



LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

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What is the relationship between contemporary digital media and contemporary society? Is it possible to affirm that digital media are without sin and exist purely in a complex socio-political and economic context within which the users bring with them their ethical and cultural complexities? This issue, through a range of scholarly writings, analyzes the problems of ethics and sin within contemporary digital media frameworks.



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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 4

Without Sin: Freedom and Taboo in Digital Media

VOLUME EDITORS

LANFRANCO ACETI & DONNA LEISHMAN

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SHEENA CALVERT & ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

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NSA: No Speaking Aloud, Anonymous, 2013.

Post-Society: Data Capture and Erasure One Click at a Time

"Oh, in the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to be God!"

Frankenstein (1931)

They must have felt like gods at the NSA when they discovered that they were able to spy on anyone. What feels ridiculous to someone that works with digital media is the level of ignorance that people continue to have about how much everyone else knows or can know about 'you.' If only people were willing to pay someone, or to spend a bit of time searching through digital data services themselves, they would discover a range of services that have started to commercialize collective data: bought and sold through a range of semi-public businesses and almost privatized governmental agencies. Public records of infractions and crimes are available for 'you' to know what 'your' neighbor has been up to. These deals, if not outright illegal, are characterized by unsolved ethical issues since they are a 'selling' of state documents that were never supposed to be so easily accessible to a global audience.

Concurrently as I write this introduction, I read that the maddened Angela Merkel is profoundly shocked that her mobile phone has been tapped into – this is naive at best but also deeply concerning: since to not understand what has happened politically and technologically in the 21st century one must have been living on the moon. Perhaps it is an act or a pantomime staged for the benefit of those 'common' people that need to continue living with the strong

belief or faith that their lives are in good hands, that of the state.

Nevertheless it speaks of a 'madness' of the politician as a category. A madness characterized by an alienation from the rest of society that takes the form of isolation. This isolation is, in Foucauldian terms, none other than the enforcement of a voluntary seclusion in the prison and the mad house.

The prisons within which the military, corporate, financial and political worlds have shut themselves in speak increasingly of paranoia and fear. As such the voluntary prison within which they have sought refuge speaks more and more the confused language that one may have imagined to hear from the *Stultifera Navis*.

Paranoia, narcissism and omnipotence, all belong to the delirium of the sociopaths, who push towards the horizon, following the trajectory set by the 'deranged minds.'

It is for the other world that the madman sets sail in his fools' boat; it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks.

This otherworldliness – this being an alien from another world – has increasingly become the characteristic of contemporary political discourse, which, detached from the reality of the 'majority' of people, feeds into the godlike complex. Foolishness and lunacy reinforce this perspective, creating a rationale that drives the

Stultifera Navis towards its destiny inexorably, bringing all others with them.

Having segregated themselves in a prison of their own doing, the politicians look at all others as being part of a large mad house. It is from the upper deck of a gilded prison that politicians stir the masses in the lower decks into a frenzy of fear and obedience.

Why should it be in this discourse, whose forms we have seen to be so faithful to the rules of reason, that we find all those signs which will most manifestly declare the very absence of reason?

Discourses, and in particular political discourses, no longer mask the reality of madness and with it the feeling of having become omnipotent talks of human madness in its attempt to acquire the impossible: that of being not just godlike, but God.

As omnipotent and omniscient gods the NSA should allow the state to 'see.' The reality is that the 'hands' of the state are no longer functional and have been substituted with prostheses wirelessly controlled by the sociopaths of globalized corporations. The amputation of the hands happened while the state itself was merrily looking somewhere else, too blissfully busy counting the money that was flowing through neo-capitalistic financial dreams of renewed prosperity and Napoleonic grandeur.

The madness is also in the discourse about data, deprived of ethical concerns and rooted within perceptions of both post-democracy and post-state. So much so that we could speak of a post-data society, within which the current post-societal existence is the consequence of profound changes and alterations to an ideal way of living that technology – as its greatest sin – still presents as participatory and horizontal but not as plutocratic and hierarchical.

In order to discuss the present post-societal condition, one would need first to analyze the cultural disregard that people have, or perhaps have acquired, for their personal data and the increasing lack of participation in the alteration of the frameworks set for post-data.

This disregard for personal data is part of cultural forms of concession and contracting that are determined and shaped not by rights but through the mass loss of a few rights in exchange for a) participation in a product as early adopters (Google), b) for design status and appearance (Apple), c) social conventions and entertainment (Facebook) and (Twitter).

Big data offers an insight into the problem of big losses if a catastrophe, accidental or intentional, should ever strike big databases. The right of ownership of the 'real object' that existed in the data-cloud will become the new arena of post-data conflict. In this context of loss, if the crisis of the big banks has demonstrated anything, citizens will bear the brunt of the losses that will be spread iniquitously through 'everyone else.'

The problem is therefore characterized by multiple levels of complexity that can overall be referred to as a general problem of ethics of data, interpreted as the ethical collection and usage of massive amounts of data. Also the ethical issues of post-data and their technologies has to be linked to a psychological understanding of the role that individuals play within society, both singularly and collectively through the use of media that engender new behavioral social systems through the access and usage of big data as sources of information.

Both Prof. Johnny Golding and Prof. Richard Gere present in this collection of essays two perspectives that, by looking at taboos and the sinful nature of technology, demand from the reader a reflection on

the role that ethics plays or no longer plays within contemporary mediated societies.

Concepts of technological neutrality as well as economic neutrality have become enforced taboos when the experiential understanding is that tools that possess a degree of danger should be handled with a modicum of self-control and restraint.

The merging of economic and technological neutrality has generated corporate giants that have acquired a global stronghold on people's digital data. In the construction of arguments in favor or against a modicum of control for these economic and technological giants, the state and its political representatives have thus far considered it convenient not to side with the libertarian argument, since the control was being exercised on the citizen; a category to which politicians and corporate tycoons and other plutocrats and higher managers believe they do not belong to or want to be reduced to.

The problem is then not so much that the German citizens, or the rest of the world, were spied on. The taboo that has been infringed is that Angela Merkel, a head of state, was spied on. This implies an unwillingly democratic reduction from the NSA of all heads of state to 'normal citizens.' The disruption and the violated taboo is that all people are data in a horizontal structure that does not admit hierarchical distinctions and discriminations. In this sense perhaps digital data are violating the last taboo: anyone can be spied upon, creating a truly democratic society of surveillance.

The construction of digital data is such that there is not a normal, a superior, a better or a worse, but everything and everyone is reduced to data. That includes Angela Merkel and any other head of state. Suddenly the process of spying represents a welcome reduction to a basic common denominator: there is no

difference between a German head of state or a blue collar worker; the NSA can spy on both and digital data are collected on both.

If anything was achieved by the NSA it was an egalitarian treatment of all of those who can be spied upon: a horizontal democratic system of spying that does not fear class, political status or money. This is perhaps the best enactment of American egalitarianism: we spy upon all equally and fully with no discrimination based on race, religion, social status, political affiliation or sexual orientation.

But the term spying does not quite manifest the profound level of Panopticon within which we happen to have chosen to live, by giving up and squandering inherited democratic liberties one right at a time, through one agreement at a time, with one click at a time.

These are some of the contemporary issues that this new LEA volume addresses, presenting a series of writings and perspectives from a variety of scholarly fields.

This LEA volume is the result of a collaboration with Dr. Donna Leishman and presents a varied number of perspectives on the infringement of taboos within contemporary digital media.

This issue features a new logo on its cover, that of New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

My thanks to Prof. Robert Rowe, Professor of Music and Music Education; Associate Dean of Research and Doctoral Studies at NYU, for his work in establishing this collaboration with LEA.

