A Peer-Reviewed Journal About

EXCESSIVE RESEARCH

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EDITORIAL

EXCESSIVE RESEARCH

Christian Ulrik Andersen & Geoff Cox

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EXCESSIVE RESEARCH relates to the announcement of transmediale 2016, *Conversation Piece* which highlights the compulsive actions of digital culture, and how we are constantly encouraged to stay active, to make, to share and to secure. Following a research workshop in Liverpool, organised in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University and the Liverpool Biennial, this issue of *APRJA* delves into the nature of these actions and their limits. It asks: What happens when research is less about exchange and more about excess?

The compulsory actions of a networked society are paradoxical. While idealised by hackers, the actions are at the same time the conveyors of new agile innovation strategies, and modes of economic and symbolic exchange. They are constitutive for our cultural being, and at the same time they can be a threat. A culture of sharing, for instance, is evidently one of the most fetishised activities of the network and describes how value is now created. 'Sharing is caring', goes the catchphrase, but by its inclination of excess, loss and indebtedness, sharing also challenges the very logic of accumulation, and hence it must be domesticated and normalised. Through corporate social network platforms that promise to deliver a coherent neoliberal subject (through sharing, making, acting, securing), we are not just carrying out social activities but also social reproduction. In other words, 'info liberalism' conceals a simple process of exchange behind a façade of compulsory actions that all seem to be for the social good.

What is excess?

In order to expand our understanding of these actions, and how we create communities of action, we need to look beyond our existing terms of exchange to the realm of excess; embracing anti-economic, political and existential meanings. Making reference to the French writer Georges Bataille, media theorist Wolfgang Sützl has argued in the recent article "On Sharing", that expanded possibilities (i.e. also the possibility of acting, sharing, making, differently) relates to an inclusion of the visceral, the erotic, and the primeval.

Excess is not simply a description of an amount beyond what is considered normal, sufficient or permitted (as with insurance or business), but in its etymological link to ecstasy, it is linked to the realm of pleasure, Bataille argues. The notion of excess is elementary to Bataille's view of a 'general economy' based upon the intentional production of non-utilitarian goods such as luxuries or spectacular displays of wealth and weapons systems. The general economy is where expenditure (waste, sacrifice, or destruction) is considered more fundamental than the restricted economies of production and utilities that are based on scarcity. He describes, for instance, how the sun freely expands energy without receiving anything in return. If people intend to be free (from the imperatives of capitalism, for instance) he recommends they should pursue a general economy of expenditure (giving, sacrifice or destruction). Only then will they escape the determination of existing imperatives of utility and normative production. For Bataille, people are necessarily beings of excess; full of exorbitant energy, fantasies, need, drives, and heterogeneous desires.

The notion of 'excess' energy is central to Bataille's thinking. He takes the superabundance of energy, beginning from the infinite outpouring of solar energy or the surpluses produced by life's basic chemical reactions, as the norm for organisms. In other words, an organism in Bataille's general economy, unlike the rational actors

of classical economy (Capitalist and Marxist alike) who are motivated by scarcity, normally has an excess of energy available to it. This extra energy can be used productively for the organism's growth or it can be lavishly expended. Bataille insists that an organism's growth or expansion always runs up against limits and becomes impossible. The wasting of this energy is a 'luxury' characteristic of any society. 'The accursed share' refers to this excess, destined for waste.

Researching excess

Given how institutionalised research itself is bound to artificial scarcity (of funding, positions, etc.) and its own brand of compulsory actions (the requirement to produce articles, to network, to cite, to secure patents and copyright, and so on), we ask how research might embrace this realm of excess? How might research go beyond itself and its own systems of exchange that are ever more economised, ever more efficient, and that also make researchers ever more redundant? The journal is a call to identify the primeval pleasures and excess energies of research itself to the extent that it becomes a spectacular expression of luxury that also challenges the regulation of academia.

Through highlighting excess in research, we address what is otherwise destined for waste, and the potential transgression of economised exchange. In terms of the presentation of research into excesses energies – such as radical boredom, blockchains, honey trading, menstruation, or poetry – the journal issue addresses the limits of digital culture's compulsory actions themselves, and also how these limits can be understood more philosophically. In other words, the authors seek to reconfigure understandings of media technologies, use and practices, and in various ways explore how the benevolent confines of info liberalism can be transgressed, shared differently, and where excess energy can be identified and other fantasies activated.

Writing excess

How do we address excess in research writing? In an essay on Bataille and his notions of restricted and general economies, Jacques Derrida highlights how a general economy of excess relates to the production of meaning; or, of a potential 'sovereign silence' which interrupts articulated language. "The writings of sovereignty conforms to general economy […] it relates its objects to the destruction, without reserve, of meaning." (342) Insofar as the language of research (of scientific form), encountered in this journal, envisages a general economy, it is not sovereign in itself (indeed, there is no sovereignty in itself, as it by its reference to loss, is not). However, if writing also defines certain formal limits of understandability, then how might we similarly look for means of escape from its determining effects?

We are inspired by the way Franco 'Bifo' Berardi identifies poetry as a means of exceeding the established meaning of words and the reduction of language to information (in *The Uprising: Poetry and Finance*). To him, "poetry is the excess of language", disentangled from the actions and limits of symbolic debt and financialisation. When it comes to research writing, we similarly hope for alternative scientific forms where the research object and method take on a different character. Although all articles in the journal issue undergo rigorous peer-review, they also – in their use of language and artistic practices – evoke the desire for different kinds of research work. In other words, if

research is to escape the imperatives of a restricted economy of production and utility then let us begin to explore the creative and critical energies of excess.

Christian Ulrik Andersen & Geoff Cox
Aarhus, January 2016

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Wolfgang Sützl

BEING WITH ONE ANOTHER: TOWARDS A MEDIA PHENOMENOLOGY OF SHARING

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Sharing and its inconspicuousness

The first problem encountered by many in approaching the subject of sharing is its lack of distinction. “The majority of daily sharing of food, money, and possessions goes unnoticed and is invisible to most people for whom it is routine,” consumer researcher Russell Belk observes (Belk, “Sharing” 717).

This inconspicuousness of sharing makes it difficult to theorize in any objectifying way: according to the hypothesis I wish to suggest, there is no object here that science could examine, no behavior that is distinct enough to be objectively studied, or work new enough to be exhibited. Therefore, enquiring into the concept of sharing will need to pass through the lens of the everyday: that which tends to pass unnoticed. As an aspect of the everyday (as in the French *quotidian*), sharing can then be considered not as a specific action or form of communication that appears in front of a neutral background, but as written in the “prose of the world,” as Hegel called the everyday experience. Prose is language in its ordinary form, not privileged in any way, that against which poetry is the exception.

But how is one to understand a routine that does not stand out as its own, that has no discernable boundary that would set it off as an “action” or a “work”? What type of knowledge is it that we can hope to acquire about everyday routines, considered by Maurice Blanchot as that which “is most difficult to discover?” (Blanchot 34) Indeed, does not the idea of discovery itself keep us confined to the kind of objectifying enquiry that depends on isolating objects and construe them as something distinct from the ordinary?

Posing the problem this way means posing it as a phenomenological question. The moment we try to think about some thing that is an inconspicuous everyday thing, we are lead to questions concerning our own thought, own perceptions, or our own being as enquiring beings. We are confronted with all that happens *before* we can even say “there is this thing.” It is this suspicion that gave rise to phenomenology as a philosophical form of enquiry in the first half of the 20th century, starting with the work of Edmund Husserl. Martin Heidegger, Husserl’s student, took this work further by enquiring into the nature of everyday existence in *Being and Time*, published in 1927. In this work, he initiates a new enquiry into the question of being.

Unlike exchange, sharing is primarily about being and only secondarily about having. Whenever we share, and no matter what we share, our being and that of others comes into play. Unlike exchange, which can carried out between anyone, sharing affects the being of those who share. However, debates on sharing tend to focus on this secondary dimension of sharing, and therefore, the relationship between sharing and being requires some attention.

I will then to turn Jean-Luc Nancy’s interpretation of Heidegger to prepare a more political understanding of sharing that will help inform the subsequent discussion of the everyday and the relationship between the everyday and the media, described by Maurice Blanchot as a “transcription.” This should finally make it possible to see how sharing in digital media can be the key component of a neoliberal economic model termed “info-liberalism” by Marlies Bannig: Such pseudo-sharing capitalizes on the very limit that sharing poses to any form of exchange. The sharing economy and social media sharing represent an intensification of exchange that turns this limit *itself* into capital.

Being-with in a shared world: Heidegger's *Being and Time*

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger sets out to restate the question of being with the ambition of devising a fundamental ontology, clarifying the meaning of being. The question of being, he states, needs to be revisited because we have come to equate being with presence. This equation limits us to make statements about being that are ontic statements (concerning beings) rather than ontological statements that capture the essence of being. But in order to do justice to this difference, we need to start from our own specific form of being as humans, which Heidegger calls *dasein*, literally 'being-there.' *Dasein* does not stand out as an object of enquiry, as another presence, but rather it refers to our mode of being as being in the world, to the place from which we can ask questions to begin with. According to Heidegger, the mode of *dasein* is our everyday life—we experience ourselves through the everyday, and, significantly, through being with others.

Dasein, therefore, is always "being-with" or *mit-sein*. Being-with requires us to let go of a Cartesian, individualized notion of subjectivity; no longer are we thinking of subjects as being atomized individuals. Heidegger writes: "Others are not encountered by grasping and discriminating beforehand one's own subject, initially objectively present, from other subjects also present. They are not encountered by first looking at oneself and then ascertaining the opposite pole of a distinction" (Heidegger 116). Once this is acknowledged, sharing emerges as a fundamental trait of *dasein*: "On the basis of this with-bound [mithaften] being-in-the-world the world is always already the one that I share with others. The world of *dasein* is a *with-world* [Mitwelt] (115—116). Sharing, then, would be something that has already occurred when I am *with* others, or *miteinander*, with-one-an-other as the German language says. It is through the shared essence of the world that the others do, in fact, appear as others. We do not share with others that are already there as others, but because we are in a shared world, the others appear as others.

That is why the sharing of the world is not something that stands out as a distinct action that can be formally represented, but it is bound up in our *dasein* as the experience of the everyday. This experience is one that we do not have as individual subjects alongside other subjects, but as "with-bound" beings with one another.

And consequently, in the everyday, the others do not stand out as different from myself: "Others are not encountered by grasping and discriminating beforehand one's own subject, initially objectively present, from other subjects also present. They are not encountered by first looking at oneself and then ascertaining the opposite pole of a distinction" (Heidegger 116). In German, Heidegger calls this non-subjective and non-objective kind of collectivity, the indistinct many of the everyday: the *man*. French uses the word *on*, while English has to circumscribe with "one," "they," or "people." The *man* is not a subject, nor a collectivity of subjects, but the way of *dasein* as being-among-one-another, where "everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The *they*, which supplies the answer to the *who* of everyday *dasein*, is the *nobody* to whom every *dasein* has always surrendered itself, in its being-among-one-another" (124). Therefore, we do not share with others that are already there as others, but because we share, the others appear as others, and otherness appears, becoming part of the world.

Heidegger brings an everyday world into appearance that is in a shared world,

or rather, an always-already-shared world. It is a world where the *man* of everyday existence acts as a manifestation of *dasein* that is no longer the being of subjects, and not even of subjects that relate to one another as subjects. Through sharing, we are constituted as subjects that are not subjects any longer. "The self of everyday *dasein* is the *they-self*," Heidegger writes: It is *dasein* dispersed in the self, prescribing "the nearest interpretation of the world and of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 125).

This is why sharing, unlike exchange, can involve intimacy. For example, when we share food, we not only offer food for others to take: we offer ourselves for others to be with, and so do those we share with. In his anthropological study of sharing, John Price speaks of "intimate economies" prevalent in sharing band societies (Price 1975). Today, this intimate quality of sharing is invoked each time concern about "oversharing" on social media is expressed (risking details of one's personal life becoming accessible to strangers).

As a consequence of being-with, when we share things we have—food, drink, bicycles, etc. —we share from the place of our own *dasein* as *mit-sein*, and our being-together determines our having, making it a having-together. Sharing as being is at the basis of sharing what we have. Because of this priority of being, sharing what we have is subject to offering ourselves as being with others.

But Heidegger does not make the relationship between being and having clear, and this limits the relevance of his phenomenology to sharing as an everyday routine. However, he does describe *dasein* in the shared world as one characterized by *sorge*, or "care." The shared world concerns us: we are affected by it and our actions are driven by this care. Derived from the Latin cura, both the meaning of the German *Sorge* and the English 'care' indicate a spectrum of meanings moves between "anxious effort" and "carefulness" (Heidegger 191). We are reminded of this each time someone claims that "sharing is caring." In the heideggerian sense of care, this means something different than simply being nice: it means that the world concerns us, regardless of any moral attributions.

Orjiukwu (2010) has offered an analysis of sharing concerned with this point. He considers sharing as an existential action between an economy of having and an economy of being: the economy of having defines the legal title a subject has over a possession, whereas the inner relationship to the good, the meaning and value it has to its owner, belongs to the economy of being. Sharing is defined as offering something which one values (Orjiukwu 165), which in terms of an economy of being is part of oneself. Along with the possession of the shared part that is transferred to the receiver, the giver therefore gives to being, where no expectation of reciprocity can exist.

The concept of *sorge* helps us see that as we share, whatever we share, and whatever form this sharing takes, it is an expression of an existential fact that concerns ourselves and the others. This makes sharing not only a concept of ontology, but also of politics: we can form a *polis* because we share.

The who of sharing: Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*

When sharing can be understood as grounded in being-with that can extend into having, the first question that arises from a political point of view is to think about this non-subjectivity of the sharer. Looking for an

answer to this question means stepping from phenomenology into political philosophy: asking the question of the lost subject. This is what Jean-Luc Nancy sets out to do in his interpretation of *Being and Time* in *Being Singular Plural*. The political subjectivity he presents is one grounded in the "with" of being-with. Heidegger himself distinguishes "with" from the German *auch*, meaning "also" or "alongside." But how can the social bond that comes from the "with" of sharing be described? And, above all, "who" has such bonds?

According to Nancy, when Heidegger specifies the *man* as the subject of *dasein*, he forgets that there is someone who even asks this question. In other words, when I ask who is the subject of dasein, from which place am I asking this question? Who am I as I ask the question? The asker of this question, according to Nancy, "removes himself or has a tendency to remove himself" (Nancy 7) and Heidegger "risks neglecting the fact that there is no pure and simple 'one,' no 'one' in which 'properly existing' existence is, from the start, purely and simply immersed" (Nancy 7). The with comes before the who.

"People," Nancy writes in the English translation of his French translation of the German *man*, "clearly designates the mode of the 'one' by which 'I' remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of 'people' " (Nancy 7). As I become part of people, I remove myself—or rather I *am removed* as the "I" subject.

Perhaps this thought can be exemplified by looking at the way we use "traffic" as an excuse for a delay. We arrive late at an appointment because too many others tried to share the road ("Sorry I'm late! Traffic …!"). At the moment of the excuse, we think of traffic as something that stands in our way like an obstacle external to us. We forget that we ourselves formed part of the traffic: we were, in fact, part of everyone else's traffic and only in as much as we were *our own traffic*. I am removed as a subject, and in that moment I am a subject only in as much as that subject is removed.

This is why Nancy can say that the "with" at the core of sharing is "at once both more and less than relation or bond […]." (34) It is more than a relation or bond because it must be there for the bond to be possible, and it is less than a bond because it weakens the very notion of "subjects" brought together in a bond. As we share, we share ourselves, but that experiencing "we" is already shared in its being-with.

According to Nancy, this way of thinking about the subject as removed stands against the atomization of subjectivity in the current process of globalization, which "results [..] in a co-dispersion given to idiocy." (Nancy 45) Why idiocy? Because such a co-dispersed subjectivity is not able to generate or experience any meaning: "There is no meaning if meaning is not shared […] because meaning is itself the sharing of Being" (2).

Being-with as the foundation of a first political philosophy, then, is related to sharing in two ways. Firstly, a political community, a *polis*, emerges from shared being. But secondly, this shared being involves a different bond and a different form of subjectivity than traditional political philosophy posits. Traditionally, we think of a political community as "adding commonality from above to the multiplicity of things below," whereas Nancy seeks to articulate the spacing of the communal the belongs to beings as such (Brogan 296). In Nancy's interpretation of Heidegger's being-with, the spacing of the communal occurs as sharing itself, among beings whose being is being-with. Secondly, Nancy sees meaning as emerging from shared being. Without sharing, no meaning is possible.

