes a category 'Barbara Kruger memes' that mostly contains manga and contemporary meme-style variations of her popular picture *Your body is a battleground*.

Arguably, the memetic qualities of Kruger's work lie not so much in its visuals and writing, but in its visual-typographic form. Kruger's high-contrast black-and-white photographs with superimposed white-on-red Futura bold type heavily borrow from 1920s Russian Constructivist graphic design: from El Lissitzky and, most clearly, Aleksandr Rodchenko. Kruger's work thus marks a historical bridge between the two tendencies juxtaposed by Steyerl: Russian Productivism and Internet-age circulationism.[9] It thus questions whether the two really are as different as Steyerl argues.

[See Figure 7: Student project by R. Beckford for the class Art and Society, CUNY LaGuardia Community College, 2014, p.68]

(Un)production of melancholia

Outside Internet meme culture, Kruger's visual form has often been copied by artists, designers and illustrators. The example above is from a 2015 graphic design class at CUNY LaGuardia Community College in 2015. The student describes the brief and his design as follows:

> 'A social problem that affects society today is teenagers trying their hardest to fit into social groups. This problem is imperative because it leads teenagers to stress, depression, or in some cases suicide. [...] I chose this image because

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8 It was adopted as an advertising slogan for Berlin's non-mainstream video rental store Videodrom in the early 1990s.

9 Steyerl, Hito. "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?" *e-flux journal* 49 (2013)

I believe that a teenage girl that is depressed duplicates the exact feeling of a teenager that forces themselves to fit into groups they are not familiar with.'[10]

Next to Barbara Kruger, the design also echoes the classical Western iconography of melancholia, the pre-modern medical and philosophical conceptual precursor to depression. Since Erwin Panofsky, Raymond Klibanski and Fritz Saxl's *Saturn and Melancholy* from 1964, melancholia is one of the best-researched subjects in Western art history and iconology.[11]

[See Figure 8: Albrecht Dürer, Melencolia I, 1514, p.69]

In short, melancholy involves a highly canonized visual language whose origins lie in the Greek and Latin medical concept of black bile (the literal meaning of the word melancholia) and the four humors, of which black bile (melancholy) was one, among the sanguinic, choleric and phlegmatic humors.

[10] "Art and Society Class Blog @ CUNY LaGuardia College." CUNY LaGuardia, Q6 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. https://artandsociety2014laguardiacollege. wordpress.com/2014/09/page/3/.

[11] Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl. *Saturn and Melancholy; Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. London: Nelson, 1964.

In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, melancholy was emblematized in the image of a pensive person resting their head on their hands, often wearing a gag and sitting nearby water in order to indicate the risk of suicidal drowning. Panofsky and his co-authors reconstruct Renaissance melancholy in its relation to astrology and Neoplatonist doctrines of corresponding macro- and microcosms. Albrecht Dürer and Aertgen van Leyden's 16th century depictions of the subject stand in this tradition, with Dürer's work at the centre of Panofsky, Klibanski and Saxl's narrative. In the 17th century, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Oxford scholar Robert Burton extended the notion of melancholy into a more general philosophical, literary and cultural subject. Its pictorial tradition lived on until the 18th century, in the work of early Romanticist Swiss-British painter Henry Fuseli among others.

Saturn and Melancholy is a poster work for the iconological method of the Warburg school that dominated 20th century scholarly art history and by reading the book we can relativize novelty claims for 'circulationism'. Not only do Renaissance emblems and Internet memes greatly resemble each other

in their respective visual compositions of headline, picture and bottom text. Arguably circulationism, in both senses of passive re-production and active reworking, is present in both. The Internet simply served as an accelerator and intensifier of an economy and ecology of images created by print.

As circulationist objects, Renaissance melancholia emblems partly undermine their conventional reading as an early manifestation of the individuation of the modern, conflicted subject (whose poetics Friedrich Schiller branded, in line with late 18th century German idealist philosophy, as 'sentimental' as opposed to 'naive'). How can an iconology that, over the course of centuries, likely had more copies and variations than the Doge, the YUNO and the Rickrolling memes put together, still signify individuality or subjectivation, except as a simulacrum or worn-out stereotype? Isn't the emblem of melancholy for cultural history what a cumshot is for porn? Isn't the cumshot, technically as well as iconologically, a perfect circulationist image irrespective of 'old' or 'new' media, in its migration from 35mm grindhouse cinema projection (film) via video-rental store VHS (analog video) to Pornhub.com (digital streaming video)?

While Renaissance melancholy seemed to comprehend all areas of knowledge and culture, as Panofsky and his co-authors show, the individuation it expressed meant that social issues were internalized. In that sense, melancholy is anti-political. Its humanist concept lacks the two aspects characteristic of 20th and 21st century discourses of depression: politics and economics. In his late lectures, Michel Foucault coined the term biopolitics as complementary to geopolitics, referring to the regulation of physical human existence through political means.[12] He linked it to individualized 'technologies of the self' such as meditation, prayer and asceticism. Contemporary phenomenona such as the 'Quantified Self' movement of people measuring and optimizing their body functions through smart wrists, fitness and nutrition apps, perfectly fit Foucault's definition of such technologies. From this perspective, Prozac is just another contemporary technology of the self; one that is industrially mass-produced and designed to aid industrial labour acceleration, scaling and optimization, in the very same way that the push of

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[12] Foucault, Michel, Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and David Macey. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France*, 1975-76. New York: Picador, 2003.

the button on a Kodak camera accelerated, scaled and optimized image production. Contemporary art, with its prevailing market business model of selling autographs, has detached itself from industrialized image production. It's only logical that it is referring to itself as 'fine art' again after the term had fallen out of grace within modernism. Wherever it has claimed to be a factory product, from Andy Warhol to Jeff Koons, this was mostly brand differentiation for a production that in reality was no more industrialized than Rembrandt or Rubens' workshops of the 17th century. If contemporary art thus adopted the model of monastic production as its 'technology of the self', then one shouldn't underestimate that the monastery, in either its Christian or Buddhist form, is both a site of economic production and of recovery, restoring people to their productive function within the wider economic system.

Today's so-called refugee crisis proves the urgency of the notion of bio- and geopolitics. Both stand for a concept of the political sovereign while the so-called refugee crisis in Europe is dismantling biopolitical control as an illusion and sovereignty as a noble lie. What seems to be at stake is a transformation of biopolitics into bioeconomics, alongside a transformation of politics into economics, which by far exceeds what Foucault himself anticipated with his coinage of 'neo-liberalism' in the same series of lectures.[13] What Foucault called neoliberalism was still the kind of postwar Western European capitalist systems that economists call social or ordoliberal. It was not yet a neoliberalism in which economic power threatened to take over political power, much like clerical power rivalled political power in the European middle ages. In today's colloquial understanding of neoliberalism, 'technologies of the self' have narrowed down to entrepreneurial self-optimization of the human body.