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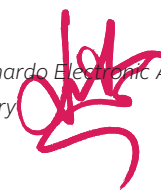
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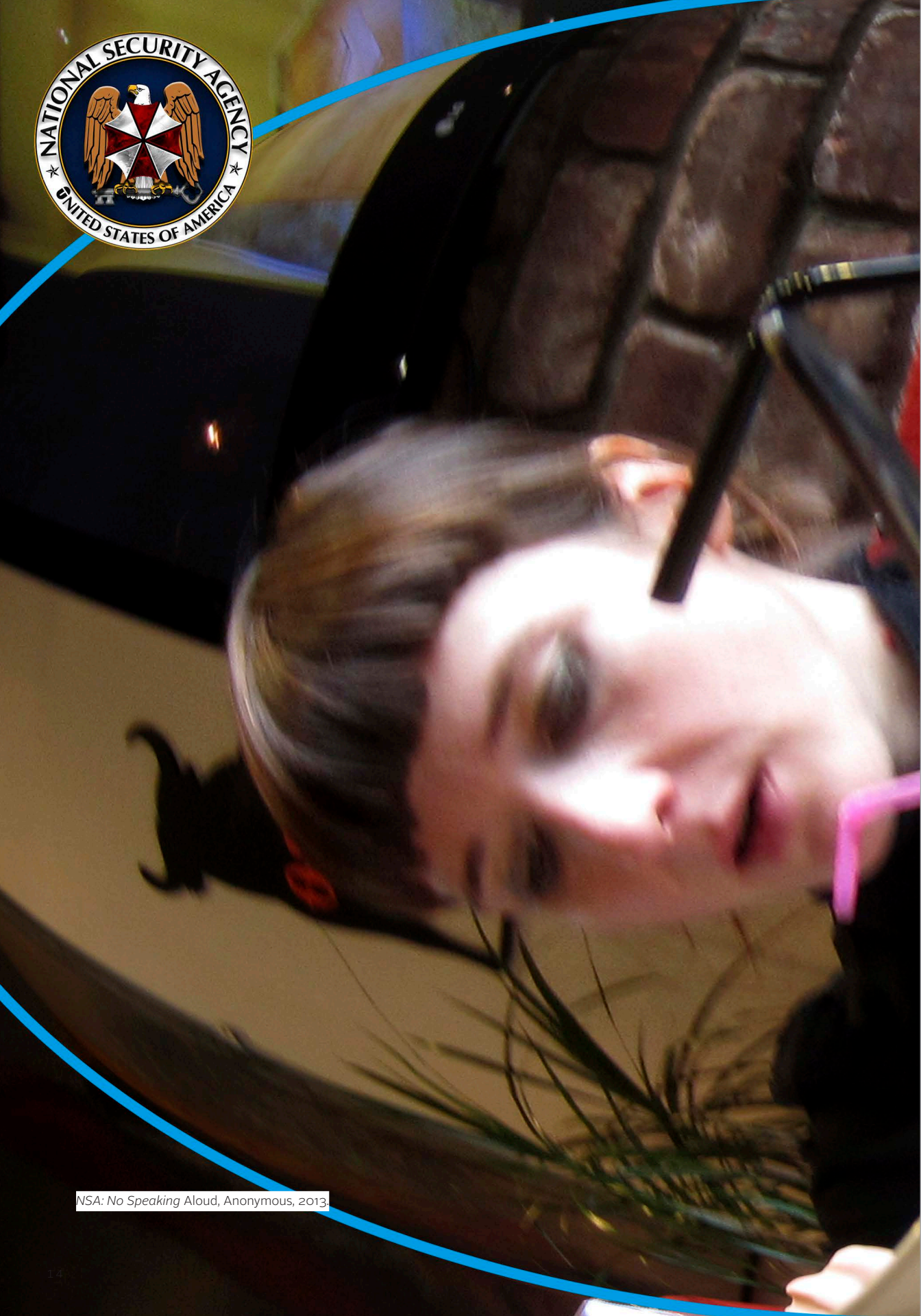
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Lanfranco Aceti

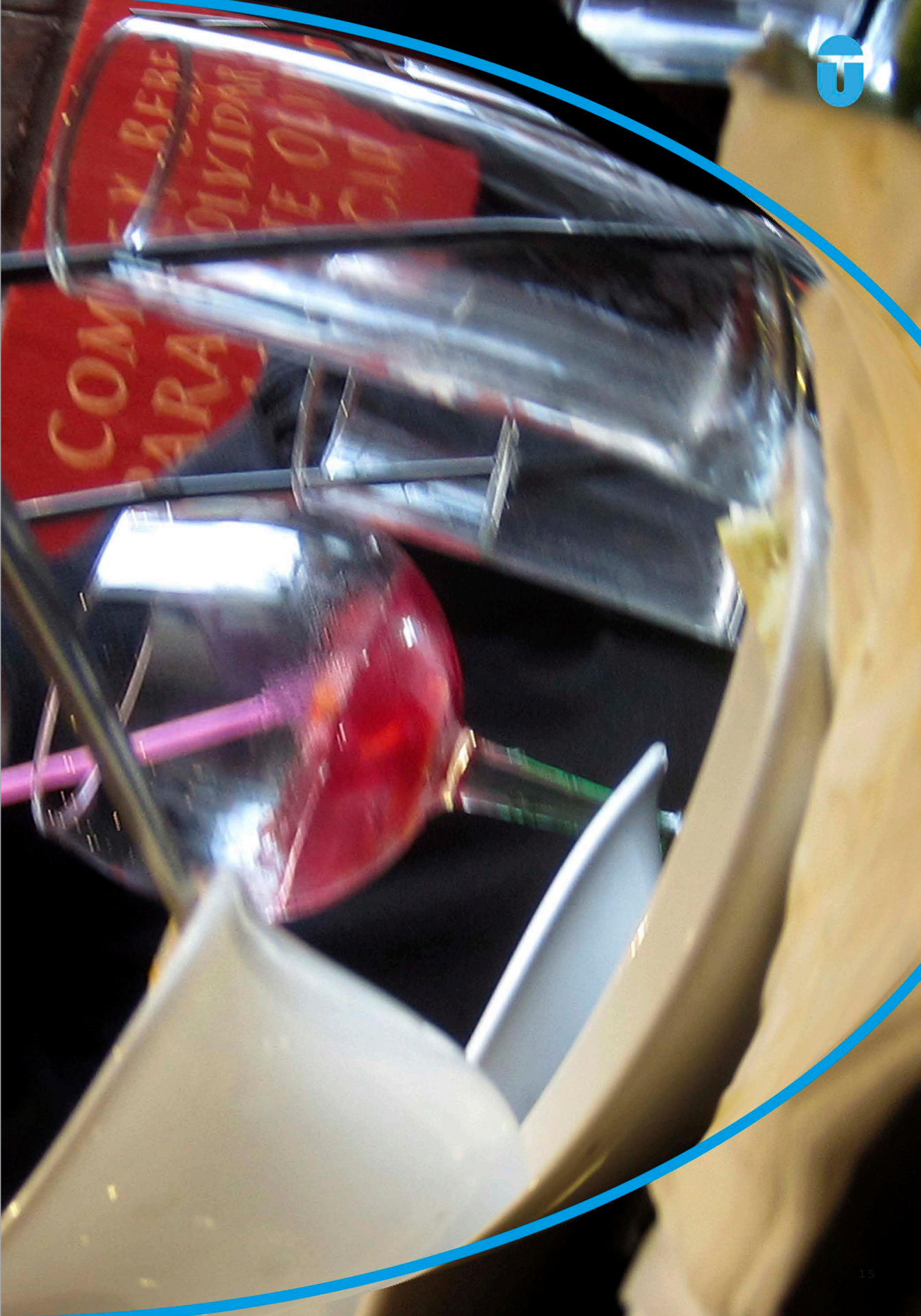
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NSA: No Speaking Aloud, Anonymous, 2013.



Without Sin: Freedom and Taboo in Digital Media

INTRODUCTION

“Without Sin: Freedom and Taboo in Digital Media” is both the title of this special edition and the title of a panel that was held at ISEA 2011. The goal of the panel was to explore the disinhibited mind's ability to exercise freedom, act on desires and explore the taboo whilst also surveying the boarder question of the moral economy of human activity and how this translates (or not) within digital media. The original panelists (some of whom have contributed to the this edition) helped to further delineate additional issues surrounding identity, ethics, human socialization and the need to better capture/understand/perceive how we are being affected by our technologies (for good or bad).

In the call for participation, I offered the view that contemporary social technologies are continuously changing our practical reality, a reality where human experience and technical artifacts have become beyond intertwined, but for many interwoven, inseparable – if this were to be true then type of cognizance (legal and personal) do we need to develop? Implied in this call is the need for both a better awareness and jurisdiction of these emergent issues. Whilst this edition is not (and could not be) a unified survey of human activity and digital media; the final edition contains 17 multidisciplinary papers spanning Law, Curation, Pedagogy, Choreography, Art History, Political Science, Creative Practice and Critical Theory – the volume attempts to illustrate the complexity of the situation and if possible the kinship between pertinent disciplines.

Human relationships are rich and they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self, as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body – not too little, not too much, just right. ¹

Sherry Turkle's current hypothesis is that technology has introduced mechanisms that bypass traditional concepts of both community and identity indeed that we are facing (and some of us are struggling with) an array of reconceptualizations. Zygmunt Bauman in his essay “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity” suggests that:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure if where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety if behavioral styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. 'Identity' is the name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty. ²

Our 'post-social' context where increased communication, travel and migration bought about by technological advances has only multiplied Bauman's conditions of uncertainty. Whilst there may be aesthetic tropes within social media, there is no universally accepted

authority within contemporary culture nor is there an easy mutual acceptance of what is 'right and proper' after all we could be engaging in different iterations of “backward presence” or “forward presence” ³ whilst interacting with human and non-human alike (see Simone O'Callaghan's contribution: “Seductive Technologies and Inadvertent Voyeurs” for a further exploration of presence and intimacy).