When nothing happens: Sharing and the everyday

The everyday is the unremarkable place where we are most of the time. It, therefore, has a potential political quality; this quality attracted the attention particularly of French structuralists and post-structuralists, most notably Henri Lefebvre who in 1947 published the first volume of his *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, in which he defines the everyday as "whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities." (Lefebvre qtd. in Kaplan and Ross 2). Lefebvre's hypothesis is that it is "in everyday life and starting from everyday life that genuine *creations* are achieved" (31). Anything created outside of the everyday "in the superior realms of social practice" must still "demonstrate its validity in the everyday, whether it be art, philosophy or politics" (31-32). To Lefebvre, therefore, effective social change can only occur in the everyday, but this is also where it is most difficult to achieve because the everyday is "hardest of all to change" (33).

Lefebvre attributes this political quality to the everyday because he considers it historically founded. According to him, the everyday is a result of the industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of the masses that occurred in Europe in the middle of the 19th century; that is, a product of the bourgeois age. Daily repetition of standardized activities, predictable and calculable, created the drabness of everyday life. As Kristin Ross writes:

> *Everyday life, properly speaking, came into being only […] when the lived experience of those new urban dwellers became organized, channeled and codified into a set of repetitive and hence visible patterns, when markets became common between the provinces and the capital, when everything—money, work hours, miles, calories, minutes—became calculated and calculable, and when objects, people and the relations between them changed under the onslaught of such quantification. (Ross 44)*

Prior to that, the routines of everyday were not routines in this sense because "church and monarch held sway, imparting a distinct imprint or style—and thus significance—to every gesture, utensil, or articles of clothing" (44).

This way of conceptualizing the everyday would leave little space for anything outside of exchange; in fact, it is a way of describing the proliferation of exchange in European society of the time. Calculable and predictable activities blend in seamlessly with the general expansion of industrial capitalism and the growth of technology. In fact, when Lefebvre understands the everyday as becoming observable with the bourgeois age, it would seem that this visibility is owed to the expansion of capitalism, and that sharing would indeed remain invisible from his perspective.

As a materialist and Marxist, Lefebvre equates the everyday experience with alienation, creating a kind of Marxist supplement to Heidegger's ambiguous philosophy of the everyday. While Heidegger thinks the everyday is characterized by the *man* as the non-subject of *dasein*, Lefebvre extends Marx's alienation theory from production to the reproductive activities that, according to him, make up the everyday. If it were not for the bourgeois control of the means of production, one is tempted to conclude, there would be no everyday, which is why, on the other hand, the everyday, and not just labor, is a potential location of the overthrow of the bourgeois class.

In fact, adopting Lefebvre's historical perspective, it is clear that sharing must disappear in the generalization of economic exchange, as evident in the enclosure movement in 17th century England that assigned common lands, also known as wasteland, to private owners (Boyle 43-44). The incompatibility of exchange and sharing is historically manifest in this transition: as economic exchange expands, it eliminates sharing by turning the commons into a commodity. Capitalism marks a transition from production for use and shared resources, to production for exchange, and private ownership of the means of production. What Marx and Engels called the "primitive communism," practiced by pre-capitalist societies, finally disappears.

In terms of media history, the 19th century process of urbanization in Europe and North America corresponds to the emergence in the modern mass audience. Popular newspapers with printed photographs, fairground entertainment media such as magic lantern shows and *Kaiserpanoramas*, the evolution of sound recording and other new media of the time all combined to offer popular entertainment, creating a type of shared experience among those masses and initiating the birth of media as mass media. These media provided a recreational space that was initially not reached by exchange. What does this mean for understanding sharing in digital media?

Sharing and the media: Transcribing the everyday

"How many people turn on the radio and leave the room, satisfied with this distant and sufficient noise?" Blanchot asks (14). We are often content with hearing the radio from a distance—or with noticing the flickering of a screen from the corner of our eye, or browsing a magazine while thinking of something else—because "what is essential is not that one particular person speak and another one hear, but that, with no one in particular speaking and no one in particular listening, there should nonetheless be speech, a kind of undefined promise to communicate" (14). Reminiscent of Heidegger's "idle talk" (*gerede*, Heidegger 161 – 164) Blanchot here understands everyday speech as characterized by "platitude" (the French *plat* means flat, stale, smooth) by "that which falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse" (Blanchot 13). Yet who is going to buy a newspaper full of platitudes? The media have a problem with the everyday as repetitive, predictable, and flat. In order for something to become media content, it must be edited, designed, and given form in ways that make it stand out from the everyday.

According to Blanchot, the media resolve that problem by "transcribing" the everyday. So while the newspaper appears every day and as such is part of the everyday experience, finding its audience on the street and among the masses, it transcribes the everyday by rendering it "informed, stabilized, put forth to advantage." The very absence of events in the everyday, Blanchot argues becomes the drama of the news item:

> *The newspaper, incapable of seizing the insignificance of the everyday, is only able to render its value apprehensible by declaring it sensational […] having replaced the 'nothing happens' of the everyday, the newspaper presents us with history's 'something is happening' at the level of what it claims to be the day-to-day […]. (18)*

Transcribing the everyday, turning it into the drama of the news, makes the everyday becomes manifest as a story that is told, and disappears as the common experience of dasein. Through the media, the "everyday looses the power to reach us" (Blanchot 14).

The presence of media in people's everyday life has grown much since Blanchot wrote this, and media technologies have moved on from print to electronic and digital media. With media consumption becoming almost constant, the extraordinary has eroded the ordinary and occupied its place. 20th century media have created an everyday as a service to be consumed, a service tells the audience that something extraordinary is happening all the time. Every day, the everyday is presented as all the events that don't happen every day.

While the subjectivity of everyday experience is that of "anyone" and this any-one is, properly speaking […] neither one nor the other" (Blanchot 18), the transformation of everyday experience into that which stands out as special over itself, therefore available for endless measuring and exchange, furthers a sense of competitive individuality whose meaning-making power dwindles as sharing is replace by exchange.

With the advent of Web 2.0 the conception of everyday and sharing as a common and inconspicuous everyday routine has changed dramatically. The transcription of the everyday now occurs in real time on social media. What is new and special is determined by popularity, the mass, as expressed in likes, re-tweets, comments, etc. The non-subject of the everyday, is becoming reconstructed entirely as a result of exchange. The subject turns from the agent of exchange into a mechanism of exchange. The Web 2.0 subject is no longer a non-subject like Heidegger's *man* or Blanchot's anyone, but the precise opposite: a subject that excels in its subjectivity, stands out over and against other subjects, measures and compares itself, seeks to improve itself and makes every attempt not to be an invisible member of the masses. It is what happens on social media.

Pseudo-sharing, info-liberalism, and social media

In social media sharing and the sharing economy, the lack of distinction of the removed subject, characteristic of the classic mass media audience, is replaced by a subject that consists of *only* distinct properties: no exchange will ever occur between precisely the same things. This subject has, as its main purpose, contributed to the expansion of capital by generating information. The distinct properties acquired, circulated, and shared stand in for the subject itself, and they can therefore be acquired and traded by automatisms. The information generated through "sharing" on social media take on the form of a user profile, a trading commodity.

The removed subject of the mass medium audience, where there is neither one nor the other, where no one in particular listens or speaks, is replaced by a form of individual subjectivity in the form of e one or the other. The move to Web 2.0 and social media sharing maps this transformation.

The more a user gives and engages with the platform, the more advantages in terms of social capital are offered in return (popularity, number of followers, re-tweets, etc.). Unlike the classic subject of the European Enlightenment, such digital sharing subjects can no longer be the carrier of political rights, free will, or sovereignty: in other words, they can no longer be citizens. They can only do what the platform allows and indeed urges and seduces them to do: behave in ways that will increase their value as human capital, with "sharing" being one of them.

What is called "sharing" on these platforms, is not sharing at all—it is the neoliberal reconstruction of a subject without sovereignty. Belk simply calls it "pseudo-sharing:" a rhetorical gimmick that benefits from the association of commonality and sociability that comes with the word and creates a "virtual *kumbaya* of joy, commensality, and fellowship" that masks the economic calculus and neoliberal rationality at work (Belk, "Sharing versus Pseudo-Sharing" 10). This masking is nothing new. Marx already described a similar phenomenon as "commodity fetishism": the masking of social relationships (between the capitalist and the laborer) embodied by the commodity by relationships among commodities. The rhetoric and semblance of sharing that occurs on Web 2.0 acts to cloud the exchange relationships that are established. Much like the laborers in factories create value for the factory owner, the sharers (and engages customers in general) on corporate social networking platforms create value for the platform owner.

Marlies Banning uses the word "info-liberalism" for the informational outgrowth of neoliberalism that has shaped Web 2.0. According to her, the sharing occurring on social networking sites creates an affective link between the sharer and neoliberal capital. What Han terms "smart power" is manifest in technologies that, in her perspective, takes on the form of an affective link between the sharer and Internet companies design new media technologies in "everyday, and ubiquitous ways to create affective situations that induce user participation and expand their business base" (Banning 493). Because of this, Banning considers online sharing labor.

But what is exploited is not just labor of a worker, which could be exchanged for a wage. Because sharing is a modality of everyday *dasein*, it is being itself that is transformed into capital. Things "are" in as much as they are capital; people are human in as much as they are human capital. Rather than transcribing the everyday, as Blanchot understood the role of media, Web 2.0 has begun to colonize the everyday as a seemingly endless source of exploitation.

The reason why social media have grown as much as they did is that turning the everyday into capital is that the everyday literally renews itself every day: it is an infinite resource, one that does not get consumed or diminished through this form of exploitation. Allowing this to happen on a global scale is how corporate social media supports neoliberal rationality: the dissemination of "market values and metrics to every sphere of life [construing] the human itself exclusively as *homo economicus*" (Brown 176).

Social media are a technology that makes the info-liberal pseudo-sharing feel like entertainment, not like labor. No disciplining is necessary. In his recent book on neoliberalism, Byung Chul Han argues that rather than power being applied in the Foucauldian, disciplinary fashion, freedom itself is exploited. Han calls the power model that applies here "smart power" (Han 25-28). This smart power is more efficient than the power of discipline, as it has no resistance to overcome. In fact, the more is shared, the more this power consolidates itself as being without an alternative.

Eventually, because of the relationship between sharing and meaning as discussed by Nancy, this kind of online sharing makes meaning dissipate: if meaning comes from shared being, being as synonymous with exchange will thrive on the circulation of meaningless content. Such content is promoted by the Web 2.0 itself with the purpose of optimizing the social media business model. Trivial content will circulate more quickly, resulting in more user data being generated. Tellingly, a search for "cat" on YouTube yields no less than 45 million results.

Sharing as limit

Yet sharing that is not pseudo-sharing remains a limit to exchange. It cannot be capitalized because it is non-reciprocal and inherently incommensurate, not subject to calculation. Actual sharing will limit and even slow down the expansion of exchange. It will set a limit to what can be exchanged, rather than acting as a "frontier" be moved forward, as Web 2.0 pseudo-sharing does.

At this point we must remember that this debate about sharing is occurring because of digital media and because we share files on these media. In fact, digital content is shared content from the moment of its creation because it never forms a stable, limited, and unique object. That is why computer networks were first constructed around the very idea of sharing. As Nicholas John reminds us, "the origins of the term 'file sharing' [are] located within the history of computing" (John, "File Sharing" 201). From "time sharing," "shared file access," and "disk sharing" to the emergence of file sharing in the current sense of the word, following the widespread adoption of the file transfer protocol (FTP) in the 1980s, sharing has been a core concept in computing. "File sharing is very similar to the model of the commons in that […] users put files in a repository that others have access to. It is unlike the commons, though, in that, as mentioned above, downloaders take nothing away from the commons by downloading a file: in this commons, there can be no tragedy" (John, "File Sharing" 204). It will therefore be difficult to eliminate sharing, understood as digital file sharing, from networked digital media. We have seen that it is possible to mask sharing with pseudo-sharing by applying a rhetoric that emphasizes the niceness of process but is actually not sharing; instead, it is a type of exchange that advances neoliberal rationality.

Remembering sharing as the everyday that limits the expansion of exchange may help identify the "pseudo" in sharing the construction of a purely economic subjectivity that is human capital. Seeing sharing as an everyday routine means acknowledging its inconspicuousness and its place outside the accounts and away from privileged objects, gestures, and discourses, and competitive subjects. Sharing as the inconspicuous everyday routine and the being-with of the political together may form the basis for a freedom that eludes the next exchange operation.

As a limit to exchange, sharing is not an alternative to exchange. It is not a utopian vision of a better world. However, with utopian visions of a better world being another commodity offered on a market, being non-utopian and remaining part of our everyday being may be a reliable indicator whether we are talking about sharing or pseudo-sharing.

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Aideen Doran

OBLOMOV'S DREAM: AN ART PRACTICE-LED ENQUIRY INTO RADICAL BOREDOM IN THE NETWORK WORLD

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A refusal to engage with, or to share in, a digital network culture that demands a permanent state of receptivity can be a powerful statement both personally and politically. In this paper I discuss how strategies of resistance to the technological enframing[1] of experience in the network world may be developed through a kind of 'radical boredom,' developed in response to the 'radical distraction' (Morozov) of the network world. I explore this in relation to my 2015 video work *Oblomov's Dream*, referencing Jan Verwoert's concept of performing dissent through embracing 'I *Can't*' as a form of agency (92-94).

Radical boredom

Concern about the effect of modern culture on our attention span and intellect is nothing new: in 1903 Georg Simmel published the essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in which he criticised the blasé attitude that city dwellers held towards the world, blaming their indifference on an overstimulation of the senses. An absence of focus and an itinerant attention, characteristics typifying the modern subject, both indicated a coping mechanism adopted to blunt the city dweller's ability to react to new sensations, a psychological defence mechanism which made city life less mentally straining. Simmel's erstwhile student Siegfried Kracauer went even further, suggesting that only "extraordinary, radical boredom" (Kracauer, quoted in Morozov), as opposed to the 'radical distraction' of a real-time social media news feed, could reunite us with our body, our heads and the lived materiality of the world. The endless novelty of the modern world affected a disembodiment of experience: it alienated the individual from his or her 'spirit', enchanted as it was by the surface spectacle of modernity, manifesting as an endless and evanescent series of images invoking leisure and the pleasures of consumerism. Modernity, to Kracauer, had created a 'culture of distraction' wherein everyday life had been colonised by "commodified forms of communication" (Kracauer 302) and was left vacant and banal as a result. Only in moments of silence and solitude could one flirt with radical and unscripted ideas. Boredom was rethought as political.

Kracauer was writing in 1924 about the early days of mass media such as radio and cinema, yet his observations resonate with many contemporary critiques of life in the digitally networked world. He describes how modernity demands a "permanent state of receptivity," (Ibid 303) a statement that could as easily apply to the live feeds of social media as it once did to radio. Kracauer rethought boredom as being something inherently political, a state of mind in which one could experience the world at different temporalities and reimagine not only what the present could look like, but also what the future could look like. In being bored the urgent, 'just in time' temporality of the network world is disrupted and we are reminded that: "we are not in charge of time… we are subject to time" (Svendsen 118).

The boring boring and the unboring boring

We are surrounded by anti-boredom devices, and we can be bored as well as overwhelmed by information overload, but it is a mediated form of boredom that differs substantially from Kracauer's concept of 'radical boredom'. Kenneth Goldsmith writes of these two types of boredom in terms of the "unboring boring" and the "boring boring" (Goldsmith). The difference between the two, he writes, is that:

> *Unboring boring is a voluntary state; boring boring is a forced one. Unboring boring is the sort of boredom we surrender ourselves to when, say, we go to see a piece of minimalist music. (Ibid)*

Where enduring five seconds of a sponsored advertisement on Youtube, or writing an email that one has been putting off can both be read in terms of the "boring boring," Goldsmith's work goes some way towards an expression of an "unboring boring." Take, for example, *Day*, in which Goldsmith transcribed the entire text of a day's issue of *The New York Times*: a task both masochistic in its tedium and "surprisingly sensual," (Ibid) an act of endurance that achieves a kind of transcendence of the material and the act of transcription. It brings to mind John Cage's famous statement on the necessity of boredom:

> *If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all. (John Cage, quoted in Goldsmith)*

A culture of distraction demands not only a permanent state of receptiveness, but also a permanent 'now.' The temporality of the network world is one of urgency, of being 'just in time' rather than 'in the moment'. Zygmunt Bauman describes this as "the insubstantial, instantaneous time of the software world," (Bauman 118) a temporality that is also *inconsequential time*, immediately evanescing from experience into "exhaustion and fading of interest" (Ibid). Bauman's analysis stands in contrast to the words of Google Chairman Eric Schmidt, in his keynote speech to the 2011 Digital-Life-Design conference in Munich. In the age of the Internet, he states: "you're never bored" (Google). Boredom has been replaced by "wasting time," idly traversing the world's knowledge on the Internet. As I have argued earlier—contra Schmidt—we can be bored as well as overwhelmed by an overload of information. However, this is a mediated form of boredom that operates in the flat, 'instantaneous time' of the network, a kind of "boring boring" (Goldsmith) that allows no room for thought or reflection as it is fixed in a permanent state of receptivity (Morozov).