Consequently, under bioeconomic conditions depression is unproductivity. It transforms from an individual issue into a collective and systemic one. If someone is depressed and absent from the workplace, it means that somebody else has to take over their tasks, running the risk of overburdening and burning out. In psychiatric terms, burn-out *is* depression (in the sense that burn-out is a colloquial term for what the medical profession

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[13] Foucault, Michel, Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and David Macey. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France*, 1975-76. New York: Picador, 2003.

calls 'adjustment disorder' or 'reactive depression'). Thus, there is a systemic economic factor to depression in a labour world that leaves less and less room for workplace unproductivity, having compressed all human work tasks into high-performance processes after the less demanding tasks were automated. In this sense, the 'Great Depression' of the Fordist 1930s was prophetic of today's bioeconomics of depression, where entrepreneurship of the self has rendered mental and economic crises co-extensive. In other words, by extending the meaning of 'depression' from a mental to a macroeconomic state, the Great Depression suggested a dialectics where the mental state of depression conversely had economic dimensions.

Bipolar Flux

In a conference lecture, artist and researcher Renée Ridgway argued that one of the most influential art schools of the 20th century, Black Mountain College, was largely a product of the American 1930s depression.[14] To quote Ridgway:

'The Great Depression gave rise to many utopian ventures - for example WPA (Works Progress Administration) from Roosevelt's New Deal, which ended because of the war boom. [...] With the Depression, and later in the era of Roosevelt's New Deal (The Public Works Art Project) the Black Mountain College arose from this financially distressed situation in the United States. [...] Black Mountain College had no endowment, each year funds had to be raised for the next session. Faculty took on salary reductions during hard times and the College was always very poor. The "work programme" in which students and faculty both worked together to build buildings, getting their hands dirty by maintaining the farm and growing food, harvesting crops and hauling coal. Studies were in the morning and evening, afternoons were for work duties or hikes. Living situation at Black Mountain College was communal, sleeping in dorms women were separated from men but 6 to a room. Therefore the school assigned everyone a studio for it was the only place one could be alone. Together faculty and students

14 Renee Ridgway, lecture at the conference *Mobility Shifts*, New School, New York, October 15th, 2011

built the "studies building", with their hands, which took 1.5 years to build. The school operated at a high pitch, if students couldn't handle their individual responsibility they left. When the tension ran too high at the school, or if there was conflict or it became too intense, Albers would state that the classes would stop for a week and everyone needed to take a break, focusing on their own research. Officially they called it an "Interlude", Albers called it "leisure time", double time, where you worked harder on what was of interest to you.'[15]

This long quote captures what made Black Mountain College a dream and a nightmare at the same time: a utopia and a dystopia of art education. It suggests a reinterpretation of Black Mountain College as a historical example of the sublimation of a macroeconomic state of exception into a microeconomic state of exception, resulting in the permanent production of individual crises as self-optimization techniques.
To quote Ridgway:
'Sexuality, love affairs, racial integration, leftist politics were all part of the picture but in 1955, students and faculty were not happy, financial problems were high and many turned to drugs and alcohol. Isolation resulted in them being their own little unique society and added to the intensity, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental breakdowns. Some stated that you had to know what the depths are, to understand the highs and that you are alive.'[16]

The art that grew out of the Black Mountain College into the off-gallery movements of the 1960s – Allan Kaprow's happenings, Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School, the 'Expanded Art' mapped out by Fluxus founder and organizer George Maciunas – was performative and processual. Ridgway suggests that its performativity and processuality were not merely aesthetic but also biopolitical and bioeconomic choices that resulted in manic-depressive business cycles. It is little known that Fluxus was just as much an economic as it was an artistic project. Maciunas had originally conceived of Fluxus as a communist cooperative modeled after LEF, the 1920s Russian Productivist

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[15] Renee Ridgway, lecture at the conference *Mobility Shifts.*

[16] Ibid.

Left Front of Artists, which converged around Sergei Tretyakov and Alexander Rodchenko. In a letter to Wolf Vostell, he wrote that:

> 'One can say that Fluxus opposes serious art or culture and its institutions, as well as Europeanism. It is also opposed to artistic professionalism and art as a commercial object or means to a personal income – it is opposed to any form of art that promotes the artist's ego. [...] Fluxus is a collective, like a Kolkhoz (collective estate), not a second self'.[17]

Throughout his career Maciunas developed a number of economic master plans and business models for Fluxus. Perhaps the three most significant of them were the Fluxus Editions, Fluxus Island and Fluxus Cooperative Inc. After returning from Europe to New York in 1963, Maciunas adopted the model of a publishing house for Fluxus. This was also motivated by his disappointment with Fluxus in Europe, where he had organised a series of festivals but found participants clinging to traditional forms of artistic identity. For Fluxus Editions, Maciunas expected artists

to produce highly affordable, reproducible objects instead of autographs and sign over their copyright to Fluxus. This was the birth of the 'multiple', intended to radically change the economics of contemporary art from producing collectible gallery art for the few to LEF-style socialist productivism for the many.

Yet neither did Fluxus artists end up signing over their copyright, nor did the multiples really relinquish their status as autographs with collectible value, as most of them were individually numbered and signed. Maciunas' vision of a truly collective practice that was neither promoting 'the artist's ego' nor a 'means to a personal income', failed. According to Maciunas, his Fluxshop, where the multiples were sold, 'didn't make one sale in that whole year',[18] and it closed in 1965 with a loss of $50,000.

In 1969, Maciunas planned to buy the uninhabited Ginger Island, one of the British Virgin Islands, and turn it into a cooperatively ran Fluxus Island. With sound artists Yoshi Wada, Milan Knizak and the actor Robert de Niro (son of an abstract expressionist painter and Black Mountain College

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17   Noël, Ann, ed. Mr. Fluxus: *A Collective Portrait of GeorgeMaciunas, 1931-1978, Based Upon PersonalReminiscences.* Thames and Hudson, 1998: 41-42.