Editing such a broad set of responses required an editorial approach that both allowed full expansion of each paper's discourse whilst looking for interconnections (and oppositions) in attempt to distil some commonalties. This was achieved by mentally placing citation, speculation and proposition between one another. Spilling the 'meaning' of the individual contributions into proximate conceptual spaces inhabited by other papers and looking for issues that overlapped or resonated allowed me formulate a sense of what might become future pertinent themes, and what now follows below are the notes from this process.

What Social Contract?

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man.
(Thomas Hobbes in chapter XIII of the *Leviathan*) ⁴

Deborah Swack's “FEELTRACE and the Emotions (after Charles Darwin),” Johnny Golding's “Ana-Materialism & The Pineal Eye: Becoming Mouth-Breast” and Kriss Ravetto's “Anonymous Social As Political” argue that our perception of political authority is somewhere between shaky towards becoming erased altogether. Whilst the original 17th century rational for sublimating to a political authority – i.e. we'd default back to a war like state in the absence of a binding social contract – seems like a overwrought fear, the capacity for repugnant anti-social behavior as a consequence of no longer being in awe of any common power is real and increasingly impactful. ⁵ Problematically the notion of a government that has been created by individuals to protect themselves from one

another sadly seems hopelessly incongruent in today's increasingly skeptical context. Co-joined to the dissipation of perceptible political entities – the power dynamics of being 'good' rather than 'bad' and or 'sinful' appears to be one of most flimsy of our prior social borders. The new reality that allows us to transgress and explore our tastes and predictions from a remote and often depersonalized position feels safer (i.e. with less personal accountability) a scenario that is a further exacerbated space vacated by the historic role of the church as a civic authority. Mikhail Pushkin in his paper “Do we need morality anymore?” explores the online moral value system and how this ties into the deleterious effect of the sensationalism in traditional mass media. He suggests that the absence of restrictive online social structure means the very consciousness of sin and guilt has now changed and potentially so has our capability of experiencing the emotions tied to guilt. ⁶ Sandra Wilson and Lila Gomez in their paper “The Premediation of Identity Management in Art & Design – New Model Cyborgs – Organic & Digital” concur stating that “the line dividing taboos from desires is often blurred, and a taboo can quickly flip into a desire, if the conditions under which that interaction take place change.”

The Free?

The issue of freedom seems to be where much of the debate continues – between what constitutes false liberty and real freedoms. Unique in their own approach Golding's and Pushkin's papers challenge the premise that is implied in this edition's title – that 'Freedom and Taboo' even have a place at all in our contemporary existence as our established codes of morality (and ethics) have been radically reconfigured. This stance made me recall Hobbes's first treaty where he argued that “commodious living” (i.e. morality, politics, society), are purely conventional and that moral terms are not objective states of affairs but are reflections of tastes and preferences – indeed within another of his key concepts (i.e. the “State of Nature”) ‘anything goes’ as nothing is immoral and or unjust. ⁷ It would 'appear' that we are freer from traditional institutional controls whilst at the same time one could argue that the borders of contiguous social forms (i.e.

The usual culprits of time and space (or time as distinct from space and vice versa), along with identity, meaning, Existenz, Being, reconfigure via a relational morphogenesis of velocity, mass, and intensity. This is an immanent surface cohesion, the compelling into a 'this' or a 'here' or a 'now,' a space-time terrain, a collapse and rearticulation of the tick-tick-ticking of distance, movement, speed, born through the repetitive but relative enfolding of otherness, symmetry and diversion.

Golding's is a bewildering proposition requiring a frame of mind traditionally fostered by theoretical physicists but one that may aptly summarize the nature of the quandary. The authors contributing to this edition all exist in their own ways in a post-digital environment, anthropologist Lucy Suchman describes this environment as being "the view from nowhere, detached intimacy, and located accountability."²¹ Wilson and Gomez further offer a possible coping strategy by exploring the usefulness of Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's "pre-mediation" as a means to externalize a host of fears and reduce negative emotions in the face of uncertainty. The imperative to create some strategies to make sense of some of these pressing issues is something that I explore in my own contribution in which I offer the new term *Precarious Design* – as a category of contemporary practice that is emerging from the design community. Precarious Design encompasses a set of practices that by expressing current and near future scenarios are well positioned to probe deeper and tease out important underlying societal assumptions to attain understanding or control in our context of sustained cultural and technological change.

Embodiment

In theory our deterritorialized and changed relationship with our materiality provides a new context in which a disinhibited mind could better act on desires

and explore the taboo. Ken Hollings's paper "THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG WITH THIS, SALLY... Faults, lapses and imperfections in the sex life of machines" – presents a compelling survey of the early origin of when humans began to objectify and try live through our machines starting with disembodiment of voice as self that arose from the recording of sound via the Edison phonograph in 1876. Golding and Swack mull over the implications of the digital on embodiment and what it means now to be 'human' as we veer away from biological truth and associated moral values towards something else. Sue Hawksley's "Dancing on the Head of a Sin: touch, dance and taboo" reminds us of our sensorial basis in which:

Touch is generally the least shared, or acknowledged, and the most taboo of the senses. Haptic and touch-screen technologies are becoming ubiquitous, but although this makes touch more commonly experienced or shared, it is often reframed through the virtual, while inter-personal touch still tends to remain sexualized, militarized or medicalized (in most Western cultures at least).

Within her paper Hawksley provides an argument (and example) on how the mediation of one taboo – dance – through another – touch – could mitigate the perceived moral dangers and usual frames of social responsibility. Swack raises bioethical questions about the future nature of life for humans and "the embodiment and containment of the self and its symbiotic integration and enhancement with technology and machines." Whilst Wilson and Gomez's go on to discuss *Biopresence* by Shiho Fukuhara and Georg Tremmel – a project that provocatively "creates Human DNA trees by transcoding the essence of a human being within the DNA of a tree in order to create 'Living Memorials' or 'Transgenic Tombstones'"²² – as an example of a manifest situation that still yields a (rare) feeling of transgression into the taboo.

CONCLUSION

In the interstices of this edition there are some questions/observations that remain somewhat unanswered and others that are nascent in their formation. They are listed below as a last comment and as a gateway to further considerations.

Does freedom from traditional hierarchy equate to empowerment when structures and social boundaries are also massively variable and dispersed and are pervasive to the point of incomprehension/invalidation? Or is there some salve to be found in Foucault's line that "'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure,"²³ thus nothing is actually being 'lost' in our current context? And is it possible that power has always resided within the individual and we only need to readjust to this autonomy?

Conventional political power (and their panoptic strategies) seem to be stalling, as efforts to resist and subvert deep-seated and long-held governmental secrecy over military/intelligence activities have gained increased momentum while their once privileged data joins in the leaky soft membrane that is the ethics of sharing digitally stored information.

Through dissociative strategies like online anonymity comes power re-balance, potentially giving the individual better recourse to contest unjust actions/laws but what happens when we have no meaningful social contract to direct our civility? It seems pertinent to explore if we may be in need of a new social contract that reconnects or reconfigures the idea of accountability – indeed it was interesting to see the contrast between Suchman's observed 'lack of accountability' and the Anonymous collective agenda of holding (often political or corporate) hypocrites 'accountable' through punitive measures such as Denial-of-Service attacks.

Regarding de-contextualization of the image / identity – there seems to be something worth bracing oneself against in the free-fall of taxonomies, how we see, how we relate, how we perceive, how we understand that even the surface of things has changed and could still be changing. There is no longer a floating signifier but potentially an abandoned sign in a cloud of dissipating (or endlessly shifting) signification. Where once:

*The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social-worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements.*²⁴

There now is no culturally specific normal in the diffuse digital-physical continuum, which makes the materiality and durability of truth very tenuous indeed; a scenario that judges-teaches-social workers are having some difficulty in addressing and responding to in a timely manner, an activity that the theoretically speculative and methodologically informed research as contained within this edition can hopefully help them with.

Donna Leishman

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As perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche would argue... He has previously described "orgies of feelings" that are directly linked to our capacity to feel sin and guilt. "To wrench the human soul from its moorings, to immerse it in terrors, ice, flames, and raptures to such an extent that it is liberated from all petty displeasure, gloom, and depression as by a flash of lightning" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace Samuel (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 139.
6. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 409.
7. Consequential subsets within a disinhibited mind are dissociative anonymity (you don't know me) and dissociative imagination (its just a game), which can lead to benign actions such as random acts of kindness or being more affectionate or potentially toxic (exploring more violent assertive sides of ones nature) and 'other' behaviors.
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15. "The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere." Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 30.
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NSA: No Speaking Aloud, Anonymous, 2013.