The curious temporality of the "unboring boring," its unfolding over time, brings us again to Heidegger and to his concept of 'profound boredom.'[2] It is described by Lars Svendsen as a state in which one is "bored by boredom itself," (Svendsen 121) wherein one encounters the emptiness of existence and of time. Profound boredom is a mood that, once awakened, "leads us directly into the problem complex of being and time" (Ibid 116). Profound boredom opens an allocentric perspective on one's own existence and presents the possibility of the liberation of the self in the moment. Contained within the negativity of profound boredom is the kernel of a positive possibility, "a boredom so radical as to be able to bring about a turnaround to authenticity" (Ibid 125).

The terror of total Dasein

To Kracauer, too, boredom held a positive possibility. Boredom was not only our "modest right" (Kracauer 303) to do no more than be with ourselves, but also "the necessary precondition for the possibility of generating the authentically new" (Ibid 301-2). If an individual is never bored, then they are also never really *present*. So, if to be bored is to be *present*, then 'radical boredom' relates not only to Heidegger's 'profound boredom' but

also to his concept of *Dasein*, 'being in the world,' wherein human existence is grounded in the body and in the specific place in which we live. Being in the world emphasises that we are more than just an incorporeal self that is distinct from the "confining prison house" of the body, as expressed by John Cottingham, that consciousness is more than a string of information that can flow seamlessly between the synapses of the brain and the silicon chips of a computer (252) An explanation of consciousness as an informational pattern that is equally replicable in organic or non-organic materials falls short of accounting for Dasein.

In the essay "The Terror of Total Dasein: Economies of Presence in the Art Field", Hito Steyerl argues that in the "technologically enhanced market for attention, time, movement" of the contemporary art world, in which there can be no scarcity of digitally reproducible commodities, presence itself becomes a rarity – "the scarcest option among a range of alternatives." The artist must not only be present but "exclusively present" in a context in which actual physical presence is conflated with the liberating potential of the 'being present' of Dasein.

> *The idea of presence invokes the promise of unmediated communication, the glow of uninhibited existence, a seemingly unalienated experience and authentic encounter between humans. It implies that not only the artist but everyone else is present too, whatever that means and whatever it is good for. (Steyerl,"The Terror of Total Dasein")*

While the 'being present' of Dasein invokes a temporal state radically different from the instantaneous and insubstantial time of the network world, the kinds of presence Steyerl writes about operate in the frenetic temporal zone of "junktime… wrecked, discontinuous, distracted," a zone of constant engagement and exhaustion. They are in fact not so much forms of presence as "a range of grades of withholding absence" (Ibid). The demand for the artists' presence can be read as a symptom of the constant demands on our time and attention, and the intense "pressure to conform and perform" (Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth") exerted by a network hegemony. As Franco Bifo Berardi has written, "everywhere, attention is under siege" (134).

Physical presence becomes a proxy for Dasein and Dasein itself becomes reified, "a cult of presence" (Steyerl "The Terror of Total Dasein"). In this context, the strategic withdrawal of one's presence (like the negativity of profound boredom) holds the kernel of a positive, or even radical, potentiality. Steyerl relates this kind of withdrawal, or "absenteeism" to the action of a strike – a refusal of the alienating labour of "self-production" demanded by the network world (Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth"). As pointed to by Brian Holmes, this process of self realisation through actions of sharing, liking and other forms of (inter) activity can be traced to the collapse of factory models of production in the mid 20th century and their replacement by a fractured, dispersed and individualised social form modelled along network lines. Thus, strike action would seem an apt historical metaphor. However artistic strike action, such as Gustav Metzger's Art Strike of 1977-1980, has more often resulted in a total disappearance than a strategic withdrawal. As Simon Sheikh says of Metzger's *Art Strike*, "nobody noticed" (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw). New strategies are undoubtedly required to resist a culture of 'radical distraction' and the exhaustion and alienation it affects, strategies that I will go on to explore in a discussion of the single channel video work *Oblomov's Dream*.

Oblomov's Dream

The idea of boredom and refusal as forms of active resistance to the commodification of time and attention fed into the development of my single channel video work, *Oblomov's Dream*. The script is adapted from the 1849 novel *Oblomov* by Ivan Goncharov, a satire on the indolence of the Russian aristocracy, with additional material from *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* by Jonathan Crary and the essay "Exhaustion and Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform" by Jan Verwoert. A disembodied narrator reads this adaptation over a shifting backdrop of still images and video that are culled from multiple sources both online and offline, a backdrop that at times is entirely abstract, and at others resembles a computer desktop, an online pin-board or a Tumblr dashboard (Figure 1).

In the original novel, Oblomov is a young nobleman who, although he is good-natured, is incapable of making decisions or undertaking any action. Oblomov's indolence is extreme, to the point that remaining recumbent in bed "represented his normal condition" (Goncharev 2). A city dweller, living in St Petersburg on an income from his rural estate, he dreams of a simpler pastoral life in the Russian countryside of his childhood, a life without change or incident (Ibid 36). Oblomov possesses vague ideas on how to reorganise this estate, yet comically fails to get past the first sentence on a letter setting out his ideas, a letter he has laboured over for years. Similarly, his reluctance to commit to any action results in the end of his relationship with his fiancée Olga. His fatalistic torpor has even spawned its own term: Oblomovism. In the novel the non-events of Oblomov's life play out as a tragi-comedy, and Oblomov's eventual fate of an early and ignominious death is nonetheless upsetting in spite of its inevitability. In the original text the eponymous hero, doomed to permanent inaction by indecision and anxiety, has been interpreted by many as a biting satire on the decay of the Russian ruling classes. In

Figure 1: Still image from *Oblomov's Dream*, video, 17.45 minutes, 2014-15. Image by the author.

my reworking of the text into a narration for video, Oblomov is elevated from being the ultimate 'superfluous man'[3] to the position of an anti-hero. His refusal to perform any social function and to produce anything of use is reinterpreted as a radical political action, an oppositional stance in a digitally networked world that prizes performativity and proofs. Oblomov does not withdraw from the world in the equivocal manner advocated by proponents of 'digital detoxing,' nor does he stage a disappearance from it by means of cryptographic practices or strike action. His strategic withdrawal from the world is the end result of an exhaustion brought on by the demands of what Steyerl has called "the pressure to represent and be represented" (Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth"). Oblomov's depression becomes politicised, a weariness brought on by the labours of self-production online and offline. Introducing Oblomov, the narrator in *Oblomov's Dream* reads:

> *Who is this, our hero? He is the man who says, "I can't". He is non-aligned, non-compliant, unwilling. He is an anti-performer, a man who stubbornly resists the demand to choose, to perform and to produce. Neither consumed nor consuming, he will never exhaust his potentials or ever run out of ideas, for he has incapacitated himself to the point where nothing more can be expected of him. (Doran)*

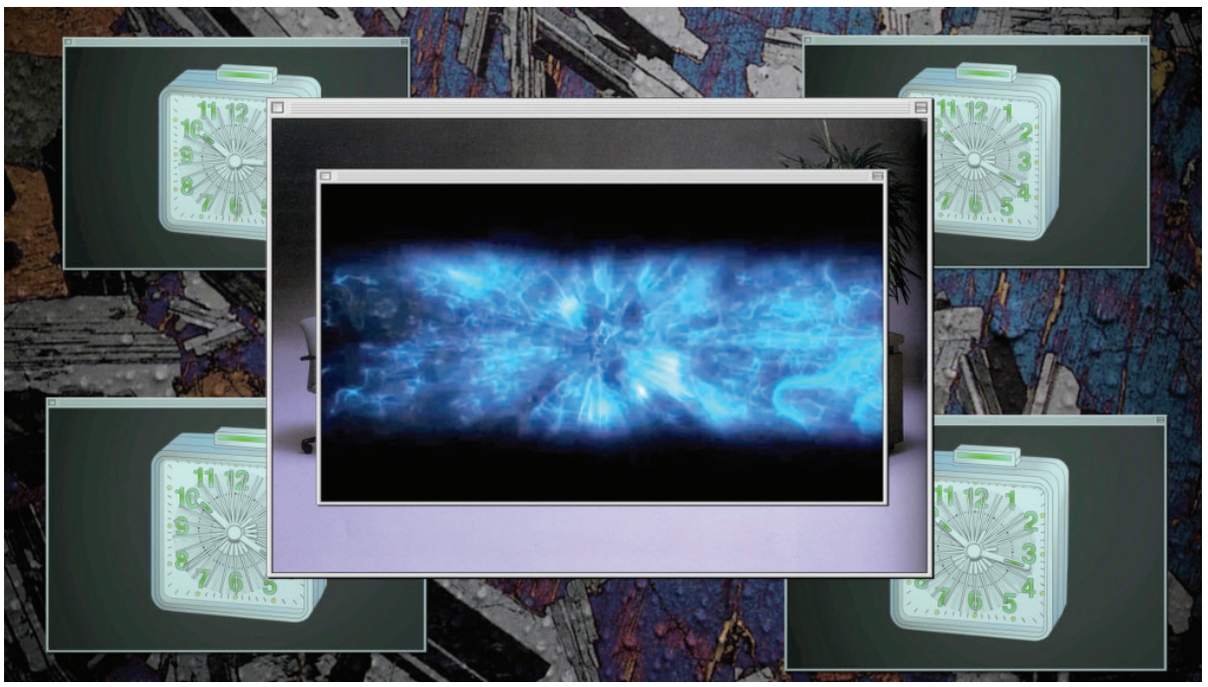
Both the network and the human body reveal their limitations when brought to the point of exhaustion by the relentless acceleration of the cycles of production and consumption. Exhibiting exhaustion in art "deprivatises exhaustion by exposing it as an experience that may be shared" (Verwoert 92). Exhibiting exhaustion begins to reveal it as a shared horizon of collective experience, our energies dissipated by the constant demand on our time and attention by the endless stream of images and information of digitally networked modernity. As the doctor says to Oblomov in my reworking of the text: "You are fatigued. There is an epidemic of it currently" (Doran).

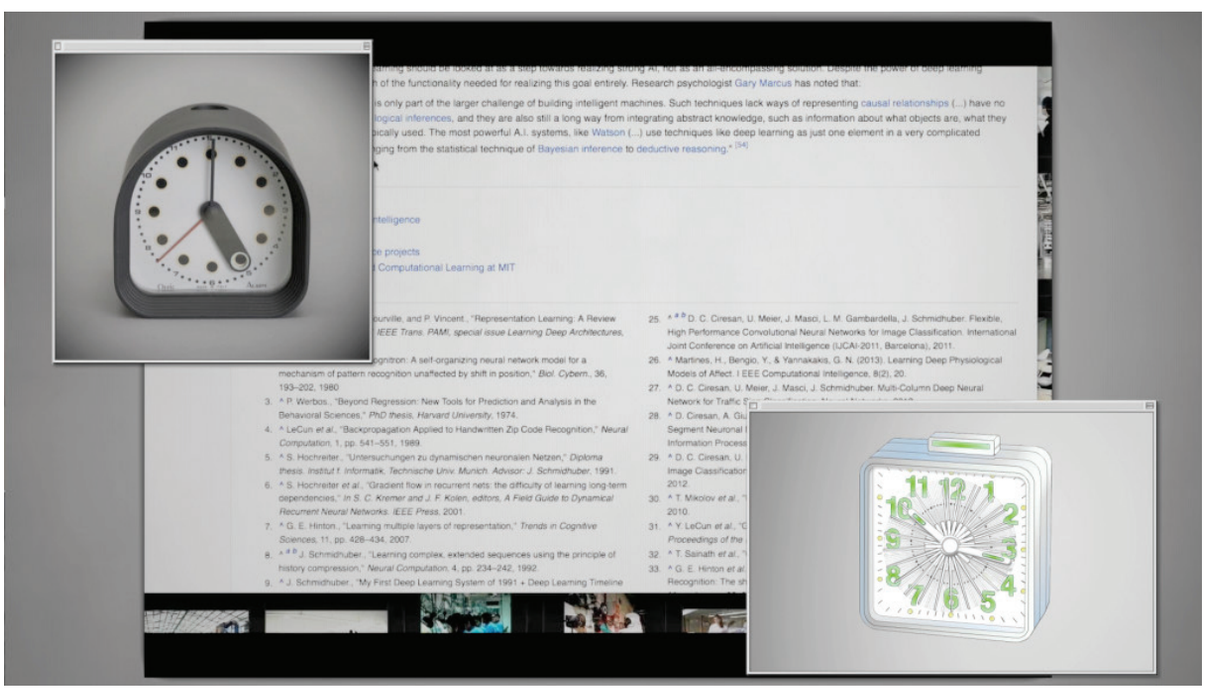
Performing the 'I can't'

When writing the script for *Oblomov's Dream* I wanted to explore through the character of Oblomov what it could mean to resist what Verwoert has called "the pressure to perform," (Verwoert) without recourse to the forms of agency commonly associated with resistance. Movements and events (e.g. the Cryptoparty movement)[4] could potentially be considered modes of high performance in and of themselves: they make things happen, they create an event. Verwoert suggests that we find other, more subtle means to "perform dissent":

> *What silent but effective forms of non-alignment, non-compliance, uncooperativeness, reluctance, reticence, weariness or unwillingness do we find in everyday life…What can make us utter the magic words I* Can't*? Does it take a breakdown to stop us? (Verwoert 92)*

To resist a culture of high performance, Verwoert suggests that we embrace the idea of *I Can't* as a "form of agency"(Ibid). Performing the *I Can't* has the potential to break the spell of "the pressure to produce for the sake of production" (Ibid) that characterises life in the digitally networked world, to interrupt the circuits of exploitation and accumulation that typify the network world. Performing the *I Can't* and embracing ones own incapacities becomes deeply





Figures 2 & 3: Still images from *Oblomov's Dream*, video, 17.45 minutes, 2014-15. Images by the author.

transgressive in this context, opening other potentialities for agency that challenge the dominant socio-economic rationale. Oblomov, in embracing the *I Can't*, exhibits his agency by deliberately squandering his own 'human resources' through passive acts of self-destruction.

Against the narration a stream of images and videos shift and dissolve, appropriated from multiple sources and arranged in a flat image plane, alike to a computer desktop or the home-screen of a smartphone or tablet (Figures 2 and 3). Multiple 'windows' close and open, as directed by the hand of an unseen user. In *Oblomov's Dream* this desktop becomes a psychological and psychogeographic space as well as a virtual one. The images, video and audio all work to hint at the state of mind of Oblomov, and of the unseen user browsing through the files on the desktop. That the personalised desktop can reveal something of the individual and their psychology seems analogous to ways in which office workers might express themselves through the decoration of their cubicle, or prisoners their cell. Personalisation is alike to a process of self-realisation, appealing to the user's sense of their own autonomy and personal agency, fulfilling a desire for the external environment to reflect one's sense of self, and for a modicum of authorial control over the interface. The choices made in personalising such as space as a computer desktop excite and engage the emotions of the user on multiple levels, transforming the desktop from a neutral space or even a 'non-place,' to one interwoven with affect and desire. The desktop becomes a portal to another world, a window into another universe.

In *Oblomov's Dream*, I deliberately leave the identity of the unseen user, browsing the desktop, ambiguous to the viewer—although this is the character with which I myself most strongly identify. This character has no words, only disembodied actions curating a selection of images and video in a role that mirrors my own labour of constructing the work. The invisible user appears to have a particularly itinerant attention, flicking between images and video rapidly and without apparent purpose, echoing Berardi's description of attention under siege in "a cognitive space overloaded with nervous incentives to act" (Berardi 134). This activity of browsing provides the core visual structure of the film: the montage of multiple overlapping elements within the confined space of the virtual desktop. The visuals travel from archival photographs of Bauhaus furniture to a hand-made perpetual motion machine, from a cat mesmerised by the motion of a metronome to a concept video for a new tactical surveillance technology from DARPA. Time contracts and dilates, illusionistic spaces are created from disparate elements, words and images emerge and dissipate. Time and again in the work the images accumulate to a points of excess, building towards a dizzying overload of visual information before dissipating quietly and beginning the process again.

Oblomov's 'squandering' of his life relates to Georges Bataille's concept of the "inevitable squander" (Sützl) that is part of any capitalist economy, acts that do not give any return of value. In Bataille's analysis of political economy, art stands alongside human sacrifice, spectacle and non-reproductive sex as the "accursed share" (Bataille) of the economy: the 'squander' of productive energy for which there can be no use-value and no possibility of return. It is the part of wealth that is "doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use" (Bataille 25). Oblomov does not accumulate profit of any kind, preferring to "waste it and get wasted," to "refuse to save anything or be saved by anyone" (Verwoert 107). Throughout *Oblomov's Dream*, via assemblages of image, audio and text, I speculate

on the possibility that acts of excess, waste and squander could begin to "break the spell of the death drive towards exhaustion" (Ibid). Verwoert has argued that while exhaustion is the inevitable result of the over-participation and over-sharing demanded by the network world, withdrawal and recuperation are not necessarily solitary and isolated acts but a shared experience which has the potential to serve as "the point of departure" (Ibid 110) for new forms of solidarity. As Verwoert writes, "the exhibition of exhaustion produces public bodies" (Ibid 107).