18   Ibid. p. 114

graduate), Maciunas travelled to the island. Wada remembered the trip as follows:

> 'A real estate broker took us by boat to Ginger Island. They promised to pick us up ten days later. They left us with no means of communication or a boat. We were totally deserted for that time in true Robinson Crusoe style. George knew about it, but the rest of us did not. It was too late to get upset and scream. I realized that this would be one of the most memorable trips I would ever take, be it Fluxus or not.
>
> On the first day we decided to camp under some nice looking small bushes. The next morning, when we woke up, everybody's eyes hurt. George was in the worst shape; he could not open his eyes at all. Everybody was sick. Later on we found out that these nice looking bushes were deadly poisonous.
>
> We did not have that much to eat. The scariest thing was that there was no means to communicate with the outside world. Finally the realtor came back to pick us up. George signed an agreement to buy Ginger Island.'[19]

Fluxus Island was Maciunas' most radical vision of a community business. Its immediate, arguably more successful, precursor was Fluxhouse Cooperative. In 1966, Maciunas used arts grants to buy up lofts in New York's SoHo, at the time a purely warehouse district, and convert them into living and working spaces for artists. The project put Maciunas into personal jeopardy. He had to hide from the authorities for years and a dispute over a contractor's bill had him beaten up, with '4 broken ribs, a deflated lung, 36 stitches in his head and blind in one eye'.[20] Although the Fluxhouse Cooperative eventually faltered and Maciunas died in 1977 at the age of 47, it remained his economically most visionary enterprise. Maciunas had not only started the gentrification of SoHo, but more generally

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19 Yoshi Wada, reprinted at Fluxus Foundation, Fluxus as Architecture, Ginger Island, http://fluxusfoundation.com/fluxus-as-architecture/fluxus-as-architecture/ginger-island/stories-of-adventure/. This episode fits the typical history of island settlements which German novelist and graphic designer Judith Schalansky collected in her book *Atlas der abgelegenen Inseln (Atlas of Remote Islands)*: most islands do not provide sufficient resources for a sustainable economy, which leads to quick exhaustion of natural resources and intolerable living conditions.
20 Wikipedia contributors. "GeorgeMaciunas." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 6 Feb. 2016. Web. 9 Feb. 2016. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=George_Maciunas&oldid=703611225

pioneered gentrification of urban neighbor-hoods through artist-run spaces, a success formula still in operation today. A success that of course, sharply contradicted his own political and economic intentions.

Maciunas may be seen as an artist whose primary works were economic experiments, the lifelong endeavor of translating a commu-nist concept of political (= macro) economy into viable micro-economies. Projects that boomed and busted, running in perpetual bipolar cycles of euphoria and depression. In this sense, Maciunas did not only pioneer gentrification but he also preempted the cre-ative dotcom economy with its manic-depres-sive model of incubators and startups.

Coincidentally or not, Fluxus includes some of the earliest art works and projects that have depression as their explicit subject. Ben Vautier's *Crisis and Nervous Depression* from 1962/1963 distills the stereotype of the psychopathic artist into an ironical-concep-tual statement. In this sense, it's still about the 'artist's ego' and hence what Maciunas criticized as perfectly exemplifying the lega-cy of artist-as-genius that prompted him to leave Europe in disappointment, and demand in his 1963 Fluxus manifesto to 'PURGE THE WORLD OF EUROPANISM'.

German Fluxus artist Wolf Vostell could also have been accused of Europeanism and of ex-hibiting the 'artist's ego' that Maciunas crit-icized in a letter to him. Yet, by pioneering television and video art, together with Nam June Paik, his choice of media might have been closer to the Fluxus ideal of art as pop-ular amusement than Maciunas' own Fluxus Editions. Vostell's installation *Endogene Depression*, first shown in 1963, mixed de-funct and partly broken-up television sets with concrete blocks and roaming live ani-mals. Reviewing the work in 2014, artist and critic Joseph Nechvatal found that:

> 'The title *Endogene Depression* is partic-ularly telling. Endogenous substances are those that originate from within an organism, tissue, or cell. Endogenous vi-ral elements are DNA sequences derived from viruses that are ancestrally inserted into the genomes of germ cells. [...] Thus the installation delightfully calls forth broadcast media as a viral entity within a conjugal host.'[21]

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[21]   Nechvatal, Joseph. "How a Fluxus Pioneer Tuned Televisions to a World of Noise." *Hyperallergic*. 28 Oct. 2014. Web. 09 Feb. 2016. http://hyperallergic.com/158926/how-a-fluxus-pioneer-tuned-televisions-to-a-world-of-noise/.

This puts Vostell into the vicinity of William S. Burroughs with his poetics of language and mass media as viral agents. Burroughs' poetics were also the blueprint for *Decoder*. In *Decoder* Muzak is just one of several psychotropic mass media that become critically disrupted through signal interference. Thus Vostell's installation could be read as another such interference, a subversive reprogramming of the mass medium of television. However, principally it constructs a post-apocalyptic world *after* television, where empty screens stare at roaming animals, while those creatures whose existence had previously mediated between electronic technology and animals, namely humans, are absent. This seems to contradict the title *Endogene Depression*. One would normally assume a posthuman landscape to be exogenous as it would not have originated from within an organism. In Vostell's installation, this organism must either have destroyed itself or the work is an update of the Renaissance iconography of melancholia; a 20th century version of the disenchanted, introverted view within a deserted environment, from a post-human instead of a humanist perspective.

[See Figure 9: Mark Fisher, Ghosts of My Life, book cover, zero books, 2014, p.70]

Hauntologies

In contemporary language, Vostell's installation could be said to produce a 'hauntology'. This portmanteau word of 'haunted' and 'ontology' was coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida in the early 1990s[22] and was recently revived by British pop culture and music criticism as a tag for decay aesthetics, including retro phenomena, contemporary uses of analog and dead media, as well as the obsessions of (predominantly Western and white) pop culture with its own past. Mark Fisher's 2014 *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures* bemoans a 'slow cancellation of the future' throughout culture and present-time politics.[23] Fisher turns Derrida's broad philosophical concept into a more narrow diagnosis of his own time and culture. Mourning over the cultural wastelands left behind by Thatcherism, hauntology has an air of white nostalgia, in contrast to non-white visions on contemporary culture

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22 Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*, New York and London: Routledge, 1994.
23 Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures*. John Hunt Publishing, 2014.

such as Afrofuturism. Even Afropessimism that manifested after the police shootings of black people in the U.S. – Michael Brown in 2014, Freddy Gray in 2015 – [24] cannot be hauntological in Fisher's sense, since the past and recent present to which it refers, do not lend themselves to nostalgia. Given the history of American slavery and race discrimination laws effective until the 1960s, Afrofuturism looks at the future as full of promise, in contrast to a recent past and present still bound by trauma.