Figure 1. Detail from *His Fleece Was as White as Snow*, 2008, Samantha Sweeting, Performance for video. © Samantha Sweeting, 2008. Used with permission.



Ana-Materialism & the Pineal Eye: Becoming Mouth-Breast

Visual Arts in the Age of Algorithmic Reproduction ¹

by

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“Becoming a child,” Picasso was overheard to lament, “takes a very long time.” Becoming Mouth-Breast takes no time at all.

CLARIFICATION.

In a meta-literal sense, the Pineal Eye is the mythical step-creature of that biological entity found in the brain; namely, the pineal gland. From antiquity forward, up until René Descartes' writings on it in the 1640s, this gland was often categorized as the site for sensuous perception, a kind of guilt and shame shallow pit-seed of consciousness; an arena, as it were, where the fore-visioning of future events – not dreams, but real, not-yet-to-have-happened-but-someday-would-happen, unfolding, predictable, REAL events – were supposedly deposited, or as we might say today: archived.

ABSTRACT

Ana-materialism & the Pineal Eye provides a landmark interpretation of materialism, representation and the image using the Cartesian conceit of a pineal gland and its voracious sexually embedded appetites. Developing the argument via Georges Bataille's re-invention of the pineal gland as an all-seeing, all devouring, (pineal) eye, Johnny Golding borrows this move to envision a different analytic approach to digital forms of 'matter' and artificial forms of 'life.' From her critical engagement with Bataille, Gilles Deleuze and Judith Butler, Golding shows why the tools provided by these modern, contemporary and postmodern approaches to philosophy, image, the body, indeed representation cannot fully explore, let alone develop these new forms of reality/ies except by retreating into traditional binary divides between male and female, good and evil, mother/child and so forth. Ana-materialism and the Pineal Eye introduces a much needed understanding to oddly cathected sensualities, multiversal realities, digital imaginaries with no weight, no volume, no spatiality, but 'somehow' making sense, and with it, creating matter, ethics, art.

By the time Descartes got a hold of the gland, he re-fashioned it as a 'synthesis' of sorts – a double-helix synthesis which named the Pineal Gland as both site (as in terrain) and sight (as in vision-image) where the body and the mind's 'eye' came together, and were enlivened, fashioned, quickened as it were, with a 'soul' or even 'the' soul. This was a place where memory, knowledge and the senses intermingled and became one; became one, that is to say, in the carnal, sexual-sensuous sense of the word; and, perhaps more to the point, became knowledge in all aspects of the intellectual and inventive, dipped in a wild, bio-degradable substance. This was not an innocent conceptual move. The Pineal Gland was re-incarnated as the bio-instrument, which, according to Descartes, directly allowed for the animal passions – those wild, consuming spirits – to rear up, like “a very fine wind,” ² or rather, a very lively and pure flame.

And so it was that the Pineal Gland at the base of the skull became that most rare of rare beasts: the living 'mind's eye,' the sight line of a conscience and a consciousness, a vision and a voice. A gland-organ-interpretive-visual-aurality that could whisper to you in that judgmentally irritating kind of way 'no, no, no: I wouldn't do that if I were you...' whilst simultaneously picturing what might happen if you did the reverse or, indeed, did nothing at all. This was a mind's eye 'picture' both substantively, that is, materially immaterial (read: mental, spiritual) and at the same time aggressively, willfully, sensuously, 'real' (read: carnal). A living, breathing guilty and shamefaced present-tense 'imaging,' thinkable, comprehensible and within one's grasp, though only by virtue of its re-presentation of a synthetic unity of Spirit and a beastly carnality – neatly shelved in the archives of the Pineal Gland.

ANA-MATERIALISM AND THE PINEAL EYE

Before moving off this point, there is something that needs to be underscored about this re-presenting, this iteration of the 'is,' now able to 'show itself' (at least in the mind's eye of the Pineal Gland). It wasn't just any kind of 'is,' just any kind of mental image emerging within (or even being 'on') one's mind. It was a sensuous, sexual, carnal, animal-spirited materiality of an 'is' in all its fabrications of the 'to be' (as in 'ought to be': i.e., materially moral; as in 'will be': i.e. materially predictive; as in 'would be': i.e., materially conditional; as in the past predictive 'once upon a time': i.e., materially subjunctive or that of the moody pluperfect).

With all its pitfalls – and there remain many in this slightly mad Cartesian appropriation of anatomical materiality to the picturing / expressing of the senses – a rather crucial, but surprisingly under-theorized (and/or completely misrecognized) conceptual move is initiated by Descartes. For what now is at stake is the entry of very new, very specific and very different analytic logic than that of its pre-Cartesian forbearers and post-Enlightenment thinkers. It marks the initial move to re-stage materiality and its relation to an object, subject, spirit, indeed representation itself, as an immersive economy, no longer prefiguring the image or produced by image. Rather, this materiality is a kind of 'ana-' materiality neither 'real' nor 'not-real.' Despite this (or perhaps because of this), it figures the image and, in so doing, acts as an ontological "groundless ground" ³ for image, text, pleasure, art. One could say, along with a nod to Jacques Derrida, that the "truth in photo-image-graphy" is precisely the cohering into the figural the "that which lies to hand." ⁴ In this sense the materiality of image (be it analogue, digital, mental) has little to do with the metaphysics of perception or understanding. It has even less to do with the technology/ies inherent in the production of said image – though, it is via technologies of production, immersivity and expenditure that this ana-materialism can best be conceptualized. Irrespective of which technology is

used, ana-materialism calls forth a whole new 'truth' in representation, one that side-steps the Universal (and all this implies around totality, objectivity, identity) and instead stages the end-game as mid-game, or even as no game at all, especially if, the rules are meant to be broken. In "The Pineal Eye," Bataille explains it this way:

The eye, at the summit of the skull, opening on the incandescent sun in order to contemplate it in a sinister solitude, is not a product of the Understanding, but is instead, an immediate existence; it opens and blinds itself like a conflagration, or like a fever that eats the being, or more exactly, the head. And thus it plays the role of a fire in a house: the head, instead of locking up life as money is locked in a safe, spends it without counting, for at the end of this great burning head is the image and the disagreeable light on the notion of expenditure, beyond the still empty notion as it is elaborated on the basis of methodological analysis. ⁵

Bataille's notion of expenditure, in concert with the pineal gland of yesteryear, forms the all-seeing fevered-eye, imbued with a material, carnal knowledge that creates the basis for 'a something' or 'an elsewhere' which, by its very definition, weighs less than nothingness, is faster than the speed of light and deeper than a black hole. One could say, further, that this 'ana-materialism,' in part born of Cartesian gentility and rude-boy poetics, steals Bataille's concept of an expended immediacy that cannot be divorced from its object/ subject/ sense/ sensibility. In so doing, it simultaneously side-steps Hegelian dialectics, Lacanian triangulations of the real, symbolic, imaginary, Butler's performative non-essentialisms and even Deleuze's "mouth-breast" (a point to which I will return momentarily).

When the seemingly non-existent (social) agency of materialism no longer remains wedded to dialectical totalities, speculative reason, or, as the newest kid on the fashion-block would call it, speculative realism; when the seemingly empty materiality of, say, the digital image, no longer is tossed on the dunghill of 'virtual reality' or ignored altogether; when all this comes to pass – as it has already done given the ephemeral code drifts of the late 20th / early 21st centuries ⁶ – then it would be fair to conclude that materiality is made manifest, i.e., becomes 'present,' through an iterative and immersive expenditure steeped in the immediate terrain of morphogenic logics. ⁷ This neither-nor (ana-) materialism marks out the boundaries of a method and the content of the 'image-field' as a radically discontinuous economy – libidinal or otherwise – and it does so without leaving a (the) trace. ⁸

To state the point somewhat differently: on the back cover of Jean Cocteau's *The Difficulty of Being*, one of the reviewers recounts the famous house-burning incident when a reporter monotonously asks Cocteau the same question he has asked over and again to all his interviewees on a monthly basis. "What single item would you take from a burning house?" Apparently, and without hesitation, Cocteau retorts: "I would take the fire." ⁹ And that is precisely what we are taking from an inflamed, burning metaphysics. To re-quote from Bataille above, now in the context of an ana-materialism gently removed from its pineal gland embodiment: "and thus it plays the role of fire in a house," though this time it does so, outside the House.