Oblomov became a vehicle through which to explore a particular way of living in network society, how the negativity of boredom or withdrawal can be refigured as a productive affective state, alike to art, in that they too are possessed of an 'accursed share.' Within a system of technological enframing, art (alongside boredom) can be seen as inefficient and unproductive in the sense that it does not generate quantifiable evidence of its own operativity. However, I argue that rather than producing surplus, both art and radical boredom represent the *surplus of being*, what Antonio Negri has called "the index of man's inexhaustible capacity to turn being into excess" (Negri 69-70).

Notes

[1] I use this term in reference to Martin Heidegger's critique of technocratic society (Heidegger). 'Technological enframing' refers to the instantiation of an instrumentalist mode of thought, one that sets strict parameters around what can and cannot be said and understood. Under a system of technological enframing the world is reduced to a standing reserve of productive energy, and all things to resources awaiting use.

[2] Boredom in the original German, *Langeweile*, literally means 'a long while'.

[3] The 'superfluous man' is a Russian literary archetype of the 19th century. The term was first taken from Ivan Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man* (1850), and refers to characters who, although talented and capable in many ways, are somehow alienated from society. They may be intelligent, idealistic and possessed of good will yet they are afflicted by self-absorption and incapability for effective action, much like Shakespeare's Hamlet.

[4] CryptoParty is an initiative started in Berlin in 2011 to promote knowledge of cryptographic tools that preserve anonymity and privacy online.

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Nathan Jones

THE TESTIMONY OF STRUCTURE: CODECS AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY

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Many contemporary theorists have observed the increasing directness of the relationship of language to economics through technology. Coming from the Marxist tradition of the Italian autonomist movement, both Franco Berardi's *The Uprising: Poetry and Finance* (from 2012), and Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude* (from 2003) contend that the special circumstances of post-Fordist industry – an industry based on cognitive and linguistic labour – places a great deal of focus on the cultural production of language. Thus, Virno describes culture itself as the new "industry of the means of production" (Virno 61) indicating that cultural explorations of communication complement or supersede technical industries making material machines and tools. Under the regime of semiocapitalism then, language artefacts acquire ontological status on a par with more explicitly technological devices. This entwinement of language as and with technology is most evident in the form of code, wherein machinic innovations themselves take the form of language, as software. But the narrow field of software production is clearly not the most profitable means by which finance can be drawn from what is linguistic – rather, social media corporations have found new ways of mining, quantifying and selling the testimony as the performance and recording of subjective experience. This article pursues the moment of the testimony in the context of this technologisation of language, and asks how contemporary literature might withdraw its innovations from the role they play in "industry of the means of production" through intimate sharing.

We can observe the pressures of this shifting status of literary innovation in popular contemporary genres such as Autofiction and Alt Lit, both of which explore deep and/or continual sharing as literary forms: a tendency which has implications in the personal lives of those who share, or are shared. The excessive autobiographical content in Karl Knausgaard's trilogy *My Struggle* (from 2013), or Tao Lin's novel *Taipei* (from 2013) for example, have resulted in accusations of abuse from people connected to the authors – their wives and girlfriends in particular. In a radio interview, Knausgaard has described as a "Faustian pact" the sacrifice of family relationships he made in achieving success with his book (Gundersen).

This burden of oversharing in which the potential of language goes to work within the subject as energetic mining activity, is exemplary of what Berardi identifies as the emotional and psychic strains of the flow connecting cognition and finance:

> *The field of desire has been invaded by anxiogenous flows: the acceleration of the infosphere has expanded expectations, semiotic stimulation, and nervous excitement up to the point of collapse. (Berardi 109)*

That is, it becomes ever more implausible to think of a limit to the reach, scale and speed of the language-technology apparatus, and thus we are held at this point of anxious collapse, needing to say, type, read, send, record in order to exist at all – while needing equally to fall back into one's self in order to innovate and devise new aspects about our selves which might be valuably shared. The objectifying of language in terms of financial value – of which the quantification through textual analysis is one part of its inclusion in "the objective order of things in themselves" (Fuller) – produces an uncanny departure from the enunciation's traditional value as a more or less vanishing mediator between subjects and objects. The work of contemporary poets, in this context, is to propose a form of address which problematizes the objectification of language as distinct from its subject, and allows its conditions to speak

through it: to speak from the conditions of the technological, the impossibility of speaking about technological conditions.

Posthuman subject

But what differentiates the objectified language of the technological from the language which has come before? After Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles designates a posthuman realm in which bodily language is submitted to sampling and quantification – codification – in return for its entry into the data stream. The basis of the relation between meaning and word in this language, Hayles argues, is radically shifted from that of the "Lacanian 'floating signifier'" in which words are located in relation to meanings in context, to the "flickering signifier", where meaning is only ever a degree of probability (Hayles 29). That is, language moves from affirming presence and absence of meaning in context, to existing as a flickering play of pattern and randomness, thus having to do with the numerical statistical array. Enunciation under these conditions becomes a matter of probability, distinguished from the presence of the enunciating subject. Berardi suggests that this shift from the structure of possibility in presence/absence to that of probability in pattern/randomness was performed firstly in symbolist poetry (18). He connects the symbolist project's separation of signifier from signified explicitly to the way that markets moved from physical to semiotic labour:

> *[S]ymbolist poets enhanced the connotation potency of language to the point of explosion and hyperinclusion. […] This magic of post-referential language anticipated the general process of dereferentialization that occurred when the economy became a semio-economy. (Berardi 18)*

Conversely, what Berardi calls for in poetry – implying a new, or a return to, non-utilizable cultural language – is an enunciation of the sensuous qualities of language, which he designates variously as its "the voice" or "excess". This return of poetry as the excess of language refers to the enunciation of the explicit and irrevocable presence of the subject; by stammering, marking or otherwise refusing the purity of the statement and therefore preventing its quanticized inculcation into the technological. The potential of excess in this instance is to prevent the collapse of the act of enunciation into the objective completion of the statement.

Incoherence

In *The Interface Effect* (from 2015), Alexander Galloway proposes four regimes for art, based on their political and aesthetic incoherence or coherence. *Ideology* for example, is proposed to be *politically coherent* – it is aligned to a dogma – and aesthetically coherent in order to make clear sense. Galloway finishes by proposing that it is to the "dirty regime" of *truth*, where works intersect *political incoherence* and *aesthetic incoherence* that we must look for works that are capable of speaking in non-generic ways through technology. This, he says is an analogue of Giorgio Agamben's theory of 'the whatever':

> *The whatever finds its power in incontinence and transformation, not unification or repetition. Likewise the whatever is politically incoherent because it tends to erode existing territories and institutional routines […] No centre exists toward which it might gravitate. (142)*

Artworks of the regime of truth, or the whatever, it is suggested, offer a radical subjectivity for the poem in which the increasingly coercive and invisible process of structuring by interfaces are made available for critique, as essential parts of the unique qualities of the speaking/writing subject: "effacing representational aesthetics and representational politics alike, in favour of direct immanence" (142). The politically unaligned and aesthetically inconsistent work, almost by definition, is one which comes into contact with limits – the ends which would match up and hold the work together in itself (aesthetic coherence) and align it with social frameworks outside of itself (political coherence), are left ragged, and the work doesn't collapse into the generic: "neither a universal nor an individual included in a series, but rather 'singularity insofar as it is whatever singularity'" (Agamben, *The Coming Community* 1).

Singularity is essential to thinking how a work operates, or fails to, in the 'infosphere', wherein everything is accorded value on the basis of transient status in a database of generic categories. So what are the qualities of a contemporary poetry of the whatever, and how do they perform the "voice of language" as excess? As critiques of both Galloway and Berardi have observed (Fest, Iliadis), neither are keen to build on their manifestos with reference to examples in contemporary artistic practice. But what is clear from both authors, is that they draw on the work of Agamben to identify the incursions of such limits – specifically in language. So, it is necessary to ask, what is Agamben's understanding of the excess of language? And how does this play against the new posthuman and techno-linguistic context which Berardi and Galloway identify as the realm for a contemporary poetics?

The contemporary

I would like to start to answer these questions with perhaps the least conspicuous term they suggest – the contemporary. Agamben has a specific understanding of the contemporary, as someone who is able to view 'the darkness' of his or her time (Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*). He uses the metaphor of the darkness in the night sky, which he says is not the darkness of absence, but rather of those stars which move away from us so fast their light, while approaching, never reaches us – they *withdraw*: "To perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot – this is what it means to be contemporary." (50)

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben again draws on this same cosmological metaphor to affirm darkness itself as trope of the language of the impossible – a language which contains that which is in excess of itself as a remnant.

> *This is language of the "dark shadows" that Levi heard growing in Celan's poetry, like a "background noise"; this is Hurbinek's non-language (*mass-klo*,* matisklo*) that has no place in the libraries of what has been said or in the archive of statements. Just as in the starry sky that we see at night, the stars shine surrounded by a total darkness that, according to cosmologists, is nothing other than the testimony of a time in which the stars did not yet shine, so the speech of the witness bears witness to a time in which human beings did not yet speak; and so the testimony of human beings attests to a time in which they were not yet human. (*Remnants of Auschwitz *162)*

The darkness of our time in contemporary poetry refers to that which is withdrawn from us about the poem's techné, which operates prior to, but normally in excess of, the poem itself. A broken language in which the unsayable is present as remnant is for Agamben, as with Heidegger, how the contemporary commutates what is withdrawn from language. The possibility of poetry as the word of the subject whose testimony is always about to be objectified and categorised into the technical apparatus of the database – and therefore impossible as anything other – is to bring the darkness which exceeds language into the poem, putting it into a position where it contains that which would normally necessarily withdraw from it in order for it to function in the "archive of statements" (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* 162). It is the voice of language which exceeds its collapse into a generic form.

The withdrawn

Drawing on the foundational work of Heidegger, in *The Open: Human as Animal*, Agamben (71-75) affirms a distinction between the human open-ness and animal self-withdrawal of which he says the human-as-animal is composed. I posit a similar move in considering the boundary of human open-ness and technological self-withdrawal which makes up the posthuman writing subject – that is, the subject who operates within, and is operated on by, technological language.

For Heidegger, a tool necessarily withdraws into invisibility while we express our own being through it – using it to our ends. Galloway similarly has written of the invisibility of media and interfaces thus: the better they work, the more invisible they become (11). To look at the other side of the coin, our experience of devices is precisely and uniquely the experience of their faultiness. This, what Heidegger called un-*readiness-to-hand* (Heidegger 204-207), when a tool becomes unavailable, broken or unwieldy, is a moment in which the tool discloses itself in relation to someone who would use it. Importantly, this disclosure is specifically related to an *aspect*, that is, the nature of its unsuitability in-relation-to – a specific subjective quality only apparent in relation to a proposed use.

Like the animal in Agamben's account, software's interaction with the world is poor, having to do with the activity of enframing, or structuring, rather than the human's active *concern* with the world. The split in the writing subject is between the poor structuring activity of technological language, and the involved concern which drives the enunciation. But this split has become infinitely complex in the contemporary conditions of technological language, whose role as a tool for communication has been morphed into that of the agent towards a particular form of disclosure. As I sought to show at the beginning of this paper, the enunciation is always to an extent driven by the current technological bias towards disclosure, and language itself is not a pure means but has deep connections to what wills itself to be said. The contemporary poet's untimeliness by definition, must write from within this paradox at work within the poem as the manifestation and refusal, of a desire to share. In writing at limits, what the contemporary poet brings back from withdrawal is *their own* withdrawn technological aspect: the excess and lack which accompany and allow for the poem to testify to technology as part of the conditions for saying.

Codec and glitch

But what is the unhuman element of the post-human subject against which the testimony becomes both an excess and a lack? And how might a poet bring back from withdrawal those elements which structure it, in order to include them as part of their subjective encounter? Embracing the apparent anachronism, I would like to use the framework suggested by the relation of media to digital codecs, and the ways in which codecs have been retrieved and performed in glitch art.

A codec (compression-decompression/coding-decoding) is a process which allows for the most salient features of new media – namely the sampling and quantifying by which it objectifies media as a statistical array. The low-order language in which a digital media item is stored is called the *data*, and that protocol which allows for it to be shown the *interface*. Codecs (such as those having the file extension .jpg, .tiff, .raw) store visual information as data, in a string of alphanumeric figures. Before being run by the codec *interface*, the *data* itself does not conventionally exist on the plane of the human subject – as visible – and after, both the *interface* and *data* are withdrawn from what we see, they are the darkness against which the image appears.

Two aspects that are important to note about this relation: 1) both the data and the interface used in combination to make the image immanent, occlude themselves in revealing the image – they are the excess which is in the saying of the image; 2) The data of the storage format stakes no claim to being the originary, or 'essence' of the image, being only precisely the a-priori, not containing either the exhaustive information with which the image can reveal itself (for it requires the interface for that), nor to contain everything that will be shown (for any viable interface could show a singularly different version of it), nor having any privileged relation to the real (being structured like a language).

The salient innovations of glitch art brought the data and the interface in a codec into immanence as part of the artefact. Artists such as Rosa Menkman, in *Vernacular of File Formats* (in 2008) and Nick Britz in *Glitch Codec Tutorial* (from 2011) using pedagogical methods and series' of images and films, forced the codec to *disclose itself*, by editing the source code of data or interface in order to produce situations wherein they fail to articulate, corrupt, or stammer their data. Often in glitch art, a series is used to show, via the aesthetic differences of each image in the series, the biases and aesthetics of specific codecs, and perform the codec process itself as the mediation of what is the apparently unmediated. The resulting images then literally exceed their data, being added-to by patterns, colourings, warps from the interface, while also becoming diminished, half-withdrawing from view in favour of the 'darkness' of their structure. The image or video itself becomes both excess and lack – paradoxically unrealised as that which it should show, while showing more than it should. The glitch in the work of these artists was an untimely gesture, operating in such a way that stammered and problematized the apparent fluency of digital media by refusing to let the image become itself and therefore be inculcated as an object in the network of objects.[1] I will now turn to a reading of a contemporary poetry book, *Mean Free Path*, by Ben Lerner, to show how it exhibits glitch-like tendencies, of series and the breakdown of structuring aspects, to perform its own testimony to its technological conditions.

Mean Free Path

Mean Free Path (from 2010) is a book, within which there is a poem also called "Mean Free Path" split across two sections by a poem called "The Doppler Elegies", and prefaced by a "Dedication". The poem "Mean Free Path" is composed of two sets of thirty-six stanzas of nine lines each, two of which appear on each page. In a form which mimics digital media's "modular" or fractal quality (Manovich), the stanzas in series do not develop on each other in a linear way, but rather pertain to their own aphoristic completion – each containing the thematic and affective qualities of the poem as a whole. This aphoristic, elliptical quality is in evidence down to the units of the phrase also, as units which are revisited in transformational arrangements at different moments in different stanzas – variously operating as an element of noise or signal at different moments throughout. Although, and because, all of what the poem testifies to is present as potential in each moment of its enunciation, any one quotation – or sampling – necessarily performs only a partial disclosure. The units by which it is sampled blur at their edges, the speaking they do uttered from the lacunae between them, and that which appears integral in one stanza quickly being transformed as excess in another. This is the quality of repetition – or rather the problematizing of repetition. By refusing to dissolve each enunciation into what has been said and which would then be repeatable, the poem "Mean Free Path" wilfully enters its testimony through the disorganizing principles of digital media's emphasis on the statistical array as continually modifying and refreshing the quality of meaning. To return to the figure of the codec, the drama that plays out across the book is experienced as though each stanza is a consistent data source as potential, realised by an unstable *interface*, the *data* sputtering and drawing striations or remnants indistinguishable from the meaning of the poem on the surface of the text.

The poem as constituted of re-coded/de-coded series can be read as a continual return to the possibility of the poem begun anew in each moment, producing incoherence across the whole, which nonetheless continually appears to bloom into disclosure. For example, the sentiment of a kind of proxy subjectivity in the second stanza "I'm writing this one as a woman / Comfortable with failure" (9) is developed in the sixth as "Reference is a woman / Comfortable with failure" (11) then re-versioned in the twelfth as "I'm writing this one / With my nondominant hand in the crawl space / Under the war" (14) and again in the next stanza as "I'm writing this one / As a woman comfortable with leading / A prisoner on a leash" (15). The cumulative effect of this assertion of new proxy voices for the poem – itself a glitch in the otherwise consistent authorial voice of Lerner himself – each neither incompatible nor reinforcing each other turns the continual desire for re-production of the subject in the data-stream, back on itself as a principle which warps and obscures the text.