Derrida's hauntology was visionary since it predicted, a few years after the fall of the Wall, at the most unlikely moment in history that the specters of Marx would not go away. Today, they are back with a vengeance. The global economic depression is the financial system collapse of 2008 frozen into a permanent state of exception. Although it appears to be the eternal return of the same (with the identical ingredients of the 1930s Great Depression) overheating of deregulated financial markets, its story differs from a European perspective. Today's crisis can

also be seen as the last of a series of manic-depressive shakeups that began with the collapse of Eastern European communism in 1990, continued with the collapse of the 'new economy' in 2000, out-of-control global conflicts since 9/11 and rippling bursts of speculation bubbles.

Alexander Brener's spray painting of Malevich's *White Cross* with a dollar sign, exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1997, could thus be framed as an emblem for the whole period after 1990. It was widely perceived as nihilistic or attention-seeking vandalism at the time, but as a most precise artistic statement in retrospect. From a contemporary bio-economical perspective however, it can be read as something quite different from what the artist likely intended. Through a contemporary lens, the spray-painted dollar sign does not simply dismantle capitalist materialism's takeover of Malevich's suprematist immaterialism. Rather, it creates a dialogue between two currencies: the painting with its speculative art market value versus the dollar as a no less speculative currency.

Abstract-conceptualist painting and dollar currency both embody economics

[24] On the notion of Afropessimism, see Sexton, Jared, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism", *InTensions Journal*, 5, 2011. http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jared-sextonarticle.pdf

wherein exchange value has been maximally abstracted from material production value. Conceptual art, with its 'dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972'[25] thus can be seen as a forerunner of the decoupling of the U.S. dollar and other Western currencies from the gold standard in 1971. Malevich's painting, spray-painted by Brener, poses the fundamental question of whether the dollar sign and the suprematist painting devalue each other or add to each other's value, perhaps even beyond the sum of their parts. There can be no definite answer to this question, only tentative responses depending on fleeting business cycles. Whose rates will go up? Whose will go down? What are their interference effects? Can we analyse the Malevich/Brener/dollar superimposition as schizophrenic or as bipolar? Does the superimposition transform Malevich's static, almost sculptural suprematist work into a time-based experimental object?

Of course, this interpretation contradicts Brener's declared anti-capitalist intentions. In 2002 he and his partner Barbara Schurz co-wrote a pamphlet on the *Necessity of a Cultural Revolution*. It frames depression as a product of neoliberal culture and continues where Maciunas' critique of the artist's ego left off:

> 'As we are talking about a cultural revolution, it would be logical to assume that it should be created by the hands of today's "cultural workers": the artists, film directors, actors, authors, philosophers, theoreticians and critics. But in the course of our search for revolutionary cultural workers, we have mostly only shrugged our shoulders and ground our teeth. Ha-ha-ha-ha! Today's cultural workers are a herd of vain and coquette farters tamed by Power - and nothing more. At least half of them are in search of success, money and recognition from so-called experts and the mass media. They dream of one day standing amongst the rows of the neoliberal elite. They want to appear on the glossy pages of fashion magazines, right next to the models. Of course, it would be unfair to accuse all of these initiatives without exception – We repeat: Today's cultural field is strongly fragmented – Within it are not only the successful, self-assured winners but also more or less unsatisfied,

25 Lippard, Lucy R. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. New York: Praeger, 1973.

frustrated, doubting, thrown-out, depressed, lost and bitter and it is to them that we appeal.'[26]

What Brener and Schurz describe here, and also address in their public actions, amounts to a larger story of post-1990 hypercapitalism. Curator and critic Inke Arns, who extensively wrote on Laibach, NSK and Slovenian underground conceptual art before 1990, suggests a connection between post-communist condition and the introduction of the World Wide Web. In an interview in the journal e-flux, she argues that 'the introduction of the Internet in Europe around 1994 produced a genuinely utopian feeling' with 'this utopian hope that this was the ultimate medium that would change the world, which now sounds strange looking back at it.'[27] Retrospectively, the Internet and Westernization of Eastern Europe share large parts in the same cultural, political and economic narrative.

26 Brener, Alexander, and Barbara Schurz. "The Necessity of a Cultural Revolution." PubliX Theater Caravan. mov, Feb. 2002. Web. 09 Feb. 2016. http://no-racism. net/publix/publix_texts.html.
27 Petrešin-Bachelez, Nataša. "Blame It on Gorbachev: The Sources of Inspiration and Crucial Turning Points of Inke Arns." E-flux Journal #1. E-flux, Dec. 2008. Web. 10 Feb. 2016. http://www.e-flux.com/journal/blame-it-on-gorbachev-the-sources-of-inspirationand-crucial-turning-points-of-inke-arns.

[See Figure 10: Hans Bernhard/ubermorgen.com, *PsychOS*, 2004, p.70]

The future now never present

The work of Swiss-born, Vienna-based artist Hans Bernhard is as emblematic for the 1990s/2000s Internet boom and bust as Brener's work is for post-communism. In 1994, Bernhard co-founded Austrian artist group etoy, which posed as an empty, content-devoid cyber startup, dressed in orange uniforms with shaved heads and adopting a macho corporate capitalist identity with stock market shares and a rented helicopter. In the early 2000s, Hans Bernhard quit etoy and reappeared under the moniker *ubermorgen.com* with his partner Lizvlx, partly as a consequence of his mental breakdown after excessive drug use during the etoy period, followed by psychiatric treatment and a diagnosis with bipolar disorder. Bernhard openly discusses his ongoing treatment, often bringing large plastic bags with the packages of his prescribed drugs to public presentations and his personal blog lists nothing but the names and doses of drugs he took on a particular day.

[See Figure 11: Hans Bernhard/ubermorgen.com, *Psych|OS*, 2001-2010 and Figure 12 :Hans Bernhard/uber-morgen.com, *The Psych|OS Generator*, 2006, p.71]

Within net.art and a larger field of media activism, ubermorgen became famous for *voteauction.com*, a website that pretended to be a selling and buying platform for votes in the American presidential election of 2000. It resulted in the artists, disguised as Internet startup entrepreneurs, coming under FBI investigation as well as a half-hour breaking news special on CNN about 'a foreign company trying to manipulate the American vote'. *Psych|OS*, a lesser known work by ubermorgen, started in 2001 with pictures and videos taken by Bernhard in hospital during psychotic states, including a self-portrait whose making he does not remember and professionally shot photographs of him as a patient. However, the most comprehensive work in this series is a piece of software called *Psych|OS-Generator*, a web application that allows everyone to select their own psychosis from a menu and further specify specific illness symptoms. The software adheres to the World Health Organization's ICD-10 numbering system for diseases. At the end of each multiple-choice procedure,

it prints out a drug prescription conforming either to European or American standards complete with a fake doctor's signature.