The Problem with Universal Cesspools and Self-Reflexive Logics (or the importance of becoming Mouth-Breast)

In the late 1970s, 80s and 90s, one of the ways used to combat the sterility of metaphysics (not to mention, life itself) was to inject into its crippling hold on representation, identity, sexuality, and art a more

messy approach, a kind of 'fuzzy logic' often relying on shock and awe, the sexually dirty, the problematic and the cruel. A little blood, a little urine, an orgasm or two, not to mention, cannibalism went a long way to disrupt the otherwise self-sealing pronouncements (read: concepts) on what or who could be considered 'female,' 'male,' 'queer' and so on. Deleuze and Butler were two of the more well known anti-essentialist post-structuralist-modernist and/or postmodernist thinkers to engage this particular strategy, though it is fair to say that the latter did not venture quite so markedly onto the more indelicate arenas of bodily pleasure as mentioned above. I want to take some time, now, to discuss the one aspect in each of their work, respectively because despite their committed political and philosophical stance around non-essentialism, both fell back into a path that brought them (though in different ways) right back to the very thing they were fighting.

In the latter sections of his *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze speaks of the "universal cesspool" of life: where, recapping Melanie Klein's work on psychoanalysis, he presents two types of 'surface' structures: the simulacra and the zone, the former of which inhabits and expresses the drives within the unconscious; the latter, which inhabits and expresses those of 'real-time,' albeit patchwork, events. ¹⁰ While perhaps crucial as a way for Deleuze himself to inhabit psychoanalysis without losing site of his own, quite profound, insistence on sexuality/ies, sensuality and indeed all the senses for a methodological framework to grasp/ inhabit 'difference' and with it, a completely different kind of identity, politics, aesthetics and theory. I would like to venture that this part of the *Logic* does not represent his finest hour.

Following a somewhat potted history of Sigmund Freud's originary phases (oral, anal, oedipal), Deleuze suggests that the infant-child latches onto the love-

object-breast-mother and begins to suck. Oh to recall the pleasure in that suck! (And for all still sucking – especially on cigarettes, but also other interesting projectiles, one knows precisely of what pleasure one speaks). We are at the entrance of The Mouth-Breast: one of the most lovely, first moments of synthetic unity/identity – and non-separation, security, wholeness – constitutive of the meaning of life and, simultaneously, life itself (where meaning of life equals pleasure; and where life itself equals sustenance/security).

The suck continues, and one devours. Steadily, forcefully, aggressively. Possessively. Until two things happen: (1) the mouth-breast's digestive track kicks in and the psychic life of the 'mouth-breast' unity starts to enter the mouth-anus phase; and (2) the breast is (eventually) removed from the mouth of the 'child-other' and, depending on a number of circumstances, its return is delayed (child-mouth is satiated; breast-love-object is tired) or even removed altogether (love-object/breast-mother-other is dead or maybe just sadistic; age and circumstance of child-mouth is too old, etc.). Enter the problem, the deep trauma problem (oral phase) from which the child-mouth may never recover. Hence, and from the point of view of this child-mouth, of the need to devour obsessively, maybe even to cannibalize so that, in any case, the pleasure of the suck can be prolonged for long as possible and, if lucky far into adulthood and onward to the grave. This need-dependency-addiction-strategy-tactic (call it what you will) involves an excremental 'gift' linked to and/or emerging from the anal orifice, which, now, is part and parcel of this originary sucking pleasure. The child-mouth-breast also now capitalizes on the pleasure, as Deleuze so tactfully puts it, of that 'abominable mixture' of excrement, anality, and the suck. (Parenthetical remark: May I now remind all of you who may need reminding that, as a consequence, both the mouth-child-other and the love-object/breast-mother-other are actively, simultaneously, engaged in

this tango-cannibalizing-suck, though for rather different reasons). "Orality," Deleuze observes, "is naturally prolonged in cannibalism and anality, in the case of which partial objects are excreta, capable of exploding the mother's body, as well as the body of the infant."¹¹ Explosions aside, he continues with this solemn, if somewhat judgmental, prediction of a mouth-breast-turned-mouth-anus:

*The bits of one are always the persecutors of the other, and, in this abominable mixture which constitutes the Passion of the nursing infant, persecutor and persecuted are always the same. In this system of mouth-anus or aliment-excrement, bodies burst and cause other bodies to burst in a universal cesspool.*¹²

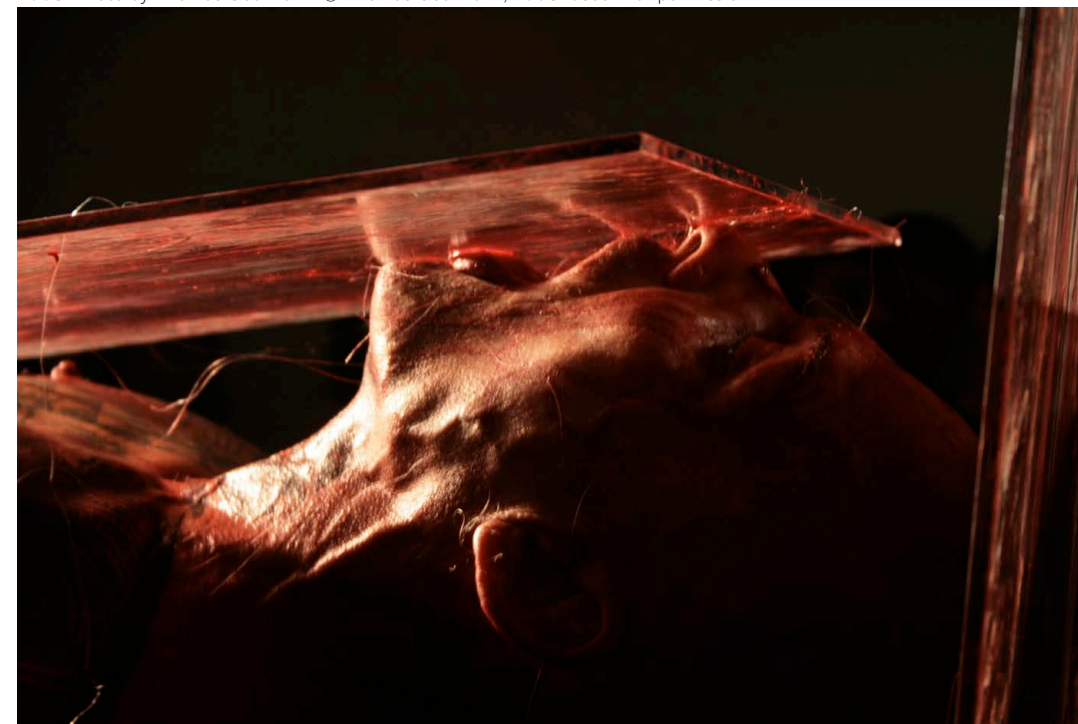
Far be it from me to criticize Deleuze on account of his reverie for dirty sphincters love objects and foul-mouthed female entities brought to bear because of (no surprises here) the mother. But it seems odd – whether or not one accepts his basic interpretation around psychoanalytic investments – that this dynamic process would be characterized as an abomination, or indeed, as a universal cesspool in the negative, smelly sense of the word cesspool. The umbrage taken, that is to say my umbrage taken, is not around the judgment per se of having characterized the inevitable / dynamic flow from mouth-breast to mouth-anus as 'an abominable universal cesspool' per se (though to be fair, one does wonder, momentarily, if in his speaking of 'orality' and the sexual in this manner, that the very playfulness of 'having fun' somehow gets lost for Deleuze in the digestive tracts of life; that is to say, is somehow sublated, this pleasure of the suck, into its darker, more malicious forms of bullying, cruelty, humiliation, beating. But I digress...).

This umbrage has more to do with Deleuze's seemingly unnecessary shift away from his own conceptual

framework(s) around identity as linked to 'difference,' 'surface,' 'plane of immanence,' 'nomadic/de-territorialism' and 'event,' not to mention the 'becoming-x' of life itself, as developed at the outset of his *Logic of Sense*, his *What is Philosophy*, his *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life* and in tandem with Felix Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus* and their *Anti-Oedipus* to name but some of the obvious volumes.¹³ Instead, there seems to be the rather odd turn (or rather return) to 'arboreal' philosophy; that is, the search for a ground, a root, a 'universal' path, and with it (or on that path), the unfolding (telos) of the proverbial acorn (mouth-breast) into the proverbial Tree (mouth-anus) which comes 'back around' to provide the path – and a mean-spirited, shameful, guilty, hard-core one at that – for the methodological acceptance of a-pleasure-

now-turned-nasty-cannibalization of the suck.¹⁴ I am not saying that this isn't a rather interesting way to understand the psychic-underbellies of such horrors as sexual assault, the dropping of explosives on innocent people, and the obsessive need to 'watch' those bombs being dropped from the safety of one's TV screen, etc. I am simply saying that this is a move around identity and sexual politics that I do not think Deleuze needed to make (given his own trajectories) and in any case, it is one we certainly do not need to take, if we engage seriously with the verisimilitude of 'orality' in the fullest sense of the term, to include not only mouth-breast / tongue-anus-suck, but (and fill in for mouth or breast or tongue or anus or suck) voice, listening, hearing, aurality, tempo, timbre, tone.