One reading of the poem "Mean Free Path" which is useful to examine in relation to the relation of obscuring-revealing indicated here, is that it is a love poem for Lerner's wife: "a little book for Ari / Built to sway" (12). The technological occasion of Lerner's articulation of this subjective experience is specifically one in which the irrevocability of the subject-object relation required for love is subordinated to an objective patterning of elements. The technological doesn't allow for the irrevocable presence of meaningfulness in romantic love, but rather insists that everything must be the result of a greater or lesser

degree of objectively quantifiable patterning. Lerner's response is to introduce an excess of meaning in which love operates among and between, refusing the foreclosure of any singular phrase, and therefore maintaining the subject's relation, in enunciating, to the enunciation itself – stammering at the limits of having said, by always falling short of being able to say:

> *I know it's full of flowers, music, stars,*
> *but*
> *But the pressures under which it fails*
> *How it falls apart if read aloud, or falls*
> *What we might call its physics*
> *Together like applause, a false totality*
> *Scales (56)*

In this penultimate stanza, we see the interruptive quality of different strands or layers of the poem being utilised as a kind of 'false totality' in which it is their resonance among each other, which produce the excessive, unfinishable quality. The writing of excess and lack in "Mean Free Path" as a poem does not explode into (and therefore gesture at) limitlessness, breaking down boundaries of decency, rapidity, scale for example, but rather stammers at the limit of what has and hasn't been said – communicating the condition of its own limits as a collapse, or fall, into its unique conditions, "what we might call its physics."

In this physics of sense, each phrase appears to us as a singular 'bit', reappearing in any number of different contexts throughout the poem. The systematic incoherence generated by these contexts crafts in the work a distinctive liquidity or vapourousness which is at odds with previous poetics which have foregrounded the 'fragmentary'. Rather than a logic of parataxis in which units are distinct, fragmentary and comparable, we have a logic of hypostasis, where breakages become the site for the production of meaning-as-pattern, which is the distinguishing quality of the digital 'stream':

> *I'm not above being understood,*
> *provided*
> *The periodic motion takes the form of*
> *Work is done on the surface to disturb*
> *Traveling waves. (48)*

This sense of leaking or liquidity among the stanza and across stanzas – a trope of the digital – is twisted by Lerner, to communicate a potential which exceeds the horizon of the poem's interaction with codification per-se. This is achieved through the explicit surrender of syntax to the logic of sampling – its broken language. All the way up, zooming out of the structure of the poem, we anticipate a coherent poetic image or a full sentence to emerge as one-in-a-series, but this closure is continually offset by the peculiar relational singularity of its elements:

> *I planned a work which could describe*
> *itself*
> *Into existence, then back out again*
> *Until description yielded to experience*
> *Yielded an experience of structure*
> *Collapsing under its own weight like*
> *Citable in moments: parting*

The system of relations between what is sayable and unsayable in each stanza then, is also continually deferred. The irreconcilable is the singularity operating in excess of what can be said, the singularity of the posthuman subject who testifies to their own untestifiable condition:

> *There must be an easier way to do this*
> *I mean without writing, without echoes*
> *Arising from focusing surfaces, which*
> *should*
> *Should have been broken by struc*
> *tures (40)*

[…]
But not how you mean that, not without
Arising from focusing surfaces charged
Changed in the familiar ways. Little
contrasts
With the task of total re-description
To begin the forgetting, a gentle
rippling (54)

The shadow of sampling

What I call the glitch poetic in "Mean Free Path" is the writing of excess. This is not human attainment surpassing the speed and efficiency of digital media, nor is it a human testimony explicitly falling short of the demands made of it by the technological. It is rather the moment produced when the sampling, quantifying activity integral to infosphere does not exhaust that which it structures, but rather exhibits the shadows of its failure to do so.

Sampling and quantification as technological structuring of language inaugurate a new poetic form, and by reading poems which work in excess of this form, it don't mean that the form breaks, but rather the sayable in them is tangibly corrupted by its emergence through them. The glitch poetic is a particular performance of the voice of a new kind of language, grounding and recontextualising itself in a shifting linguistic environment. As Berardi calls for, the glitch poetic signifies for the posthuman body, a "reemergence of the deictic function (from *deixis*, self-indication) of enunciation […] sensuously giving birth to meaning." (20)

Notes

[1] The glitch has notoriously been inculcated thoroughly into the financial through commercialization and commodification of its visual and sonic tropes (Britz, in Urquart), leaving many of its central practitioners to abandon the term – or produce more nuanced and multi-platform versions of its core techniques. The glitch poetic would be part of this effort to reclaim the activist glitch tradition from the saturation of its tropes in visual and sonic mediums.

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SHARING THE ABJECT IN DIGITAL CULTURE

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Introduction

> *it is always a question of countering animal disorderliness with the principle of perfect humanity, for which the flesh and animality do not exist. Full social humanity radically excludes the disorder of the senses; it negates its natural principle; it rejects this given and allows only the clean space of a house, of polished floors. (Bataille,* The Accursed Share, Vols. 2 and 3*, 55)*

Digital technologies, wearables, and self-tracking systems have placed the body in a larger exchange system. Bodily performances are quantified down to the last detail, and biometric data is exchanged between smartphones, databases, and various stakeholders. Our quantified self becomes a tool to better manage our life, but it also provides a method for harnessing previously 'wasted' excess energy. As walking, sleeping, and eating are turned into valuable data, the excess of the post-digital body is contested. As such, the neoliberal principle of exchange has established itself in our bodies and minds (Sützl).

One such example is how menstruation has been picked up lately by the 'tech' industry. Today millions of users track their period cycle using reproductive health apps, and menstruation tracking is an integrated feature in Apple's HealthKit software platform. Additionally, LOONCUP the recently developed menstruation cup automatically tracks and analyses menstruation data directly from the blood to the smartphone. Messy blood becomes clean data. Quantification of menstruation takes self-tracking to the extreme, and in a neoliberal rationality the digital managing of menstrual blood seems as the obvious next step in humans' effort to obliterate the very traces of nature. In a Bataillean sense, it counters "animal disorderliness with the principle of perfect humanity, for which the flesh and animality do not exist" (Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vols. 2 and 3*, 55). As such, menstruation trackers help us manage a (former) site of disgust.

The digitization of menstruation raises several questions about the cultural aspects of menstruation in an exchange economy. What happens to the cultural complexities of menstruation, and the body in general, when through digitization it changes value from excess to exchange? With this speculation I aim to investigate the relation between menstruation data as abject, taboo, and excess, in order to consider governed principles of subjectivity, intimacy, and sociality. Drawing on Georges Bataille's notion of excess, Mary Douglas' analysis of dirt, and Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, I will present a cultural analysis of menstruation tracking, including my own intervention *Periodshare*. Focusing on the relation between menstruation-as-dirt and data-as-purity, I will discuss complexities and ambiguities of data and the self-disciplined quantified self as cultural objects.

Menstration as dirt, data as purity

Tracking and datafying menstrual blood is an act of merging dirt and purity; messy blood is turned into clean, polished menstruation data. Thus, discussing the relation of menstruation blood as dirt and menstruation data as purity means to also consider menstruation as a culturally embedded phenomenon that includes self-discipline and subjectivation. Data is an object of purity; something you cannot touch or smell. At first sight menstruation quantified to data also seems pure and as something whose particular

details you would not know had it not been for the tracking. However, coming from the body's inside, menstruation data seems to be of a different and more intimate kind than comparable biometric data such as statistics from a physical workout. This changes the premises for sharing these data through a social network. One reason for this is found in the long cultural history of menstruation as taboo.

Menstruation as a matter out of order

> *Taboo is a spontaneous coding practice which sets up a vocabulary of spatial limits and physical and verbal signals to hedge around vulnerable relations. It threatens specific dangers if the code is not respected. (Douglas xiii)*

In a very literal sense, menstruation is an excess of the bodily system. On a biological level, menstruation is where the body sheds unfertilized eggs and the womb's unused 'reception committee'. It is associated with non-reproductive sex, but also with death, as menstruation has the impossible status of a dead being who never lived. In particular, menstruation belongs to what Julia Kristeva terms *the abject*; something that is neither me nor recognizable as a thing (Kristeva 2). The abjection of menstruation, Kristeva argues, points to the liminality of the subject itself as it comes from her own body, and consequently leads to the abjection of self. Abjection is "the other facet of religious, moral, and ideological codes on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing spells of societies" (Kristeva 209). Kristeva has developed her own notion of Bataille's concept of excess, and especially his writings of *informe*, the formless, that resists the need to take shape and fit into a universal categorization system (Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 31). To Bataille, the abject points to the poverty of prohibition constituting each social order. As prohibition is what is commonly understood as a thing separating human from animal, the weakness of prohibition as expressed by the abject is a powerful tool to underline the fragility of objectivity.

Whereas Kristeva builds her analysis of menstruation on the psychoanalytic notion of the abject, Douglas' analysis is grounded in social anthropology and in a structuralist understanding of dirt. Here, menstruation as dirt is "a matter out of order" (Douglas 44). If the European culture understands menstruation as dirt, it is not (only) as a symbol of bad hygiene, but rather, and more importantly, as a symbol of an inappropriate element in a systematic ordering and classification of matter. As such, the menstruating woman does not fit into a European conception of the female, as she neither equals sex, nor reproduction. In some primitive societies, e.g. the Mae Enga of Papua New Guinea, menstruation is seen as female pollution, and even married men fear menstrual blood, as "they believe that contact with it or with a menstruating woman will sicken a man and cause persistent vomiting" (Douglas 182). Although it could be argued that this fear of pollution relates to the symbolic order, something that does not fit with our rational Western ideas of dirt, Douglas argues that our Western ideas of dirt and hygiene are equally a question of the symbolic order. Building on Douglas, we see that also in Northern European visual culture, menstruation is treated as something dirty, disgusting, and embarrassing, symbolized through blue gel in advertisements and hidden in small pink boxes in school. Rituals, in primitive and Western societies, control this 'danger'. In popular culture it has become a ritual to hide menstruation, to disguise it through

synonyms such as “the curse” or “Aunt Flo”, and to reject its material status through jokes about Premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and so on. Through this cultural purification, we have learned to behave as if it did not exist. Menstruation exists in the margins of culture even if it is an important part of most women’s lives.

Dirt in a larger infrastructure

Douglas argues, “where there is dirt there is system” (Douglas 44). Menstruation only exists as dirt due to religious, cultural, and political systems that, in striving for purity, categorize it as dirt. By engaging with dirt it is possible to analyse these systems, and their “powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body” (Douglas 142). What is dirt is often found to be a taboo. Taboos function to maintain cultural systems and reduce intellectual and social disorder. Consequently, a taboo acts as a ban or prohibition not to be transgressed. As uncomfortable facts, dirt as taboo is something we would rather ignore but, as Douglas argues, it is not always an unpleasant experience to confront taboos since they often involve an ambiguity that should be contested. Transgression of taboos is experienced when we enjoy works of art, or when the abject is used as a political tool to distort order.

This also holds true for menstruation. Especially young female artists use menstruation as an aesthetic and artistic material to provoke or distort the pure, clean system on social media(s) and in popular culture. This is seen in the works of artists Rupi Kaur, Arvida Byström and Casey Jenkins for instance. But lately menstruation has also been used widely as a political tool against governments or corporations in the fight for certain freedoms and equality. Some examples are the UK campaign #JustATampon, women bleeding in white pants to protest the tampon tax, Kiran Gandi who ran the London 2015 marathon without sanitary protection, and recently we have also seen the Indian campaign #HappyToBleed protesting against the Sabarimala temple that denies entry to menstruating women. Menstruating women have long been perceived as impure and polluting in Hindu culture, but this case adds an extra layer because the new chief of the Sabarimala temple aims to invent a machine that scans women to check for menstruation:

> *These days there are machines that can scan bodies and check for weapons. There will be a day when a machine is invented to scan if it is the ‘right time’ (not menstruating) for a woman to enter the temple. When that machine is invented, we will talk about letting women inside. (Varghese)*

The dystopian sci-fi future of automatically scanning impure bodies, tracking menstruation, and controlling access is not far away, in either religious or high-tech societies. Simultaneously with the speculations made by the Indian temple chief, San Francisco-based LOON lab have managed to fund the wireless menstruation cup LOONCUP through a Kickstarter campaign. Data is easy to datamine and sell, and in the future LOONCUP could potentially sign agreements with governments, global insurance companies, or even the Indian temple chief. In this type of example, conflicts of politics, religions, and economy intertwine to manage intimacy, subjectivity and sociability. LOONCUP demonstrates the power that follows in the transformation of matter into data; in attempting to transform the useless into something with use-value.

Excess and the accursed share

> *From the start, the introduction of labour into the world replaced intimacy, the depth of desire and its free outbreaks, with rational progression, where what matters is no longer the truth of the present moment, but, rather, the subsequent results of operations. (Bataille,* The Accursed Share *57)*

In *The Accursed Share* Bataille presents a utopian society where human activity should not only be judged by its use-value. Rather, uselessness should be considered an important, sovereign form of human life, in erotic as well as economic systems. Bataille's notion of excess confronts the traditional idea of exchange as the only valid system by highlighting the fact that every system has expenditure; waste, which can only be spent on unproductive activities, the so called luxuries of nature. These, Bataille argues, are the greatest enemy of capitalism, as capitalism cannot monetize excess. As such, excess is what cannot be comprehended in well-known systems as money, or more abstractly under the phenomenon of exchange. Bataille saw this present in the luxuries of eating, death, sexual reproduction, and sacrifice among others. The 'accursed share' expresses this excess as a gift-giving that, in opposition to exchange, does not have restricted economic interests but is a question of a general economy, where giving becomes an act of acquiring power.

Wolfgang Sützl points to Bataille's notion of excess as a potential critique of today's "sharing economy", and argues that sharing as we know it from e.g. Uber and Airbnb has more in common with capitalist, rational notions of exchange than with the principle of the gift (Sützl). Sharing is an everyday, intimate experience, whereas exchange is a systemized, fixed infrastructure. Exchange problematizes the phenomenology of 'being-with' (the Other), as Otherness gets charged with the violence of competition. In an exchange economy we do not see other people as citizens but merely as customers or competitors. Furthermore, exchange seeks to govern the ungoverned nature of excess, as it is seen in digital rights management in terms of the excess of file sharing. To Sützl, Bataille's anti-economic notion of sharing might be a possible alternative to neoliberal society, as sharing questions the only possible nature of an economic system build on exchange.

In the second volume of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille develops his notion of excess in the realm of eroticism, as "the essence of humanity emerges from this excess" (57). Instead of regarding humans as inherently rational beings and believing that reason was what separated the human from animal, Bataille argues that the arrangement of "the gift" (also at the basis of sexual activity) is part of the transition from animal to human. Unlike animals, human beings place prohibition on excessive behaviour, his/her animal needs, and the human body. Bataille criticises the idea of prohibition as natural, and does so by pointing to the instability of the obscene and taboos. One such example is the fear of menstrual blood. As this is experienced in both primitive and civilized societies, he rejects that our civilized "sanitary installations" (66) separates us anymore from animality. To Bataille this is not the fear of animality, but "the disgust with being *human*, which increased from the contact with a civilization so meticulous that it often seems sick" (66). Consequently, Bataille argues that with an increasing process of civilization more prohibitions and taboos are organized in order to govern excess.

Following this, the purpose of inviting menstruation into the smartphone is not to transgress the menstruation taboo by embracing more diverse biometric data. Rather, it is a way to further deepen our disgust with being human by civilizing and disciplining ourselves. In the process of changing menstruation from seemingly useless excess, the waste of the bodily system, to useful, exchangeable data, menstruation suddenly seems to have become a new sort of value. Statistics could be made. Diseases might be tracked. It might even be possible to compete in menstruation! Following these theorisations about dirt and purity, excess and exchange, and in order to explore the ambiguity in the taboo of menstruation having an exchangeable value, I devised the speculative design project *Periodshare* (2015).

Figure 1: Still from *Periodshare*'s Kickstarter campaign video, 2015: https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/752149579/periodshare-push-your-cycle-to-the-world?ref=nav_search.

Periodshare

Periodshare is a critical and ironic speculation on the future value of body fluids. The 'speculative design' (Dunne and Raby), or 'research-through-design' project, features a wearable, wireless menstruation cup connected to an app. The system automatically tracks the period in real-time and shares it on social networks, hereby making it easy for the subject to inform others such as her partner, boss, and friends about her period. She can even live-tweet her menstruation data, hereby making something very private a public issue. *Periodshare* explores the boundaries of inside-outside, private-public, and material-representational data. More importantly, *Periodshare* questions the status quo of menstruation, asking what is the value of menstruation in a post-digital age? In a context where artists argue against the censorship of this body fluid and the tech industry invites menstruation into new operating systems, *Periodshare* is situated as an ironic critique inside consumer culture to highlight the tension between taboo and monetization. It comprises a speculative prototype, a Kickstarter campaign, and a performative intervention at an Internet fair.