Psych|OS couldn't be a more literal title for the work, since it constitutes an operating system running on psychoses as its data set as well as amounting to a cybernetic sculpture of psychoses as programmed systems. Furthermore, it is a piece of perverse entrepreneurship of the self that outsources the medical profession to algorithms, replacing it with its own bio-economics for the depressed. Where Brener and Schurz still retain their optimism in depression as a driving force for revolution, in *Psych|OS* only depression and dystopia remain, except for a small moment of freedom in the humor of the piece.

[See Figure 13: Metropolarity Collective, *The Future Now Never Present*, 2014, p.72]

Psych|OS-Generator epitomizes what Afrofuturist writer Ras Mashramani calls science fiction as the current condition rather than a vision of the future. We are already living in Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Stanislaw Lem and Vladimir Sorokin's dystopias (or utopias, depending on the euphoric or depressive spin one might give to their stories). Mashramani

co-founded Metropolarity, a punk-queer science fiction collective based in Philadelphia. In Metropolarity's zine *Journal of speculative vision and critical liberation technologies*, she published the following text:

> 'Toddlers on touchscreens cause
> their fingers was born with it - drone
> surveillance over all yr bodegas -
> superbacteria talkin bout fuck yr
> penicillin
>
> Sci Fi is no longer only for the future
>
> Sci Fi is here on your front porch
>
> This is a meditation on the future
> present
>
> our sci fi realities.
>
> The future is now
>
> and always has been
>
> world without end amen.'[28]

While this post-apocalyptic imagery is superficially reminiscent of Vostell's *Endogene*

Depression, it is not expressive of an end-of-the-world scenario (as is stated clearly in the last few lines) either, nor even of a post-human vision, since in the narrative of this text, humanism never existed to begin with. This is where Mark Fisher, quoting Kodwo Eshun, links hauntology to Afrofuturism:

> 'Put bluntly, we might say that postmodernity and hauntology confront "white" culture with the kind of temporal disjunction that has been constitutive of the Afrodiasporic experience since Africans were first abducted by slavers and projected from their own life-world into the abstract space-time of Capital. [...] Forcibly deprived of their history, the black slaves encountered "postmodernity" three hundred years ago: "the idea of slavery itself as an alien abduction . . . means that we've all been living in an alien-nation since the 18th century' (Eshun 1998: A [192])[29]

Evoking the 'spectre haunting Europe' of the Communist Manifesto, Derrida's 'hauntology' in the Spectres of Marx was, above all, an

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28 The Future Now Never Present: *Journal of Speculative Vision and Critical Liberation Technologies* vol., no. 2 (2014): 3.

29 Mark Fisher, The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology Dancecult: *Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture* 5(2): 42-55, 2013

answer to Francis Fukuyama's neo-Hegelian (and neoconservative) 'end of history' after the end of the Cold War. Hauntology is about the ghost, the zombie, that has been declared dead, yet by still haunting the present causes a disruption in time. While Fisher's reading of hauntology in relation to Afrofuturism is sympathetic with the latter, it is problematic. Firstly because it seems to reduce Afrofuturism to 'confront[ing] "white" culture'. Secondly, by disrupting only the past and the present, hauntology actively excludes the future, unlike Afrofuturist thinking. The future thus remains what it used to be (in Christian and Islamic eschatology, at least): a horizon of hope for absolution, a belief, a smokescreen that makes depression bearable, or its dystopian other. In this notion of the future, depression can only be attached to the past. Hauntology thus becomes a recipe for stigmatizing depression rather than embracing it.

Depression is timeless. It doesn't discriminate against anyone. With no horizon, race or class privilege, depression creates the lives that perfectly fit front porch dystopia. Let's demand justice for depression, not cures.

Debt and the Materiality of the Dividual

By
Joshua Simon

The commodity, as conceptualised in the Marxist tradition, opens up the discussion about how our social relations are materialised. The commodity is therefore an entry point: under current economic and political conditions, it is the negative space created by debt and turned into a *thing*. Conceptualising the commodity can reveal the way it performs the contradictions present in ourselves.

At the heart of this mapping, a new form of subjectivity emerges: the *dividual*. As the locus of a multitude of subjectivities, the commodity plays a significant role in both forming and describing the dividual. As far as forms of subjectivity go, Darwinian evolutionary biology and creationism both tell a similar, linear story of progress — the transition of beings from nonhumans to humans: objects turn into subjects, either by gradual 'natural selection,' as Charles Darwin describes it in Chapter IV of *The Origin of Species*, or by divine construction, as revealed in the Book of Genesis. Marxist analysis proposes a totally different method, one that ironically fits pagan and polytheistic notions of reincarnation. The latter traditions resonate much more with the realities of contemporary modes of labour than they do with evolutionary or monotheistic myths. To put it simply, commodities are the reincarnations of the subjects who laboured over them – the subjects who designed, produced, delivered, marketed, sold, bought, used, and re-used them. Paradoxically here, the Marxist critique of political economy adopts an animistic quality.

Commodities, then, are ghost-traps. In the cult movie *Ghostbusters* (dir. Ivan Reitman, 1984), a parapsychologist manufactures a ghost-trap and travels around Manhattan with his partners trying to eliminate ghosts. The Ghostbusters trap is an allegory of the commodity. The reincarnated materials of our social relations, commodities are the ghost-machines of labourers (either producers or consumers). Commodities are the traps from which our collective subjectivities can emerge.

As a result of capital's tendency towards technocratic fascism, labour has moved away from production to consumption. Therefore,

commodities operate as materialisations of our social relations, both from the perspective of production (with alienation as its key mode of experience) and from the perspective of consumption or other daily labour divorced from employment (with its key mode of experience shifting towards debt). Marx explained that while a commodity may appear, at first, to be an extremely obvious, trivial thing — 'its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties'[1] — Slavoj Žižek points out that this famous description of the commodity does not follow a simple empiricist scenario (by which a transcendent entity is unveiled as a trivial everyday thing), but rather the opposite: Marx proposes that the commodity, which appears to be a mundane and common thing, abounds in metaphysical subtleties.[2]

The project I have been involved with in recent years looks at the commodity as a precursor to any one *thing* in the world. Related to the work that sees art as an auto-critique of financialised capitalism, this proposal considers privatisation to be the highest stage of colonisation. By this, I mean that the patterns of colonisation have met their limits with capitalism's colonisation of the world after 1990, and they have since returned to haunt the colonisers through anti-colonial resistance and privatization. This logic was presented by Hannah Arendt in her description of technologies that propelled 19th century imperialist exploitation overseas (through concepts like race and the nation-state) and that, in turn, gave rise to totalitarianism in the 20th century from the 'metropole' of these empires. The outside, therefore, becomes the inside.[3] Privatization is seen as a regime of taxation without representation, in which the process of generating profit creates a generation, which is overqualified for the employment market and already in debt when entering the

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[1] When describing a wooden table Marx writes: "But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will." See: Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1976), pp. 163-164.