Figure 2. Detail from *Self-Obliteration #1* – from the event *Resonate/Obliterate* by Ron Athey at Remy's on Temple, Los Angeles, 2008. Photo by Thomas Qualmann. © Thomas Qualmann, 2008. Used with permission.



This kind of orality is a far, far cry from the language barriers of semiotics, sign, signifier and the imprisoned boundaries of representational logics. This oral tradition, this ana-materialist mouth-breast 'picture' is nothing other than an intensity, a sensuous/libidinal intensity of surface / simulacra that, in its cohesive-ness, presents a wholly different methodology; indeed presents 'difference' itself as methodology. This 'difference itself as methodology' was re-staged by Butler in her conceptual development of 'performativity.' Sadly, this move not only did not resolve the dilemma (and critically moralistic judgments) of the sexual/sensuousness intensity of 'becoming X,' but it reinvigorated the very essentialism(s) she wished to vanquish around identity, politics, gender, sex and sexuality. Let us take a closer look at this charge.

One of the great advantages of feminism – and not just feminism, but of all the so-called 'civil rights' movements of the (18) 70s, 80s, and 90s as well as the 1970s, 80s, 90s – is that as both theory and practice (social movement), feminism emphasized the non-essentialism of biology. In so doing, there was a specific kind of 'liberation' based on a conception of what it meant to be 'human.' No longer did one's genitalia or skin color (or class or disability or, eventually, one's sexual orientation etc.) have anything to do with one's 'personhood.' Seen in this light, the very foundations of a 17th century (Newtonian) physics coupled with 19th century Enlightenment (*Sapere Aude!* Dare to Know!) came to inhabit the very core of one's 'right' to be human. ¹⁵

Without going into the whole story of how this right (to be human) became attached to law, property, schooling, transportation, seating arrangements etc., suffice to say that with Thomas Hobbes's 17th century *Leviathan* the 'individual,' as distinct from 'the human' was born (albeit whose life was "nasty, brutish, solitary and short" ¹⁶), but in any case had the right rather

than privilege for 'movement.' Here movement was seen to be a necessary 'fact of life,' indeed life itself, given the lens of Newtonian physics through which Hobbes owed his concept (of movement). With the right to movement, came the right over one's body (habeas corpus), further refined with John Locke in his *Two Treatises*, ¹⁷ as having an interest or 'stake' in society and thus, the right to own property, starting with the property ownership of one's own body (and to be able to do with it what one wished (though it did not include, and to this day still does not, include the right to suicide). With Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, ¹⁸ one learned how those rights could be marginalized or destroyed, given a certain set of some ones who drew a circle in the sand with their collective big toe, claimed that what lay within that circle to be theirs, and found people stupid enough to believe them. This made those who had not fallen for that trick very annoyed indeed. Annoyed enough to organize, annoyed enough to fight, annoyed enough to die for the (civil) right to have, as a given, a society based on non-essentialist versions of people, class, ethnicity, religion.

I present this thumbnail sketch of modern political theory (classical liberalism) not to suggest that history, our 'history of the present,' is catapulted by the voracity of the 'Universal Concept/Idea'; but rather to underscore the value of struggle, political struggle, to take (steal, borrow, etc.) various ideas presented and/or experimented with in various disciplines from physics to alchemy (if need be) and to make them become 'coherent,' 'sticky'; i.e., to make them work. One of the most cogent of these life-changing-in-struggle-concepts coming onto the 1980s scene was, and remains to this day, the well-known concept of Performativity. The concept is important on a number of levels, but it is especially important because it underscores not only the non-essential, discursive/constitutive nature of one's (gendered) being but that as a

discursive practice, it "enacts or produces that which it names." ¹⁹ Taken originally from John Langshaw Austin's work on speech act theory, this enactment pushes language beyond a simple form of representation (or standing in) and emphasizes the fact that in so naming – an activity, a moment, a place, a change – makes meaning 'take' place. Butler, again:

"One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well..." [Gender is thus] "a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were" The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again." ²⁰ [Brackets my own]

In this sense, the earlier, liberalist view of the individual as the source of one's action(s) and self-willing subjectivity is exchanged, replaced, as a retroactive construction that, as Dino Felluga remarks, comes about only through the enactment of social conventions: "Gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority." ²¹ Moreover, and because this 'gender act' belies no essential 'truth' but is utterly, fully, historically produced, the act can be transformed, challenged, disrupted through other performative acts. This is the political nub: there is no truth to sexuality or gender, simply the enactments that make truth 'stick.'

So why would this seemingly rather liberated picture of the political, the real and the symbolic be so problematic, especially to those committed against essentialism at every turn? It is problematic because this retroactive construction of subject-formation requires the methodologies inherent in self-reflexive philosophy. Geoff Boucher, in his *The Politics of Performativity*, neatly sums up the problem:

Butler interprets the process of subject-formation through the lens of the philosophy of reflection. In so doing, she proposes that although agents are socially constructed through the cultural ascription of multiple subject-positions, nonetheless, the intentionality behind these gender performances is driven by a desire for self-identity. She grasps the anticipation of identity effectuated by ideological interpellation as an ambivalent relation to authority that precedes identity-formation, based on a combination of guilt and love. What this means is that Butler takes advantage of the paradoxes of the philosophy of reflection to reinstall the desire for recognition, in the form of the individual's pre-discursive will-to-identity, at the heart of ideological (Althusserian) interpellation. ²²

This belies two problems: first, a reintegration of Jacques Lacan's real, symbolic and imaginary and with it, the insistence on the logic of castration (lack/phallus) as that which defies and defines the very core of sexuality itself, along with shame, guilt, need for recognition as primary to any coherent form of conscious life. This irritating division of lack and phallus (always tossed off as though 'not really' meaning female [lack-empty-hole] or not really meaning male [phallus-virile substance-erect and ready to go]) reinstates the second irritating problem: that of the insistence that individuated meaning must always-already be forged through the contradiction/sublation/synthetic unity of the Universal concrete concept. We are right back to

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* and his *Science of Logic*.²³

The Big Ask

Now, maybe this double-sided problem is just not a problem. Maybe after all these years of fighting against the stupidity of thinking that all things penetrative is 'male' and all things 'lacking,' female, and no matter how many times one bangs their pretty little head against the proverbial brick wall of essentialism – no matter what form it takes – this sexist enactment just won't go away; well maybe it's just time to hang up those red ruby slippers, those 'over the rainbows' dreams and go back to Kansas, with or without the dog. Maybe, after all these wild debauched years, I've just been carried away with trying to explain what happens when I sniff out the uncharted paths in a manner according to my custom, especially when night stealths towards day: the stillness of air! The light! The dew! The quietness of tone! The possibility to connect a this with a that! Perhaps what I am mentioning has only a tiny micro slice to do with that raw kind of pleasure of the suck – but I mention it anyway, for no other reason than that the combination of light, and touch, and sound, and smell compels me to inhabit my body differently; now aligned, now maligned, with a series of curiosities, hungers, expectations, promises, threats. This has very little to do with losing (or conversely, with finding) 'my' self or even 'a' self. It has even less to do with 'the subject,' 'subject-formation,' or holes or sticks or anything in between. For this is a peculiar type of (social) agency; a peculiar type of mastery – a kind of gutter-ground 'gift,' this instant surface-slice of intensity of desire and pleasure and satiation: this holy place of the mouth-breast, this holy place of the bended knee. Because, for me, for us, we owe it to ourselves to develop a feminist theory, a quantum, fractal, synthetic theory – call it what you will – a queer kind of theory, that not only 'understands' and 'enacts' the conditions of the 'here,' right

now, and in a direct nod to Karl Marx and his 11th *Thesis on Feuerbach*,²⁴ changes oppressive conditions without losing site of the brutality that awaits when one challenges the status quo's status. But – and this is the 'Big Ask' – it must be done in a manner according to one's senses, one's 'custom'; one that goes beyond metaphysics itself: goes beyond identity politics, beyond representation, beyond binaric divides, captured along a phantom retina of the pineal eye. Otherwise, we are set simply to reiterate the either/or 'deep cut' of a synthetic unity (rooted in contradiction, telos, and grand narratives) and its co-conspirator, the wound of a suppurating lack and a very dodgy phallus.

If that isn't reason enough to grasp with impunity this strange ana-materialism, and even more peculiar 'mouth-breath' and run with it into a wholly different epistemological field, then perhaps this last set of remarks will do it.