Sharing the abject

Periodshare points to interesting ways of engaging with menstruation and datafication in the near future, and seeks to raise awareness of the cultural and social stigmas and taboos underlying the larger phenomenon of menstruation trackers. It does so by using the common cultural language of innovative, scientific technology development; it is clean, white, and seemingly empowering – but at the same time it distorts the cultural expectations by introducing irony, criticism, and amateurism. The prototype possesses an ambiguity in its rhetoric. It is polished and clean though unpleasing in its concept and technical incompleteness. Compared to sleek black boxes, *Periodshare*'s DIY-character makes people slightly uncomfortable when imagining wearing something slightly unfinished inside the vagina. Examining the hardware and software of *Periodshare*, several ambiguous

questions arise. One of them concerns the development of the prototype; the careful hand stitching of an ESP8266 WiFi module into white panties with conductive yarn contrasts the mechanic character of most wearables, and questions the relations of feminine and masculine creative labour and technological development. The software, which makes it possible to share the menstruation data in real-time, serves to question when data is deemed too private to share in a public network, and the objectivity of menstruation data, as the software clearly is not capable of tracking complex, personal biometrics but only simple standard values defined by the designer.

When it comes to the Kickstarter campaign, *Periodshare* uses and exploits the cultural rhetoric and codes of 'start-ups' and innovation labs. The ambiguity in the (visual) language makes it slightly difficult to estimate the credibility of the project; is this serious or just a joke? Using a DIY-rhetoric, amateurism, and somewhat hysterical expression as seen in the video, *Periodshare* takes advantage of the privileged site of Kickstarter to reflect on the inherent values of an increasingly corporate organization (where private enterprise is supported), and where creative projects lose out to the those who manage to speak the language. I used similar tactics in the performative intervention at a technology fair celebrating the Internet. Assisted by the prototype, the Kickstarter campaign, and a petition for potential users, I performed being a start-up looking for funding. But as *Periodshare* circumvented the rational logic of innovation by not claiming to solve a simple design problem, the intervention lingered in the space between critical design and art, innovation and criticism. It steered the conversation away from business models and efficiency towards discussions about the larger systems in which menstruation exists, e.g. the institutional systems, taboo systems, and tracking systems. *Periodshare* has no clear use-value, as the excess of sharing menstruation data points further than the machine itself. The matter concerns the apparent conflict between the taboo of impure menstruation and the logic of pure data. Contrary to common understandings of menstruation trackers, *Periodshare* points to how the combination of these results in ambiguities when the data is shared with a wider public.

Ambiguous data: Data as abjection

> *We could not reach the final object of knowledge without the dissolution of knowledge, which aims to reduce its objects to the condition of subordinated and managed things. (Bataille,* The Accursed Share, Vols. 2 and 3 *74)*

The quantification of menstruation leaves several concerns related to its somehow still excessive character. Firstly, subjectivity is problematized, since the embodied phenomenological experience of how your period feels is lost in quantification, which potentially also loses any subjective knowledge of the workings of your inner body. You might know more about when and how much you menstruate, but less about the texture, smell, feeling, and social dynamics of menstruating. Secondly, menstruation is in many ways still a taboo, and the numerical representation of menstrual blood does not change the attitude that material blood is disgusting and something we would rather hide. The data produced by *Periodshare*, despite its apparent quantification, is somehow always 'too much' for its rational absorption into commercial streams, also on social networks that are built on the principle of sharing social life.

In *Periodshare* the material status of menstruation does not only change status from something inside me to outside me, it also changes status from something outside me to something inside my smartphone and my social network. Menstruation data, and biometric data in general, is in a transitional state between being an extension of my body and being representational, incorporeal. In this sense, data can also be seen as abjection, whereas we have come to understand data as pure. Contrary to menstruation, there is no shame or disgust in data and there seems to be no ambiguity either, even if both can clearly be contested. However, information in menstruation data is a matter out of order; it is dirt on social media, still haunted by the symbolic value of menstruation itself – as excessive information. When shared, menstruation data becomes very explicit, and the act of sharing it becomes an act of oversharing. As 'too much information', this excess is inappropriate and a non-productive act. It has no use-value, and unless the system of menstruation as dirt is changed, the concept of menstruation data does not fit into an exchange system based on rationality and order.

Although a number of companies behind contemporary menstruation trackers claim that their product breaks the menstruation taboo, it might be relevant to question if they do not merely ignore the taboo by hiding menstruation data inside the smartphone. Rather than breaking the taboo, menstruation trackers might reinforce it. According to Douglas, culture can treat anomalies negatively by ignoring them, or positively by deliberately confronting them and trying to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place. Approaching menstruation data from a cultural perspective lets us shed light on its ambiguity. It is pure to track menstruation, but impure to share it. Menstruation data in private is pure, whereas menstruation data in public is impure. Corporations have taken advantage of this by monetizing the private sphere of intimate data, but instead of empowering women, menstruation trackers might surveil, self-discipline, and alienate women by inducing a fear of soaking through or having irregular periods, or even by imposing on them a value system in which women's most essential social role is to reproduce.

The intimacy and complexities of self-tracking

If we wish to understand the complexities of humanity, we should, according to Bataille, treat the world of eroticism equally important to the world of thought. As such, a 'feeling' technology, an object of desire and excess, would supplement a 'seeing' technology of intellectual reasoning (Rettberg 69). In "To save Everything Click Here", Evgeny Morozov critiques self-tracking technologies for its seemingly apolitical simplification of human bodies (246). Larger systems of solutionist quantification is reproduced in small detail on the human body, and when we track and analyse – e.g. menstruation data based on generalised, scientific parameters, assuming that the human body is an abstract function – we forget that the human body is also an embodied subject influenced by sociocultural and political situations and experiences. These are harder to monitor, but Morozov argues that we should acknowledge these micro-complexities, and, in referring to Jane Jacobs, treat bodies as a problem of organized complexity. This involves dealing with complexities and ambiguities of the "intangibles" (245), not by reducing them to simple problems, that need simple solutions, but by deliberately confronting them and trying to create a new pattern of reality in which they have a place.

As an extreme example, menstruation tracking lets us see the quantified self in a new perspective. If we accept that Bataille's notion of excess is a nature of waste, something that somewhat escapes capitalism, the commercialisation of excess as seen in the quantified self is indeed a victory for capitalist, rationalised society and a defeat for Bataille's utopian anti-capitalist dream. When menstruation is tracked this bodily excess becomes a commodity, pointing to how Taylorism has invaded every sphere of private life. 100 years ago, Lillian Gilbreth, the mother of household management, moved optimization into the private sphere (Lepore), and automatic menstruation tracking might be the last thing that women need in order to fully optimize living. As a phenomenon, self-tracking is a commercialisation of intimacy, establishing the capitalist principle of exchange in our intimate life and social relations. If intimacy is increasingly exercised in the pursuit of commercialised profit, then what happens to the excessive character of intimacy? As Melissa Gregg argues, "we face the prospect of being unable to appreciate the benefits of intimacy for unprofitable purposes" (6).

The intimacy and emotions of our post-digital bodies have come to work (Berardi). In menstruation tracking this it exemplified by the managing of PMS, sex and so on, into everyday life. But the present ideology of 'dataism' (Dijck), the belief in data as the objective truth, forgets that data is social and networked, more complex and ambiguous than simply easily measured. Understood through the notion of excess, *Periodshare* investigates and reflects upon the cultural value of menstruation in an exchange economy, and in a wider context the monetization of intimacy, subjectivity and cultural taboos.

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Tessa Zettel & Sumugan Sivanesan

PLAN BIENEN: SHARING (IN) THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN CITY

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This text circulates in and around a series of honey trades, conducted by the authors as a form of artistic research outside (or in excess of) academic structures. They took place over a summer in residence at Berlin's ZK/U – Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik, alongside performance-lectures, publications, discursive brunches, focus groups, a durational high frequency stock exchange and various other relational exercises; one part of an ongoing project investigating real and speculative relationships between parallel crises in bee ecologies and economic systems.[1]

In times being darkly named the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene and the Sixth Great Extinction, *Plan Bienen* plays with overlaying its two objects of study, both more or less lurching towards a kind of collapse, as a means of finding new insights and perspectives. What is instantiated as crisis here is bound up in a denial of so-called 'natural' limits, characterised by increasing tension between the expansionary logic of free-market capitalism and the scale of reductions in emissions and consumption (throughput) needed to avert widespread irreversible ecological breakdowns. Bees act as a micro-political entry point into these broader dynamics – as a species particularly sensitive to ecological change, their perceived demise points towards a critical failure in systems that we are intimately entangled in. With Berlin as a locus, we thus began tracing other ways of being in relation at work in the multispecies city, practices perhaps more responsive to systemic capacity, supporting different modes of generating, measuring and exchanging value.

Our honey trades unfolded as an informal network of beekeepers willing to exchange the honey produced by their bees for non-monetary things – translation services, singing lessons, and assistant labour in its extraction. We read them as a pilot for future actions, but also as a set of encounters that help us think through the limits of dominant and defuturing (in that they take futures away, our own and other species) modes of exchange, towards what might lie beyond (Fry).[2] Here we share some of our findings at the edges of research around labour, value and interspecies relations.

Figure 1: Plan Bienen, Open Haus, ZK/U, 2014. credit: Laura Fiorio

Labour

Sociologists Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut, in their study of urban beekeeping in New York, note that "only when bees vanish do they tangibly appear to us" (517). The phenomenon of Colony Collapse Disorder, in which an entire hive of worker honeybees simply disappears, swept through the US pollination industry some years ago, prompting fears worldwide that this sudden threat to *Apis Mellifera* would in turn jeopardise the future of many essential food crops (and by extension of the human). An indicator of systemic breakdown that still evades neat explanation in human scientific terms, the vanishing was eventually attributed to a convergence of new types of insecticides (neonicotinoids) with factors like Varroa mite and Nosema, constant moving of hives, lack of biodiversity, effects of climate change such as 'season creep' and immune systems

weakened over generations by the replacement of sugar syrup for extracted honey. Suddenly centre stage were the living and working conditions of this little co-habitant of the worlds-within-a-world that we humans have constructed (Fry). Though bees have long been cast as model capitalist (or even collective communist) producers, the logic of maximum yield underlying modern beekeeping had apparently found the limits of the labouring insect body.

For Viennese philosopher Fahim Amir, today's newly visible urban bees are the quintessential "emblem of green capitalism" (personal communication). At a seminar on multiple modes of dwelling in Berlin's Tiergarten,[3] he gestures towards the rooftop beehives on the iconic Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) to show how 'naturecultures' are put to work in the neoliberal city. Here bees produce honey to be sold in the gift shop as a boutique locavore product in the service of eco-friendly public relations. Just as their pollinating activities produce conditions desirable for us to live in, their presence on prominent skylines performs a kind of symbolic labour, assisting the city in re-branding from urban playground and post-communist social experiment to green 'lifestyle capital', attracting investment capital and facilitating the march of gentrification. Elsewhere this dynamic plays out a little differently, as in Oliver Rudzick's Schrebergarten in the leafy neighbourhood of Wilmersdorf. Oliver, who recently traded in a career in physics for apiary, is the first beekeeper to participate in our honey exchange, offering three jars (plus plums plucked from the trees above and homemade cake), to Luci in return for an hour or so of her translation corrections to a scientific paper. Selling jars of honey intermittently over the hedge to passers-by, he considers his bees to be doing valuable public relations work, playing a (political) role in the fight to save this particular Gartenkolonie from a rumoured sale to developers. The Kolonie is in a quiet street on the edge of the centre, now desirable real estate in a city where land speculation is not yet taken as completely natural.

Figure 2: Luci, Pearl and Oliver, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

Such ambivalence is familiar to those of us in the business of making art that attempts a critique of the encroachment of capital on all spheres of life. Occupying a privileged position in that our labour is 'surplus' to more overtly utilitarian exertions, our self-determining capacity to spend time in the field and in rather open-ended research mode is by intent channelled towards the production of 'neighbourly' (though not necessarily smooth) relations that build resilience and shared knowledge. In this case, project participants made connections with bees as creatures and with their situation more broadly, and got to know beekeepers living in their local area. Our activities in anti-disciplinary speculation were based in Moabit, where ZK/U was established less than five years ago and where not coincidentally prices are already on the cusp of skyrocketing in line with the rest of Berlin. There we worked closely with the Moabees, a feminist beekeeping collective from the Kiez who manage hives together in a number of locations (including atop a container in the ZK/U compound), sharing honey as a common resource and skills and know-how through free workshops in

the community. Nevertheless the ease with which this kind of (unpaid, precarious) artistic labour can be instrumentalised in processes of 'place-making', gentrification and the creation of cultural capital, means that it is also messily implicated in the forces it tries to revoke.

Figure 3: Moabees, ZK/U, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

Stretching Amir's provocation (with our remit of speculative work), we could understand city bees as an 'insect working class' whose labours are both utilitarian and abstract. It is tempting then to imagine the disappearance of bees from industrialised hives as a kind of workers' strike, or as Amir has put it, a 'zoooperaism',[4] a declaration of insolvency or refusal in the form of strategic political action undertaken by worker bees to sabotage the human-centred mechanisms of expansionary global agribusiness production in which they are deployed.[5]

Value

One beekeeper tells us that beekeeping in Berlin reached a peak during the DDR, when honey could be either traded for desired commodities on the black market or sold back to the State at a fixed price, constituting a rare personal income supplement. Today there are around 900 urban beekeepers (still only one quarter of those in the 1950s), with hives sprouting in every neighbourhood – across school gardens, rooftops, empty lots and cemeteries. In post-industrial cities like Detroit and Berlin, an impoverished state unable to afford city maintenance leaves many public areas to grow wild, resulting in more biodiversity of food (and less pesticides) for local bees than in rural areas dominated by monocultures. Incidentally these are also often the scenarios in which artists find themselves able to afford living and working space, on the fringes of land (temporarily) forgotten by the imperatives of profitability and comfortable homogeneity.

Figure 4: Moabees, Park am Gleisdreieck, 2015. credit: Tessa Zettel

At Berlin's Stadt Honig Fest in Prinzessinnengarten, a lively annual gathering of the city's expanding apiary community, we meet Heinz Risse and Rainer Kaufmann, who run immensely popular courses here and practice beekeeping in ways that allow for the bees to be as industrious (or not) as they choose. Heinz and Rainer collect only minimal amounts of honey after winter when it is no longer required by the brood, and don't offer sugar syrup to sweeten the deal. Rainer chooses the path of polite refusal in declining to join our micro-honey exchange network; his abundant garden provides for all his needs and anyway his honey is too precious to trade. Beekeeping campaigner Erika Mayr is however enthusiastic – she already uses the honey from her rooftop bees to pay

for dentistry work and as wages for the DJs who play in her bar. 'Home-made' honey (if it can be so called), like jam, always circulates within a gift economy, which is not to say that there are no sticky multidirectional transactions involved.

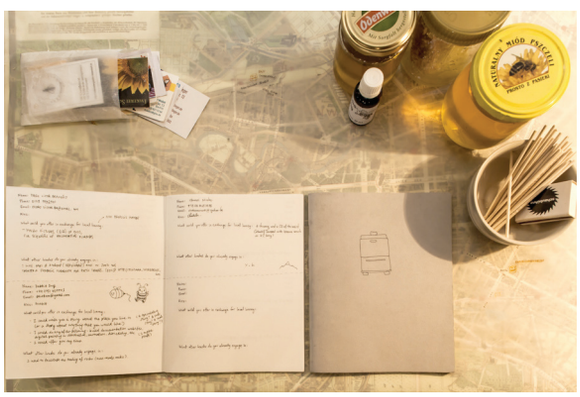

Figure 5: Plan Bienen Austausch logbook, 2014. credit: Laura Fiorio

Here in Berlin, cultures of DIY economies and radical social formations evolved in post-reunification conditions of monetary scarcity. Times having clearly changed, such activities are now framed by the global 'sharing economy' which design philosopher Cameron Tonkinwise critiques as "overwhelmingly an antiregulatory, precariat-creating way of monetizing social interactions" (n.p.). At last year's annual OUIShare Summit, a sort of trade fair mix of 'platform capitalism' – commercial enterprises framed by social networks and (unpaid) user-generated content – and social innovation start-ups sat beside more community-led initiatives like a cargo bike-share programme and the free store/object library Leila. On one stand was the citizen-science project Open Source Beehives, a network of makers and beekeepers who design and build standardised plywood hives monitoring bee health and behaviour in different parts of the world, addressing limited scientific knowledge about pollinator species and the 'wild' ecologies that support agricultural landscapes.[6] Here we also came across LebensmittelRetten, an organised food rescue operation that partners with organic supermarket chain BioCompany to collect and redistribute unsellable food, now managing a network of free public fridges across the city. The fridges fit into well-established networks of hausprojekts and community centres, enabling unofficial modes of circulation and exchange that are in a sense built on the material failures of an economic system driven by constant growth and 'wasted' surplus.