[2] Slavoj Žižek makes these points in a lecture titled ... →

[2] "Hegel As a Critic of Marx," at the conference *One Divides into Two: Dialectics, Negativity & Clinamen at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry*, Berlin (28-30 March 2011) <http://www.ici-berlin.org/videos/docu/one-divides-into-two/>(accessed 2014-08-15).

[3] See: Hannah Arendt, "Imperialism," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), pp. 123-302.

employment market. All living-labour, under the conditions of late capitalism, is overqualified: the new protocols of accumulation incorporate qualifications that were previously outside of its reach, particularly in the sphere of reproductive labour.[4]

The Overqualified

With labour accessible to capital, the employment problem was thought to be resolved by the de-unionized labour of the debt economy. Yet, today, not only do we suffer from de-unionized labour in the employment market — and from the debt incurred by student loans, state taxes, and life taxes (privatised services) — but also, we are *overqualified* for the employment market. We are a workforce that can write code, play instruments, take photographs, translate, and teach, all while mastering graphic design and video editing programs. Eventually, however, members of this workforce find a day job for a few hours a week, such as teaching art to kids in a private

elementary school while working evening shifts waiting tables at a bar.

The assembly line runs through us now, and labour has expanded from production to consumption. From the Fordist labour-time of the assembly line, which was clearly demarcated, pragmatically organised and managed, to the never-ending labour-time online where having experiences generates value directly, the Internet has taken on the function of a global time clock where we punch our cards on platforms of unpaid labour like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram. Now, our shock work, being less about the production of goods and more about the circulation of subjectivities, exhausts various gestures and practices that seemed, just a few decades ago, to hold substantial critical weight. Appropriation strategies are a good example of that, having lost most of their critical power to the advent of cloud computing, forwarding, and tweeting.

As Marx explains, the productive powers of labour under capitalism appear as the creative power of capital. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi made this point by describing how the general intellect has turned into labour. But the productive potency of labour can no longer

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[4]   Paolo Virno's notion of virtuosity and life-labour of the multitude is relevant here. See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles/CA and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004

be contained and organized by capitalism, because, as Bifo puts it, 'Value can no longer be defined in terms of average necessary work time.'[5] Today, many aspects of life have been infiltrated to constitute new forms of labour, even before one enters the employment market.

The *Acceleration Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, written by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, addresses this directly. They posit that when John Maynard Keynes was writing *The Economic Prospects for Our Grandchildren* in 1930, he could still envision 'an enlightened capitalism inevitably progressed towards a radical reduction of working hours.' Keynes saw a capitalist future where people would have their work reduced to three hours a day. But as Srnicek and Williams declare, what has instead occurred is 'the progressive elimination of the work-life distinction, with work coming to permeate every aspect of the emerging social factory.'[6]

The Dividual

Private property is by definition a negation — as Marx remarks, private property is the deprivation and exclusion of property from others. What this means is that the exchange is no longer a human relationship but instead 'the abstract relation of private property to private property, and this abstract relation is the value which acquires a real existence as value only in the form of money.' The social relationship of private property to private property is already one in which private property is estranged from itself, meaning that we are deprived of and excluded from what we believe we own. The abstraction into money, therefore, represents the alienation of private property.[7]

With this comes another key negation, one that abstraction through money contributes to, and one that relates directly to the notion of subjectivity proposed here. That is the *in-dividual*. This term holds a double meaning. It refers to something being indivisible, a singular thing that cannot be divided, but it also indicates separateness or

[5] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, "The Future after the End of the Economy," *e-flux journal*, no. 30 (December 2011).
[6] Clause 2 in the third part of Nick Srnicek's and Alex Williams's "*Acceleration Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*". See: http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/

[7] See Karl Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*", in id., *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin and New Left Review, 1975), p. 261

individualism — the concept of being inseparable from oneself and separated from other entities. Therefore, the individual, the cornerstone of a liberal, deliberative, representational worldview, is itself a negation — but a negation of what? It is the negation of a thing that is already there, a thing that is already a part of something else: *the dividual*.

When Deleuze outlines the dividual in *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, he uses it to denote the collapse of the individual. In the text, Deleuze describes a shift away from the Foucauldian *disciplinary* societies of the 18th and 19th centuries. The old order, which Deleuze describes as analogous to the prison, is composed and organized of vast spaces of enclosure. Individuals are always going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws: First, the family unit, then school ('You're not at home, you know'), then the barracks ('You're not at school, you know'), then the factory, then a visit to the hospital from time-to-time, and then, perhaps, prison, the model site of confinement.[8] With the shift to the 'Societies of Control', Deleuze says the crisis involves all environments of enclosure: prison, hospital, factory, school, and family.

[8]   See Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript," op. cit., 177 (3).

These environments of enclosure seep into one another — you never finish school, you never leave the family, you never finish the army, you are never out of the hospital, never out of prison, never out of the factory. Here, Deleuze describes the life of the overqualified generation — always in school, always in debt, always dependent on family, always recruited, always in need of medication, always unemployed or in between jobs, but at the same time always working.

Deleuze describes the dividual as a product of the 'Societies of Control' in which 'the key thing is no longer a signature or number but a code.' Way before laptops and smartphones, Deleuze's direct example was the ATM, where one has to authenticate herself as a user by entering a password rather than writing down her signature: 'We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become *dividuals*, and masses become samples, data, markets, or *banks*.'[9] The dividual for Deleuze is a dissected entity roaming through networks. We are then

[9]   Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," trans. Martin Joughin, in id., *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 [1990]), 177-182, 180. Originally published in a slightly different translation in *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7, 5 <http://www.spunk.org/texts/misc/sp000962.txt> (accessed2014-08-15).

faced with a conceptualization of subjectivity that doesn't center on a discrete, indivisible entity (i.e., the in-dividual). Manufactured through production protocols and the debt economy, the dividual is in constant negotiation. With a non-fixed and mobile, always partial flow, the dividual is in the process of subjectification — it is not an entity unto itself or an entity apart from others, but an entity in-relation. The dividual is a subjectivity that is already part of a presence. In the 'Society of Control', the dividual actually holds a resistive potential in its logic.

Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera defines self-determination (in relation to the potential of social labour materialized in the commodity) in a compelling way: 'Capital unfolds the potential of social labour only as abstraction, as forces that are constantly subordinated and castrated by the rationality of value of the commodity.' But since the emergence of these tendencies may be a threat to capital, allowing the potentials of social labour to flourish 'is an issue of labour over and against capital, on the basis of what capital has done thus far.'[10]

When we take into account the fetish — from king to commodity — we witness the making of the in-dividual. As with the fetish, the in-dividual operates with the formulation of a whole, presenting itself to itself — a separate being inseparable from itself. The commodity provides us with the site of the dividual. As the materialization of our social relations, the commodity absorbs our omnipresent and shared dividuality along with its connectedness. Through a dialectical understanding of the commodity, we can see how it actualizes the potential of the overqualified. Our social relations can be activated by reading the commodity in the context of the economic and political logic in which it was produced. Writing on Sergei Eisenstein's cinema, Deleuze describes how Eisenstein's work aims to 'reach the Dividual, that is, to individuate a mass as such, instead of leaving it in a qualitative homogeneity or reducing it to a quantitative divisibility.'[11]

[10] Quoted in Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Comunism*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 2011), p. 237. Álvaro García Linera, "Marxism and Indigenism," inaugural speech delivered at the *Marx and Marxisms in Latin America* conference at Cornell University on 14 September 2007 <http://www.cornell.edu/video/alvaro-garcia-linera-marxism-and-indigenism> (accessed 2014-08-16).

[11] See: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans.: Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 162

This framing of the dividual, therefore, can help further investigate the form of divided subjectivities, namely those that are constituted in, around, and through the commodity and the potential forms of social labour it contains.

The Political is Personal: Thinking about Feminism and Work with Selma James and Silvia Federici

By
Nina Power

> 'When feminism asserted that "the personal is political" it usually conveyed that women's personal grievances were also political. I wanted to … show that the reverse was also true; that the political was profoundly personal, shaping our lives, and that applying Marx's analysis of capitalism to the relations between women and men illuminates them.' – Selma James, 'Marx and Feminism' (1983)[1]

What are the contemporary relations between men and women on the question of work? How can Marx's analysis of capitalism help us to understand the two sides of the statement that the personal is political but that the political is also personal? We live in an age in which, paradoxically, it seems, the first part of this formulation – radical at a time when violence against women was hidden, private – has come to dominate our thinking about politics in general. We all now understand that the personal is political, that the everyday lives of everyone contain asymmetrical experiences of exploitation and oppression that point to larger structural features – sexism, racism, homophobia, and so on. The original feminist slogan contained a revolutionary and analytical force that compelled those who believed themselves already except from self-critique because they had 'good politics' to turn inwards and question the divisions of labor central to the organisations of which they were a part, and to reflect on everyday forms of exclusion and dominance that would otherwise be obscured and even dismissed. There is no question that this work is vital and unending.

But what about the other side? How is it that the political is personal, and what does that mean for us today? The various regimes of life that we cross between on a daily basis – work or unemployment, unwaged labor in the form of care and emotional work, our relationships with ourselves and with others – are, even in their most neutral-seeming form, clearly both personal and political: felt in the first place as chunks of time, emotionally-shaded, as necessities or escapes from

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[1] Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class: The Perspective of Winning* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), p. 143.

necessity. Yet there are larger ways in which these elements of existence, although felt to be 'chosen', can also be seen as trends, tendencies, as things that affect us all by affecting us differently, and often across large strata, such as sex, such that it is less a question of how we *feel* about sex and more a question of how we are treated by virtue of being understood to belong to a particular category whether we like it or not.

Take a recent news story from The New York Times 'As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops.'[2] Here the author asks why it is that women's median earnings 'stubbornly' remain about 20% below men's. Earlier explanations have focused on the role of children and employment or the different types of jobs that women and men might be found in (i.e. the idea that women tend to be found in lower-paying jobs such as teaching and care work), but here the author, on the basis of a long-term study by Paula England, Asaf Levanon and Paul Allison that looked at the United States census data from 1950-2000, suggests that something else is going on, namely that 'work done by women simply isn't valued as highly', despite the fact that women are better educated than men and increasingly opt for the same types of jobs.[3] In other words 'men and women are paid differently not just when they do different jobs but also when they do the same work'.[4]

The argument in the *New York Times* article is that once women start *en masse* doing a particular kind of work then gender bias begins to 'sneak in' and those types of jobs are then devalued so that, as Cain Miller puts it, 'when women move into occupations in large numbers, those jobs began paying less even after controlling for education, work experience, skills, race and geography.'[5] Employers simply place a lower value on work *because* it is work done by women, even if the actual work done is exactly the same as the work done by men. 'It's not that women are always picking lesser things in terms of skill and importance,' Paula England says, 'It's just that the employers are deciding to pay it less.'[6] When women enter various employment fields in greater numbers, pay decreases for

2   Claire Cain Miller, 'As Women Take Over a Male Dominated Field, the Pay Drops', *The New York Times*, March 18th 2016 < http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/upshot/as-women-take-over-a-male-dominated-fieldthe-pay-drops.html>, accessed 23rd March 2016.

3   Ibid.
4   Ibid.
5   Ibid.
6   Ibid.

the same jobs that more men were previously doing. Not only this, but the reverse finding is also true: 'Computer programming, for instance, used to be a relatively menial role done by women. But when male programmers began to outnumber female ones, the job began paying more and gained prestige.'[7]

But should we be surprised at this kind of finding? It certainly might make us feel gloomy, knowing that no matter how much women work, or study, they will always be paid less even for the same work. But as Selma James reminds us, many years ago '[t]he struggle over the depression of one's sector's wage is *always* the struggle over other sectors' wages. Thus low – unequal – pay for women is what keeps men's wages down.'[8] This is, then, an old story, except that the sectors are no longer even held apart by sex, but are held apart *within the sector* by sex. Part of what it means to be a 'woman' or a 'man' today, despite how we might desire to feel differently about our relation to sex and gender, is to be treated as a woman or a man – to be paid more if you are a man, and less if you are a woman, even for the same work. 'Biological

divisions become social divisions' as James astutely puts it more than thirty years ago.[9]

All the work that James and others did in excavating the sheer quantity of 'unwaged' labor – that is to say, work, housework, 'women's work', that was not waged but not entirely unpaid either 'for some are paid in the form of food, clothing and shelter'[10] – did much to reformulate the relationship between Marxism and feminism, specifically by pointing out the unwaged labor power that goes into producing the labor power of others – everything it takes to create and care for workers, all the work that goes into work, if you like. This was a revelation. As James remembers:

'In 1969 and 1970, reading in Volume I of *Capital* all about this uniquely capitalist commodity labor power, I realized that this was the special commodity which housework produced. Being ignorant, I thought everybody knew and I was angry that they had neglected to tell us. It was a surprise to find that the obvious view – that women were the producers of everyone's labor power, everyone's ability to work and to be exploited – was new.'[11]

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[7] Claire Cain Miller, 'As Women Take Over a Male Dominated Field, the Pay Drops', *The New York Times*, March 18th 2016
[8] James, op. cit., p. 154, fn. 19.