SYNTHIA WITH AN 'S' (AND THE REALITY OF ALGORITHMIC REPRODUCTION)

On May 20, 2010 an announcement by the J Craig Venter Institute in Rockville Maryland heralded the generative birth of the first man-made, single-cell organism, which they duly named 'Synthia' (with an 's'). It had been sequenced from the genetic code of *Mycoplasma genitalium*, the world's smallest living bacteria, found primarily in cattle and goats.²⁵ Global reports flooded over the web and other communication platforms, describing in lurid detail how the 'natural' DNA of the *Mycoplasma genitalium* was stripped out from its cell, copied point for point, re-sequenced, imprinted with a watermark, uploaded into its bio-original as an artificial – that is to say, synthetic, life form. It was considered a 'LIFE form' because this new (artificial) cell, now, and without any of its 'natural' bio-matter, began to replicate bio-logically. And while it is

true that this replication (and what it produced) might not be seen quite at the same level as when Dr Frankenstein's Monster's finger trembled as a sign of life on his laboratory table – this replication held all the same terrors/jubilations /ethical conundrums – and promises – of that 19th century shout: "IT'S ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE!"

In the beginning there was the Word. And that word was: Synthia.

The important point about Synthia is not that – or not just that – 'she' would be heralded as a monster in single-cell form. It is not even that her emergence, or for that matter, the emergence of bot-learned decision making, augmented realities, dark matter, the uses and abuses of Dolly and her cloned sisters before her, 'always already' put into question the very nub of what constitutes a 'she,' not to mention the very meaning of being 'alive' and whether one should or should not play Creator. It also put into sharp relief the very ontologies through which one might grasp this most modern of post-postmodern conditions. For this seemingly innocuous little event generically called Synthia was in fact a paradigmatic sea-change, a grounding event birthing a certain kind of knowledge system, whose very meaning, indeed whose origins (if this be the right word) would emerge less from the semiotics of signs and signifiers, phalluses and lacks, and more from a simple re-iterative algorithmic co-gency, a simulacra deeply coded in the she-wolves of myths and founding civilizations.

This deeply superficial heterologic 'knowledge system event,' fractal in nature, infinitely regressive, and aggressively successful in its virility, to make meaning 'take' place births/invents complexity as eternally returning simulacra, without ever getting beyond, beside or inside 'herself.' It is a whole new soaring, this multiply inhabited single-celled will to power, this newborn Zarathustra, forging a slice-minutiae of expression

with no absolute roadmap, marker, or destiny. Deleuze pre-guessed this move as a "reverse Platonism," a kind of simulacrum of sense.²⁶ Jean-François Lyotard shaped it as figural; that is, as a kind of "lesson in darkness, like the paintings of a blind man" – the very gesture required to make imagelessness gather momentum, materiality and, in its wake, come alive.²⁷

The usual culprits of time and space (or time as distinct from space and vice versa), along with identity, meaning, Existenz, Being, reconfigure via a relational morphogenesis of velocity, mass, and intensity. This is an immanent surface cohesion, the compelling into a 'this' or a 'here' or a 'now,' a space-time terrain, a collapse and rearticulation of the tick-tick-ticking of distance, movement, speed, born through the repetitive but relative enfolding of otherness, symmetry and diversion.²⁸ This cohesive slice, this dimension, must be understood in the strongest temporal/spatial sense of difference as 'altogether different,' fourth dimensionally different. It names a kind of 'being-with-altogether-different' difference as an ana-materiality which, despite (or because of) this apparent paradox, reiteratively resembles and re-assembles platforms, planes, plateaus, surfaces as de-territorialized plural or multiversal singularities into the 'being-with' singular plural as Jean-Luc Nancy would name it, of an 'inoperative community' fractal in nature, immanent in design, and perfectly repetitive in its bio-logic enfoldment.²⁹

Distant cousin to the fragment, which can be distinguished by its relation to a concentrated 'whole' or 'totality' (as in a piece of a pie, ¼ of a 1, a thesis/antithesis of a synthetic unity and so on), this 'slice,' this surface ana-material dimension, with no underlying structure or Archimedean point, pre-figures the figural as the presencing of the event so nonchalantly called 'Synthia' herself. She becomes both chronological sequence of an 'a-to-b-to-c' etc. and an Aionic series of the-whatever-is, morphing to the whatever else, morphing

to the whatever-works, cohesively held together by the relativity of its attraction (=). Deleuze admits this move as 'the inclusion of the senses' – its color, its rhythm, its beat, indeed, tactility itself (touch, smell, taste), which enables expression to 'come alive.' ³⁰

Of course there are many types of 'synthetic unities,' each perfectly capable of igniting what I have often named 'the Trojan horse problem,' whereby uninvited methodological assumptions and onto-theological conundrums can unknowingly or unwittingly be dragged into the picture. Therefore when one pinches the use of Benoît Mandelbrot's fractal move, and in particular, his formulation $Z \rightleftharpoons Z^2 + C$ which neatly states an infinite expansion of a given 'Z,' it may be that our more detailed picture of Synthia is not without its Trojans. For the re-iterative ana-materialist dimension/slice of reality she embodies; a kind of 'dry dream' version of Friedrich Nietzsche's more sensuously wet 'eternal return,' ³¹ our Synthia may become both the wild child, always already 'greater than the sum of her parts' and simultaneously, a rather dull minutiae of her presence. But this move, away from the univocity of the metaphysical Concept toward the multiversal logic of what can be called 'fractal philosophy,' however problematic, is long overdue. For the problem with Metaphysics, and particularly the metaphysics of dialectical synthesis, is that it simply does not work; it simply does not have the tools to address our post-postmodern Synthia.

This is not to say that, after two thousand years, the various sets of epistemological and methodological gifts falling under this wide umbrella called 'metaphysics' could be seen as anything other than complex and elegant. This is particularly true of the analytic gifts by Hegel, which, albeit have been challenged by a host of scholars including most significantly Theodor Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* ³² not to mention Marx in his *Poverty of Philosophy* and elsewhere, ³³

developed one of the most sophisticated encyclopedic logics on contemporary (that is to say, modern, life) which put at its root the fundamental position of uncertainty and change without getting 'outside' the system. He did this in part by way of a subtle positioning of negation, one that was established in such a way that allowed for synthetic reason and with it, synthetic unity to express at its very core, the process of becoming/ immanence/ transcendence. ³⁴ But, however sophisticated these moves, the dialectical system did this by privileging an abyssal present; that is, one which could never be 'inhabited' analytically, politically, aesthetically, ethically, algorithmically or otherwise. This is because not only did 'the now' slip away as soon as one tried to grasp it; but the very 'territory' of the present resided in the deep cut/ excluded middle of logical contradiction, the totality of which, in producing the kind of 'synthesis' that it did, could only point to grand narratives, as the grounding of its Truth. ³⁵

With the move toward fractal philosophy, especially via Mandelbrot's 'set,' the present is precisely what is inhabited. ³⁶ A kind of dot in the hourglass of life, with the future, the past, and the elsewhere gathered via economies of circulation, planes of immanence and dimensional surface slices, the present emerges as the paradigmatic iteration of the 'Zeta.' It is posed as the unsayable-something-of-whatever-that-is replicating 'herself' via an infinite feedback sequencing loop of $Z \rightleftharpoons Z^2 + C$. This sequence-ing creates pattern; the pattern re-loops to create 'synthetic unity'; the process is repeated. It is a process found throughout nature; it is in every pattern of growth; it is at the basis of artificial intelligence, and how robots 'learn.' It is what Lyotard names the 'affirmative Zero' ³⁷ that is, an active ana-material morphogenesis, an active the reiteration of synthetic unities, which, on May 20, 2010 at 4.30 in the afternoon created 'life.'

We stand in, or, more precisely, at, the reckoning. Caught in mid-run, whilst on the run, this 'standing' defies rationality whilst simultaneously encoding it at the very iteration of its repeatability. One is reminded of Martin Heidegger's provocative claim that what constitutes 'thinking' is, to paraphrase Heidegger, a leap away from representation, which has served only to blind 'rational man' through an over-reliance on observation, deduction, and neatly placed observational scientistism. Thinking is an active move toward non-representational dwelling. ³⁸

Picture this: Having leapt into non-representational dwelling, materialism, mouth-breast embodiment, what do you suppose Hegel's 'rational man' would make of his encounter with our warrior princess, Synthia? For make no mistake about it: it is only a matter of time when programmable learning will slip-slide into judgments, and our Turing Machine of yesteryear might well desire something more daring than ice cream with a cherry on top.

It's a delicate game we are playing after all. ■

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Original development at the ISEA2011 Istanbul (The 17th International Symposium on Electronic Art), coupled with meditations on 'synthetic unity'/'synthetic life,' which were transformed into a workshop event at *Touched: When Philosophy meets Art*, live philosophy installation/poetics, (Liverpool Biennale, Nov 2010): "TOUCHED: Philosophy Meets Art," YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_Gc_xKbEQI (accessed March 12, 2013). Fuller version as Keynote, Queertopia! (Keynote address, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, May 27, 2011 and as part of the *Digital Image and Memory Speakers Series* (The Photographers Gallery, London, September 05, 2011) and at Virtual Futures 2.0, Live philosophy installation/ poetics (Warwick University, June 2011, with Stephen Kennedy, composer).
2. Rene Descartes, *The Treatise of Man* (1633/1664), XI:129 and as "a certain very fine air or wind" in his *The Passions of the Soul* (1662), 1:330. Accessed at "Descartes and the Pineal Gland," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pineal-gland/index.html> (accessed March 11, 2013).