Figure 6: Open Source Beehives, OUIShare Summit, 2014. credit: Tessa Zettel

The new conditions and politics of a changing climate, bringing into focus the unevenness of global patterns of consumption and consequent impact, demand that 'we' reduce waste, find cleaner modes of production and radically lower our material intensity in developed economies. As Tonkinwise argues, sharing is really about the messy negotiation of access to goods, which in the interests of futuring necessarily become scarcer. As so-called 'share' economies become absorbed into capitalist methodologies, business opportunities arise for individuals to become service providers, participants in turn self-audit and police their behaviour to maintain profiles on sharing platforms. These emergent forms of 'platform capitalism' enable the privatisation of the means of consumption: "every space and product and even moment of time now has earning capacity" (Tonkinwise n.p.). The

one value that Tonkinwise finds in sharing systems today (that is to say, what potential they have for shifting values) lies in the friction caused by new socialities that are not defined by the familiar alienated service roles of work. In other words "capitalism is an alienated way of handling those negotiations; sharing forces you to negotiate with aliens" (Tonkinwise n.p.). In economic relations with 'social thickness', those in which resource flows are placed upfront in a novel social relation, value must be negotiated person-to-person, sometimes awkwardly. In our honey trades, the worth of a jar had to be determined outside of monetary equivalence, what it could be sold for in a supermarket never approaching the quantity of time, labour and attention that keeping bees requires. From the side of those offering, for example, a singing lesson or a hand with the work of beekeeping, such a value also had to be then weighted against an assessment of one's own capacities to meet the needs of others – human and non-human – that we share our cities with.

Figure 7: April, Honey Stock Exchange, Gütermarkt, ZK/U, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

Partly as a way of capturing the abundant artistic labour needed to facilitate an experience for only a tiny number of participants, each of our successful trades was commemorated in a specially designed 'Notgeld' (emergency bank note). Notgeld was a form of local currency popular in Germany in the 1920s, when war reparations contributed to massive economic collapse and hyperinflation pushed the price of a loaf of bread up from 150 marks to 200 million in just a year or two. Many regional municipalities responded by producing their own Notgeld which had to be used locally and before the expiry date (spent not saved). Being pictorial histories of desire at such a time – there are rolling fields, cows, even beehives – as collectibles they accrued a different kind of symbolic value. Commodities like coal and butter also functioned then as informal currencies; unable to lose all their value overnight, they were inherently less unstable than money, which as economic historian Winfried Bogon points out, is only a system of trust that functions for as long as everyone believes in it.

Figure 8: Plan Bienen: Statements of Profit and Loss (detail: Notgeld), exhibition, Art Laboratory Berlin, 2015. credit: Tessa Zettel

Our Notgeld – micro-visual narratives of each exchange – were printed in editions of three, one for each (human) trader and one for the bees, all equally use-less in a non-art economy but functioning semiotically to 'value' the event (and the co-mingling of its participants). The B (bee)-side elevates the role of the particular colony of bees involved in the transaction; clearly they are responsible for the honey, but there are also other things that a beekeeper receives in exchange for the care and home that they provide. As

Bärbel, a beekeeper for more than twenty years, tells Valentina after they've finished centrifuging the honey out of its comb as part of the trade, beekeepers fall 'in love' with their bees, are somehow changed by them. The bees themselves are further engaged in their own exchanges, such as that of pollen for pollination with the city's flora, both wild and carefully planted.

Figure 9: Valentina and Bärbel centrifuging honey, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

Multispecies entanglements

Many of Berlin's most famous streets – *Unter den Linden*, *Kastanienallee*, *Birkenstrasse* – are named for the flowering trees that line them, trees that together provide food for bees throughout the year (and of course produce certain desirable honeys). This is an instance of more-than-human agency rooted in the ground itself, living traces of the once-powerful beekeeper lobby groups who, in the late nineteenth century, helped shape the ecologies of a rapidly expanding city to serve the interests of more than one species. In Germany today the activist association Mellifera e.V. works explicitly to "interfere politically on behalf of the bees," recently managing to help secure a temporary ban on neonicotinoids in the EU that is soon to be followed in parts of the US. Rainer and Heinz of Prinzessinnengarten are also directors of Mellifera; Heinz keeps more bees (50,000 give or take) on the rooftop of the *Abgeordnetenhaus* (House of Representatives), in order that they may directly influence the decision-making of the parliamentarians inside, part of the Berlin Summt! initiative responsible for the bees on top of HKW and much of Berlin's prominent skyline. In the city planning sphere, urban ecologist Herbert Lohner is currently preparing a 'white paper' recommending state 'green infrastructure' legislations, for example a minimum number of Schrebergärten (allotments) to be provided along with every newly built apartment. Such moves invoke the right to a certain kind of green space, a commons that involves interspecies sociality and provides a value not fully quantifiable in monetary terms.

Figure 10: Birkenstraße, Moabit, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

Moore and Kosut write of our limited ability to 'know' bees using human senses, terms and concepts, advocating instead for "new modes of embodied attention and awareness" (520) – ways of standing back, *intra*-acting and 'being with' (534) – essentially following the bee through its social transactions with objects, humans and insects, apprehending it as operative within its own world of meaning. In this they recognise other kinds of agency that bees have in the formation of engaged alliances within urban

landscapes, through their embodied labour (pollination) even constituting us physically as a species. Bringing together "the idea of the bee, humans' material relationship with the bees, including use of them, and the actual bee as its own thing," Moore and Kosut describe "an ontological murk of relations" that replaces strict distinctions between species and their surroundings with a relationship that is intimately "enmeshed and porous" (525).

Amerindian perspectivism, as championed by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, takes such intermingling further. Viveiros de Castro argues for this philosophy of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin, in which "everything and everyone can be human" or rather "nothing and no one is human in a clear and distinct fashion," to be taken up as a potentially radical decolonial tool (70). According to perspectivism, all species see the world the same way, but the world that they see changes; for instance, a jaguar may see themselves as human, us as we would see wild pigs, and blood as we see beer, or a tapir would approach a mudflat as we would a ceremonial house. Each referent then takes on multiple inflections, so that behind the taste of beer is blood and below the ceremonial house is mud. In this 'transformational' world, all things – human, animal, plant, spirit, earth – can variably occupy the prime subject position, and their habits and actions understood under the rubric of culture. Perhaps honey, consumed by us both, might be a substance through which our distinct perspectives intersect, a site of ontological undoing where interspecies translation and transformation could occur. The golden liquid at the centre of our trades may then even take on shamanic properties, as a figure that can metamorphose and (mis) communicate across species.

Massimo de Angelis argues that the present economic crisis is a capitalist crisis

Figure 11: A Gift from the Bees (detail: Honig Butter Kekse), performance, ZK/U, 2014. credit: Sumugan Sivanesan

of social instability, capitalism having effectively reached the limits of the various social and biophysical ecologies on which it depends (123). One way out of this crisis lies in the creation and maintenance of the commons, the practice of 'commoning', in which communities form around the shared use and governance of resources – for example, a community garden or a bicycle share network. For de Angelis, commoning now becomes an imperative of social production, as a process of "socialization, communication and the transformation of subjectivities and social relations", such that the other is "no longer alien but a co-producer of life in commons" (140). Scholars of multispecies studies insist that we understand how ecologies – lifeworlds – are themselves co-produced by innumerable species and processes that are 'more-than-human'. Such positions dismantle notions of the self and other by exposing varied and often invisible interspecies co-minglings, including those that comprise the human biome and attest that "we have never been human" after all, that rather it is "relationality all the way down" (Haraway, cited in Gane 141).

Drawing from the theories of physicist-philosopher Karen Barad, Moore and Kosut's practice of 'intra-species mindfulness' has resonance in reconsidering how we organise together in urban communities (520). Instead

Figure 12: ***Rates of Exchange: A Discursive Sonntagsbrunch*** **(detail), discursive brunch and mapping exercise, Art Laboratory Berlin, 2015. credit: Tessa Zettel**

of attempting to figure another species out, they encourage us to figure the bee *in*, moving outside our human selves to understand 'human' and 'other' as cultural constructions. In this formulation intra-actions are the material-discursive exchanges that *co-constitute* entities and refute the idea of bounded 'entities in themselves'.

Our work as artists – in which 'production' is relational and co-constitutive – is brought together with that of the bees in an attempt to forge a common political ground. This is also a process of commoning that figures more-than-human entities into everyday social practices of exchange and reciprocity. Referencing in its title an imagined (or imaginary) 'exit strategy' to overstretched relations subsumed under capitalism, *Plan Bienen* consciously follows the trajectory of the bee towards ways of thinking and being that undo the human, reconfiguring our relationships with fellow species and each other, and the changing common lifeworlds that we co-produce and hold together.

Notes

[1] See *Plan Bienen* project blog: <http://planbienen.net>.

[2] Tony Fry proposes defuturing (and its inverse, futuring), to describe that which takes futures away, our own and other species, in place of the now meaningless discourse of sustainability/unsustainability.

[3] *Tiergarten: Landscape of Transgression*, 2015. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 4 July.

[4] Amir draws on the work of Sigfried Giedion, whose book *Mechanization Takes Command* from 1948 ascribes agency and accounts for the bodily resistance of animals in the slaughtering and meat packing industries of Chicago. Amir notes that Giedion's analysis resembles Italian Operaist theory which argues for the conceptual and political autonomy of living labour against the allegedly objective arguments of capitalist economic theory.

[5] This proposition was explored in more detail by the authors in an earlier version of this paper "Disappearing Bees", published in *un Magazine* (Zettel and Sivanesan).

[6] Open Source Beehives <http://www.opensourcebeehives.net>.

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SUPERABUNDANT DESIGN: FROM WASTE TO CONTROL IN BITCOIN MINING

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Tiziana Terranova draws attention to the necessity of questioning how algorithmically-enabled automation works "in terms of control and monetization" and "what kind of time and energy" is being subsumed by it (Terranova 387). Cryptocurrencies are payment technologies that automate the production of money-like tokens (Bergstra and Weijland) following algorithmic rules to maintain a fixed production rate. Different kinds of energy and residues, which are not always acknowledged, are involved in this process. Here I distinguish between two closely linked layers in the Bitcoin token production: first, an algorithmic layer, which contains the instructions and rules for the creation of bitcoins; second, a hardware layer, which performs and embodies the former. While these layers work together, I will argue that they enact their own kind of logics of energy and waste. I will begin at the more visible end of the production cycle, the hardware layer, where the definition of waste and energy consumption is shared with many electronic devices; then I will trace back its algorithmic layer, which as I argue, follows a different logic.

Hardware layer: Energy, e-waste, and efficiency

A quite introductory video to Bitcoin, the archetypical cryptocurrency, explains that "the bitcoin network is secured by individuals called miners. Miners are rewarded newly generated bitcoins for verifying transactions." (WeUseCoins). Miners are machines that verify the signed public keys for each transaction and which validate these into blocks in a public registry (i.e., the Blockchain). The job for successfully validating and packing the transactions produces new tokens for the miner, and generates a Proof-of-Work. The former is the result of a 'puzzle', which can be then easily checked by any other machine in the network. Since the design of the system seeks a controlled pace, if the coins are generated too fast (because there are more and/or stronger miners) the 'puzzle' becomes harder (Nakamoto, "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System").[1]

Solving puzzles to produce tokens directly translates into a relevant issue of consumption of energy and production of waste. From the deployment of Bitcoin up until the middle of 2010, mining was a task that any modern CPU could handle, even though the process would push it to its limits and heavily reduce its lifetime. Until mid-2011 the workload moved to GPUs, but was rapidly surpassed by FPGAs (Field Programmable Gate Arrays), which reduced energy consumption while achieving more hashes per second. The next natural step were ASIC miners (Application Specific Integrated Circuit) at the beginning of 2013.[2]

Even though the Bitcoin network was maintained at the beginning by every enthusiast with a computer and some energy to spare, today the mining industry is populated with pools and dedicated farms. This evolution was foreseen in Bitcoin's design (Nakamoto, "NCML"). In pools, different miners contribute their processing power to calculate a block together. The reward is then distributed among them, usually accordingly to the computational power given, although each pool has its own share protocols. Each one of these clustered miners can have one or multiple ASICs. Mining farms on the other hand are dedicated places that behave in a more or less Fordist fashion, and are even located in old factories or abandoned stores, which house swarms of ASICs ("Bitcoin Mining in an Abandoned Iowa Grocery Store"). The energy consumed in farms is striking. A paper from 2015 estimated that the mining network at the time consumed about the same

amount of electricity as Ireland (Malone and O'Dwyer). Although mining units energy efficiency has improved in the last years, the difficulty variable has grown too, and the energy footprint problems of production remain. To cite a specific example, one still operating farm has been told to have 10,000 S3 mining units ("My Life Inside a Remote Chinese Bitcoin Mine"). The Antminer S3 is able to produce 441 Gigahashes per second and consumes 800 Watts per Terahash: that is roughly 4761 Watts in a day, for just one unit. A farm with 10,000 of these units would consume 47,616 Kilowatts a day. Comparing these figures with home energy consuming estimates in the U.S. ("How Much Electricity Does an American Home Use? – FAQ – U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)") shows that just this farm consumes 1,571 times more energy than an average household. Mining, today more than ever before, is a race, and reducing the energy footprint is not grounded in pollution awareness, but in cost cutting. As mining units become progressively more energy efficient, they simultaneously become more obsolete. A constant refill of state-of-the-art equipment is necessary to stay in the race. Obsolescence of hardware is not exclusive to the Bitcoin phenomenon, smartphones and all sorts of gadgets are 'recycled' every year as newer versions arrive on the market.[3] According to Michael Bedford Taylor, it took four years to achieve the third generation of mining hardware, and although there are no figures of the number of ASIC units being produced and sold, it would be fair to assume that there is no market comparison with the consumption figures of the smartphones, tablets and other popular devices.

Units by themselves are not more threatening than a colossal mountain of used smartphones, what is menacing is the mono-task logic that produced them. Unlike the smartphone market, mining units do not suffer of a short life because of its hardware resistance, cheap materials or consumption trends, 'planned obsolescence' for ASICs resides in the scarcity model of Bitcoin's design. Tokens have a fixed limit (21 million) and are getting harder to obtain, so the fast production and consumption cycles of the hardware are intrinsic to the system. At least until the mining becomes unprofitable, in such a scenario, the number of miners diminish and with it the difficulty (which, again and recursively, makes the people interested in mining to go up). Difficulty, however, rarely drops, and in the long run describes a stepping curve ("Bitcoin Difficulty Chart – Chart of Mining Difficulty History"), which causes mining hardware to age fast. Being specific circuits optimized for hashing, ASICs do not have a second life. Unlike GPUs, they are useless for any other tasks, which makes them completely worthless after their useful, yet short, life. Since there is no second hand market for mining units, they rapidly contribute to High Tech trashing problems. Electronic waste arguably conforms today about the same amount (in municipal numbers) as plastic packaging waste (Puckett and Smith). Most of the e-waste is recycled in foreign countries because of low labour costs and loose environmental regulations both externally (at least in the U.S. for export of hazardous materials) and internally (waste handling in the host countries). Arguably, around 80% of e-waste is exported to Asia, and 90% of these to China. The hashing power that runs throughout the bitcoin network – i.e. the most and more powerful machine miners – clusters in China too. On a rough estimate ("Bitcoin Hashrate Distribution – Blockchain.info") more than 50% of the hashing power is concentrated in Chinese mining pools and a significant part of the rest is in the U.S., meaning that most of bitcoin's e-waste will eventually end up in Asia.

E-waste is a residual of production that is not reintegrated to capitalist production cycles and thus marks one of the many crises of it, as Jennifer Gabrys argues:

> *Remainder breaks with sustained cycles of productions; it moves us past what might be seen as a Marxian concern with the way raw materials are mobilized for production […] interfering with any notion of a simple feedback loop from production to consumption, remainder calls attention to the after effects and transforms the material arrangements that emerge through the density of our technological and cultural practices. (Gabrys 41)*

Mining waste is an immediate leak of its own cycle. Since it has no secondary use, it is discarded faster than less specialized electronics. It is waste that exceeds production. Mining devices of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies insert themselves indiscernibly among the electronic waste in scattered dumps, but its particular monotasking characteristic makes them suitable non-recyclable remainders. Waste in ASIC units follows the general fate of the discarded microchip industry, escaping the loop cycle and disrupting economies and ecologies at the outskirts of capitalism's production. The number of mines and of ASICs in them is obscure. Nonetheless, as said before, the quantity of e-waste coming directly from mining does not compare to the waste produced by other gadgets. The discussion around excess is not so much framed in quantity, however, but in its lifespan and purpose: hardware mining units are limited to the one and only task of solving the Bitcoin puzzle.