[9] James, op. cit., p. 155.
[10] Ibid., p. 151.
[11] Ibid., p. 151.

How far can we say that things have changed now that large numbers of women have entered the workforce?[12] It might be tempting to say that things are surely different now, that women are no longer expected to be solely tied to men in the same way, or to perform unwaged domestic labor out of some enforced assumption about how work and payment 'should' be sexed. But others are cautious about suggesting that things have changed so drastically. In a 2013 interview with Marina Vishmidt, Silvia Federici, also a key figure in thinking about unwaged labor from a feminist perspective, makes the following claim:

> '[W]e should resist the assumption that work conditions have become more uniform and the particular relation that women as houseworkers have to capital has been generalised or that work in general has become 'feminised' because

of the precarisation of labor. It is still women who do most of the unpaid labor in the home and this has never been precarious. On the contrary, it is always there, holidays included. Access to the wage has not relieved women from unpaid labor nor has it changed the conditions of the 'workplace' to enable us to care for our families and enable men to share the housework. Those who are employed today work more than ever. So instead of the feminisation of waged work we could speak of the 'masculinisation' of 'women's labor,' as employment has forced us to adapt to an organisation of work that is still premised on the assumption that workers are men and they have wives at home taking care of the housework.'[13]

This 'masculinisation' of women's labor has generated a double-expectation: not only must women sell their labor power, but they also must do the work that they used to be expected to do because they were women. Only now we don't talk about it anymore! Or in

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[12] It is obvious here that my discussion is primarily restricted to a Western context. The questions that Maria Mies in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (London: Zed Books, 2014 [orig. 1986]) further necessarily complicate the picture: 'we cannot close our eyes to the stark fact that women of all classes in the West, and middle-class women in the Third World, are also among those whose standard of living is based on the ongoing exploitation of poor women and men in the underdeveloped regions and classes', p. 1.

[13] Marina Vishmidt, 'Permanent Reproductive Crisis: An interview with Silvia Federici', *Mute Magazine*, 7th March 2013 http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/permanent-reproductive-crisis-interview-silvia-federici, accessed 23rd March 2016.

Federici's words 'most women live in a state of constant crisis, going from work at home to work on the job without any time of their own and with domestic work expanding because of the constant cuts in social services. This is partly because the feminist movement has fought to ensure that women would have access to male dominated forms of employment, but has since abandoned reproductive work as a terrain of struggle.'[14] It seems difficult to imagine that there is any time for a life outside of work (in the expanded sense) now, a life that includes and is even based upon non-coerced activity, either emotional or intellectual or physical. As James puts it in the 1983 essay, given the hostile environment in which is compelled to survive on work that each carry out against their will, 'what's astonishing is that men and women even talk to each other, let alone live together and even love each other'.[15] Astonishing indeed! And yet men and women of all sexualities continue to spend time together as romantic or non-romantic friends, partners, lovers. Such is the resilience of our social drive, particularly when particular kinds of relationships

are no longer seen as normative.

But do we even know what it might mean to learn to live together and love each other, in the free sense, when all the time and space we might have to find out has been taken from us? As James put it in the 1980s, and which claim remains as true now as it was then:

> 'When capital buys the use of our labor power, it is in charge of our working, of our activity for most of our waking hours. It is not only what we produce which capital takes, from which we are "alienated." It takes our possibilities. We are alienated from our own capacities, our ability to be creative, our ability to shape and reshape ourselves. Capital takes who we could be and limits us to who we are. *It takes our time, which happens to be our life*. It takes us.'[16]

Our time, which happens to be our life ... to understand what work is, the way it constructs us as beings treated a certain way because of our use to capital – women are cheaper and they produce more workers! – is to begin to understand what it might mean to take time itself back. The political is personal

14   Marina Vishmidt, 'Permanent Reproductive Crisis: An interview with Silvia Federici'
15   James, op. cit., p. 153.

16   James, op. cit., p. 149.

and the political has in no way disappeared. If the way it hides itself has become more cunning then we will only have to try harder to outwit it.

Contributors

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Maya Tounta is a writer and indepedent curator from Athens, Greece based in Vilnius, Lithuania. Between 2014 and 2016, she was curator at Rupert Centre for Art & Education in Vilnius, where she worked with the Exhibitions, Residencies, Public and Alternative Education Programmes. Recent curatorial projects include *Double Bind* (Rupert, The Academy of Fine Art at Oslo National Academy of the Arts, The Living Art Museum, Reykjavik), a travelling exhibition of commissions exploring depression, and *λοπαδοτεμαχοσελαχογαλεοκρανιολειψανοδριμ-υποτριμματοσιλφιοκαραβομελιτοκατακεχυμενοκιχλ-επικοσσυφοφαττοπεριστεραλεκτρυονοπτοκεφαλλιο-κιγκλοπελειολαγῳοσιραιοβαφητραγανοπτερύγων*, 'a chimposium' and week-long residency created in collaboration with Brud (an intelligent artifice), centred around eating the longest word in the Greek language – a fictional dish appearing in Aristophane's *Assembly Women* (391 BC).

Marina Vishmidt is a London-based writer and editor occupied mainly with questions around art, labour and value. She is the author of *Speculation as a Mode of Production* (Brill, forthcoming) and *A-Autonomy* (with Kerstin Stakemeier) (Textem and Mute, forthcoming). She also works regularly with Anthony Iles and with Melanie Gilligan. She contributes to journals such as *Mute, Afterall,Texte zur Kunst*, and the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, as well as co-/edited collections and catalogues, most recently *Anguish Language* (Archive Books, 2015). She is part of the Theory faculty at the Dutch Art Institute, lectures in the history and criticism of artists' moving image at the University of Brighton, and has taught at the University of the Arts in Berlin, Sandberg Institute, Central Saint Martins, and Goldsmiths.

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