3. Martin Heidegger, "Lecture 7," in *The Principle of Reason (Der Satz Vom Grund, 1957)*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 50-58. See in particular page 55 where he states: "Being 'is' the abyss in the sense of such a remaining-apart of reason from being. To the extent that being as such grounds, it remains groundless." See also the recent and important intervention by Lee Braver, *Groundless Grounds: A Study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012) where he quite convincingly shows how both Heidegger and Wittgenstein, each in their own distinctive ways recognise the problem of the 'groundless ground' as one of the most central problems for contemporary philosophy.
4. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Within that text, see in particular "Paregon," 37-82. The way in which 'figural' can be re-thought outside representational and/or dialectical positions, see also Jean-Francoise Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Anthony Hudek and Mary Lydon, with introduction by John Mowitt (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press: 2012), especially "The Line and the Letter," 205-233.
5. Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye," in his *Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, translated, edited and introduction by Allan Stoekl et al. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 14 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press: 1985), 79-90.
6. On the economy and style-structure of code drifts, see the groundbreaking work, "Code Drift," by Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, *Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies* (Victoria: New World Perspectives/CTheory Books, 2010), 4-19. In this seminal work, the Krokero develop the concept of 'code drift' as name for the digitalisation of the object, a kind of shadow materiality, one remove from its pictorial object. It is neither to be understood as an extended metaphor for an object nor as its standing reserve. It speaks to the digitalised, sensuous non-embodied materiality of the digital-real.
7. Morphogenesis as a concept-tool began with the recursive algorithms of Alan Turing and, three decades later, further developed (to an almost unrecognizable level with its predecessor), by Benoit Mandelbrot. Pertinent to this development: the concept of 'fractal' and the view that one should concentrate on the problem of 'roughness' rather than 'sameness' in predictive patterns, repetition and difference. By so doing, Mandelbrot's recursive fractal patterns enabled some of the most breath-taking breakthroughs in 'artificial' intelligence and the ability for (ro-)bots to learn, to remember, to predict – without the need for programming. With respect to the concept of fractal and its recursive, see Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1977) and its development as a 'theory of roughness' in his later, *The Fractalist: A Memoir* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012). See also the work by Nina Samuel (ed), *The Islands of Benoit Mandelbrot: Fractals, Chaos and the Materiality of Thinking* (New York: The Bard Graduate Centre/Yale Distributors, 2013).
8. In a lay sense, think of an image on one's iPod or 'tablet.' If one smashed open said PDA, one would not find 5,000 songs or all of one's library of e-books spewed across the floor. This does not mean for a moment, that the material reality of its contents 'do not exist' or, more important, are 'virtual.' Ask anyone who has lost their data after a hard night's work. To put this on a more conceptual register, 'not leaving a trace' – or more significant, 'not leaving 'the' trace (note to Derrida) – requires a set of conceptual moves and/or tools that must fall clear of time/space diagrammatic logics, transcendental/quasi-transcendental metaphysics and/or the eternally returning linguistic turns, incapable of nuanced, dimensional, immersive thinking so required for 21st century contemporary culture (or indeed, for any culture).
9. Jean Cocteau, *The Difficulty of Being*, trans. Edith Sprigge with Introduction by Ned Rorem (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), back cover.
10. Gilles Deleuze, "The Fifth Series of Sense, The Twenty-Seventh Series of Orality – The Thirty-Fourth Series of Primary Order and Secondary Organization," in *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 28-36; 186-250.
11. Deleuze, "The Twenty-Seventh Series of Orality," *The Logic of Sense*, 187.
12. Ibid.
13. See in particular Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "6. The Barbarian Despotic Machine" *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 214, where, detailing the importance of nomadic/de-territorialisation, they expose the strategic efforts of the State to impose, coordinate or in some capacity generate, territorialism and 'staying put' as one of the most important moves an oppressive State can generate: "It has often been remarked that the State commences (or recommences) with two fundamental acts, one of which is said to be an act of territoriality through the fixing of residence...(There is no great change, from this point of view, when the State no longer does anything more than guarantee the private property of a ruling class that becomes distinct from the State)." A point to which Foucault, in his "Preface" to their *Anti-Oedipus*, famously emphasized as a way to counter "all forms of fascism, whether already present or impending." Thus he urges: "Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe what is productive is not sendentary but nomadic." *Anti-Oedipus*, xv.
14. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "The Rhizome," in *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Continuum, 2003), 1-12.
15. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)," in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-23.
16. Hobbes Leviathan, *The Leviathan* (reprinted from the edition of 1651), ed. W.G. Pogson Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
17. John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government (In the Former the False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer and His Followers Are Detected and Overthrown; The Latter is an Essay Concerning the True Original Extend and End of Civil Government)*, London 1821, (New York: Bartelby.com 2010).
18. Jean Jacque Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984).
19. Judith Butler, "On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex,'" in *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13. I am indebted to Geoff Boucher for his insightful remarks on Butler in this context. See Geoff Boucher, "The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler," in *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 112-141 and at http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf (accessed March 13, 2013).
20. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay," in *Phenomenology and Feminist Theory in Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990), 112-141, as cited in Dino Felluga, "Modules on Butler: On Performativity" in his *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* (Purdue Univ, 2011), 272. See also: http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf (accessed March 2013)
21. Felluga, "Modules on Butler," 279.
22. Boucher, "The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler," 120.
23. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1968).
24. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach (1865)," in Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), 61-65. It could be said that the whole of Marxist theory can be found in these eleven theses, the last of which at page

- 65, famously states, "Philosophers have only *interpreted the world*, the point, however, is to *change it*." (italics in the original).
25. Richard Alleyne, "Scientist Craig Venter creates life for first time in laboratory sparking debate about 'playing god,'" *The Telegraph*, May 20, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/7745868/Scientist-Craig-Venter-creates-life-for-first-time-in-laboratory-sparking-debate-about-playing-god.html> (accessed 22 May 2010).
26. Gilles Deleuze, "I. The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," *The Logic of Sense*, 254-56.
27. Jean-François Lyotard, *Sam Francis: Leçon de Ténèbres/Lesson of Darkness. Écrits sur l'art contemporain et les artistes*, ed. Herman Parret, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Ghent: Lieven University Press, 2010), 31. See also his "Discourse Figure: The Utopia behind the Scenes of the Phantasy," in *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 3 and *The Poetics of Theatre*, trans. Mary Lydon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983): 353.
28. Benoît Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, 6-24. See also: Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw, *Why Does E=mc2 (and why should we care)?* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), 57, 71-72.
29. Jean Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press/ Meridian/Crossing Aesthetics, 2000), 2-5. See also Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. and trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 19, 53; and Laura Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 5-11; 163-65.
30. Further elaborated in Deleuze, "Twenty-Third Series of the Aion," "Twenty-Fifth Series of Univocity" and "Twenty-Sixth Series of Language," in *The Logic of Sense*, 162-67, 169-174; and 181-182, respectively.
31. See in particular Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, "Why I am a Destiny," (§3), trans. Walter Kaufman, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufman (Middlesex: Penguin Putnam, 1978)
32. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. A.B. Ashton (London/New York: Routledge, 2004).
33. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy – Answer to the "Philosophy of Poverty" by M. Proudhon* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975).
34. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Sections, 1-12, 16-20, 73-85; 148; 159-163.
35. For a more detailed explanation, see Johnny Golding, "Fractal Philosophy and the small matter of learning how to listen: Attunement as the Task of Art," in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, eds. Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2010). Second publication, expanded version, in *Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies* 14, ed. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *CTheory*, April 14, 2010, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=634> (accessed March 15, 2013).
36. Importantly, this is not to suggest that the present is 'in between,' like Samson holding apart the past and the future before the haircut. There is no such thing as an 'in between,' at least as far as the present is concerned. A useful guide for novices to Mandelbrot's work can be found at <http://www.ddewey.net/mandelbrot/> (accessed March 15, 2013). For an earlier discussion of 'Zeta' and its re-enactment on the question of Time and certain forms of metaphysics, see also: Johnny Golding, *The Assassination of Time (or the birth of Zeta-physics)* in *Deleuzian Events: Writing / History*, eds. Hanjo Beressem and Leyla Haerkamp, 132-145 (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2009).
37. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 5-6.
38. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called 'Thinking'?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins, 2004/1965), 3-19; 39.



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