To the question of whether Bitcoin mining is a waste of energy the Bitcoin Foundation answers that: "Spending energy to secure and operate a payment system is hardly a waste." ("FAQ – Bitcoin") It is not considered waste as long as the system works. The idea of waste is superseded by efficiency, and annulled in a scenario where the system is fully operative. The substantial empty computational work, energy usage, and e-waste produced in the mining operation has no other goal, and so far no other purpose, than to keep the machine running to produce secure, distributed and artificial scarcity. Within the hardware layer energy is translated into efficiency and residue into excess of production. The former adaptations happen under a discourse concerned with the maintenance of a secure payment system. However, the hardware uses formerly described are mainly underpinned by the rationale of the algorithmic layer. This preceding layer has, as I will argue, its own notions of excess and a different reintegration into the production system.

Algorithmic layer: Designed scarcity, randomness, and control

In this section, I will first argue that this rationale of superabundance is based on a false idea of immateriality. Secondly, the more subtle effect of this mode of production is the reintegration of surplus to production in the form of control.

The efficiency and superior security of the system, eventually translates into compelling symbolic and exchange value. Algorithmic value – the capacity to distribute security in a system via computational power – gains symbolic momentum with growing media attention and generation of controversies. Cryptocurrencies gain recognition, and exchange value grows as their market performance develops, until the tokens of

the system can be effectively considered as assets of financial objects. A rush to adopt and exploit the venues follows, as the system becomes prevalent, in great part due to its speculative disposition, which can be exploited as the tokens get exchanged with fiat currencies, creating traditional financial behaviour, like the widely known Bitcoin bubble of 2013. The detonator for the eventual exchange value is, however, the intrinsic value of the algorithms designed to maintain an artificial scarcity.

Modelled scarcity can be considered through what has been defined as "governance by design," which is "the process of online communities increasingly relying on technology in order to organize themselves through novel governance models (designed *by* the community and *for* the community), whose rules are embedded directly into the underlying technology of the platforms they use to operate" (De Filippi). Bitcoin's communities participate in a designed governance, not only in the sense that rules and development are audited and enhanced considering consensus, but in particular because the latter is obtained using the platform (i.e. the branch, fork, and version of the software with a majority of users become the 'de facto' Blockchain). What is more, scarcity is part of the rules enabled by algorithmic governance because while specificities may be open to discussion, the enactment of the rules belongs to a purely algorithmic dimension. For example, regarding scarcity, even though the limit of bitcoins is now fixed to 21 million, this figure is potentially subjected to decisions of the community; however, regardless of the total number of coins, the generation of new ones is algorithmically adjusted to sustain the production in relation to a ratio of difficulty, blocksize and time between each block generation. The resolution framework and enforcement of rules are hardwired to relational data schemes interwoven by discrete steps of precise instructions.[4]

The puzzle analogy is only appropriate within its algorithmic dimension, which means it must be understood not as a toy or a game, but as a problem that must be solved by following a set of rules. More accurately, the puzzle consists of generating hashes (a string of numbers and letters with a defined length) until one of them fulfills the requirements of the variable 'difficulty' level (in the case of Bitcoin, the number of zeroes at the beginning of the resulting hash). This operation, also called a CISO (Constrained Input Small Output) problem is solved by trail and error[5] and due to the random number involved in the process – the 'nonce value' – finding a 'desirable' final hash is a truly exceptional event (Courtois, Grajek, and Naik). Every attempt to come up with a successful hash uses a new random number, thus randomizing the result. Difficulty is hence, in this context, associated with probability and far from tribulation. Regarding Bitcoin, difficulty is an algorithmic adversity.

The difficulty variable (D) at 19th September 2015 was set on 59,335,351,233.87, which translates as a $2^{25} \times D$ number of average hashes to find a block. This means one opportunity to build a block for every 19,909,640,081,173,010,000 (A) tried hashes. The only way to deal with the odds involved in this operation is to have a machine capable of generating as many numbers of attempts per second as possible, i.e. an ASIC miner. A state-of-the-art dedicated unit available today can manage to make about 5,500,000,000,000.[6] To calibrate the surplus involved, it is better to think of it in negative terms: unlike the lottery (at which a lonely miner would have better odds) where every non-winner plays a passive role, the miner is a machine that actually uses computational power to actively generate around a sextillion ($A - 1$) useless hashes. I suggest that the algorithmical layer

of Bitcoin production is superabundant – underpinned by the idea that digital resources are not bounded – since the mining operation is based in the generation of a sextillion unusable strings.

Designed scarcity is only maintained in a decentralized network via the rules embedded in the above explained excessive use of resources. In a section of her book entitled "Economies of abundance" Gabry's describes Robert Noyce's micro-chip sell strategy.[7] This consisted of selling integrated circuits (which were not as popular at the time) for less than their actual cost. This risky strategy paid out by enhancing the markets and the necessity for microchips as more machines relied on them. In a way, Noyce not only designed a sales strategy, but the pervasiveness of the microchip. Within Bitcoin, the original design of scarcity in a functional distributed system is also the blueprint for the pervasiveness of excessive computational work. Without being a contradiction, in this system scarcity is traded for excess.

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are not systems inherently designed for waste nor significant threats in that sense, and their peculiar mode of production involve a behaviour shared by many algorithmic devices.[8] Yet, they are a pristine example of how the idea of unlimited resources gets embedded into automatized and instrumental apparatuses. Ignoring the more obviously material e-waste, the enormous surplus of the algorithmic layer (a continuous sextillion number operation procedure) is underpinned, to some degree, by the idea that digital informational resources, unlike its more overt material counterpart, *can't* be excessive. There is a rationale of unlimited resources attached to the idea of the digital, in part because is still understood as immaterial. Gabrys reminds us that "waste and waste making include not just the actual garbage of discarded machines but also the remnant utopic discourses that describe the ascent of computing technologies" (Gabrys 4). 'Virtuality' as immateriality, is a live fossil of the rise of computing and its spread onto bewildered crowds. What is more, rather than becoming obviously material due to its more known relations to humans, waste, or servers, digital immateriality hasn't disappeared and, if anything, has become 'post-digital'. That is, an idea of digital superabundance, or unlimited immaterial resources, has become naturalized in our technology, and in our relations to it, to the point that the questioning of the use of *excessive* computing power is redirected to a question of performance. If a system works, the question of excessiveness becomes superfluous.

On the one hand, the design of the system relies on this idea of superabundance, and on the other, the actual algorithmic performance works on its own mode of thought. Bitcoin proof-of-work is a non-human, non-mechanical kind of labour that produces new tokens. Aside from programming and setting up the machines, barely any human labour is involved in the process. Both programming and setting up the machines are not by any means small tasks, and they depend on an assemblage of a huge number of names, discussions, infrastructure, discourses, electricity, investment, and so on. Machines are not built by nature, "they are 'organs of the human brain, created by the human hand'; the power of knowledge, objectified" (Marx 706). However, the production process is executed exclusively by algorithms: labour is predominantly digital, what remains instrumental is only the arrangement of labour. What is more, because the nonce value plays a key role in the process, randomness becomes a fundamental for production. Luciana Parisi argues that this randomness becomes the condition of programming and with it our notion of logic as rationality gets surpassed: "This new function of algorithms

thus involves not the reduction of data to binary digits, but the ingression of random quantities into computation: a new level of determination that has come to characterize automated modes of organization and control." (Parisi ix-x) Algorithmic randomness, more than being a systematized reproduction of rules or an applied representation of rationality, works as an outbreak from it, and points to different modes of control.

Algorithms have been successfully integrated to the capitalist economy in notorious ways (Gerlitz and Helmond), mostly as means of production which become valuable as they monetize and accumulate social knowledge, from cognitive means to users behaviour (Terranova 383). Bitcoin is particular in this sense, since it is heavily driven by algorithmic production (native digital labour) of pieces designed to be themselves a novel kind of exchange value. It is tempting to see Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as devices attempting to resist the controlled cycles of capitalism production system (an arguably generalized discourse supporting blockchain technologies stands against the abuses of the current economic system). Just as human labour is excessive (as surplus) in a creative way, automation – human knowledge, skills and work absorbed into machines – can develop productive powers not always contained by capitalist economy (Marx 693). Nevertheless, I would argue that the surplus in the algorithmic layer of production (i.e. the excessive operation of mining's algorithmic layer), is not released from the production cycle – as does e-waste – but reintegrated into it, both to the security design of the device and to the scarcity model, as a new means of control for an algorithmically-enabled capitalist economy.

This argument follows Beniger's seminal work to understand the economy of information as means of control. He proposes that the industrial revolution generated a crisis of control, when communication technologies and information processes lagged behind the fast developments of energy technologies and their applications (Beniger). The current economy of information is thus seen as a reaction to the accelerated improvements of manufacturing and transportation of the 19th century, what Beniger calls the "societal control revolution" of the 19th and 20th century. In his view, control is the capability of one agent, human or not, to influence another with a determined purpose. Within communication technologies, this purpose is directed to information processing. Bitcoin's production system is a recoupment of communication over energy. Unlike the residues of the hardware layer escaping the production cycle, the generation of unused hashes of the algorithmic layer are reabsorbed into the system: excessive computation, fuelled by randomness, is *a priori* for performance. The continuous generation of hashes – Bitcoin's instantiation of digital superabundance – is a subtle strategy for both the conservation of a state (scarcity) and for the supervision of a decentralized informational system (a secured ledger). Terranova warns that alongside automation new types of control and strategies to reintegrate surplus are also generated, "[automation] must be balanced with new ways of control (that absorb and exhaust) the time and energy thus released" (Terranova 385). From an algorithm's own logic, the excessive random hashes are not wasted because they are not residue, on the contrary, they remain in the system as enablers of the key states of scarcity and security. In a scenario where Bitcoin's distributed system operates successfully, the algorithmic excess of the system should not be considered waste, but a post-digital element of control.

Notes

[1] I will address relevant details on the functioning of the 'puzzle' in the algorithmic layer section.

[2] For a history of Bitcoin mining hardware, up until the end of 2013, see Taylor.

[3] A complex economical and cultural outcome of, among other things, planned obsolescence - an appealing subject for marketing and industrial economics some decades ago, but recently reborn within the scope of ecological awareness (Guiltinan).

[4] Here I am referring to Berlinski's general definition of algorithm.

[5] Alternatives have been suggested to improve this procedure with less costly computation methods (Courtois, Grajek, and Naik, "Optimizing SHA256 in Bitcoin Mining").

[6] SP20 Jackson by Spondoolies-Tech (http://www.spondoolies-tech.com/products/sp35-yukon-power-shipping-from-stock).

[7] Noyce was the manager of Fairchild Semiconductor, and then co-founder of Intel, see Berlin.

[8] Much of the cryptography involved in Bitcoin was developed to improve security in different devices, and is used on a day to day basis by generally accepted payment systems (e.g. Europay, Mastercard and Visa) (de Jong, Tkacz, and Velasco González; DuPont).

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Kasper Schiølin

CUM DEUS CALCULAT, FIT MUNDUS, OR THE WILL TO TECHNOLOGY: DIAGNOSIS AND CURE

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Introduction

The question concerning *technology*, and the question concerning *the will* is perhaps one and the same. If this conjecture is, however, too bold, then let it be enough to say that technology, and the will is indeed inseparably and closely related phenomena; the will's titanic manifestation in technology is as obvious as the fact that we never chase the objectives of the will without being armed to the teeth with technology. In short, the will does not reach far without still more advanced technology at its disposal.

The idea of technology's liberating potential is accompanied by the idea of technology as a mirror image of the human mind or intelligence. If not earlier, then from the pioneering work of Turing – who outlined the conditions of possibilities for artificial intelligence – the idea of technology as something rational, intelligent or 'smart', comparable to the human brain, has been the dominant way of understanding technology (cf. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"). Since the very first offspring of digital technology, the image of technology as a "Giant Brain" – which a spellbound press tellingly named the world's first digital computer ENIAC – has been reflected in public opinion about technology, not just in academia.

Strange as it may seem, the idea of technology as rational is really a 'humanization' of technology. Since Aristotle's widespread shibboleth that the human is a *rational animal* ('zoon logikon'), human distinctiveness has primarily been defined through rationality, and with Descartes' attempt to externalize rationality as a 'thing' – a 'thinking thing' – the way to imitate rationality, that is AI, was developed (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1037b13-14; Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*). For centuries the 'ratio', or the 'intelligence', has thus been seen as the most human 'thing', and therefore also the 'thing' that is to be imitated if technology should be as perfect as the human. When Turing and others began playing their imitation games, they were in decisive ways thus humanizing technology in accordance with Aristotle's persistent anthropology; technology had to be a rational as well.

However, what if humans were instead determined by an *unruly will*; a will to sex, to power and ultimately to life as such? To what extent would an alternative anthropology, which determines the human as a *willing animal* by subordinating rationality to the will, influence, and maybe even enrich, the understanding of technology?

In any case, the understanding of technology as rational means to well-defined ends does not make sense anymore. To a still greater extent the usage of digital technologies is compulsive, and without clear purpose. Like a patient suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, washing the skin of their hands, the rationality of the late modern human has been flushed out by "the flood of precise information and brand-new amusements", as Adorno and Horkheimer incisively remarked at the dawn of the digital culture industry (xvii). Today this flood has whirled into a disastrous tsunami absorbing any kind of rational singularity into a repetitive techno-groove of uniform obsessive-compulsive behaviour, where the user is trapped in a binary logic of a rigid *yes* and *no*. Consider for instance, how many of the million clicks and finger slides performed every day on various touch screens all over the world have a distinct purpose or fulfill a recognized need, and how many are mere compulsions.

It would be tempting to interpret such repetitive and useless behaviour in a Batailleian sense as an accumulation of *excess energy*, which would cause a state of ecstasy that encounters the hegemony

of utility (Bataille, *The Accursed Share*). However, the compulsive behaviour is only apparently useless. The circuit of exuberant energy produced by the compulsive user is the very life nerve of the anonymous digital industry, which absorbs every click, finger slide, retweet, like or Google-search – deliberately as well as compulsively – to ensure its growth and power. As Ernst Jüngers' figurative notion goes, we are living in an age of *total mobilization*, where all *energies* – as he notably calls it, in line with Bataille – are mobilized to work twenty-four seven on a giant plan, which nobody seems to know (cf. "Total Mobilisation"). In this sense, technology seems to be neither a sheer material extension of human rationality, nor an abundant source of excess energy, but a blind, ravenous, and limitless will to nothing but itself.

Bataille's notion of excess energy is indeed an obvious choice for interpreting the compulsive behaviour of digital culture. Although Bataille's reception of Nietzsche is evident, he only slightly touches upon the obvious relationship between his notion of excess energy and the will. For instance: "The subject – weariness of itself, necessity of proceeding to the extreme limit – seeks ecstasy, it is true: never does it have the will for its ecstasy" (*Inner Experience* 89). However, emphasizing the will more thoroughly, offers an opportunity to explore the 'total mobilization' of digital culture, in which excess energy is completely exhausted through its transformation into profitable and functioning zeros and ones.

Adopting the metaphysics of will, developed by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and others in the 19th century will help to diagnose an already arrived future, where no energy is left to transgress binary logic. However, one must keep in mind that philosophy always comes too late: Evidently, the digital industry has already come up with the same conclusion, and applied the metaphysics of the will in their own golden terms, and incorporated obsessive-compulsive behaviour into the very heart of their designs and business models. The cure must thus be found outside the realm of the will, as Bataille also seems to suggest in the above quote.

In the philosophy of Nietzsche – who at his most critical and at the same time most productive way takes over the central concept of the will from Schopenhauer, his 'educator', as he calls him – the understanding of technology as a blind will is sharpened. However, since Nietzsche himself does not unfolds a proper philosophy of technology, an interpreter, who are able to link the will to technology, is required. Heidegger, who brought the metaphysics of will into relation with technology, is such an interpreter. Thus I will first distill Heidegger's comprehensive reading of Nietzsche; and secondly, see what Heidegger is doing with the diagnosis that his immersion in Nietzsche's philosophy results in. In other words: diagnosis first, then, perhaps, a cure.

Diagnosis

Heidegger's Nietzsche

Before the middle of the 1930s Nietzsche only sporadically appears in Heidegger's works. From the middle of the 1930s to the middle of the 1940s Heidegger was, however, intensively occupied by Nietzsche's thinking. The mere existence of the approximately 1000 page lecture notes on Nietzsche, published in a double volume (GA 6.1 and GA 6.2) in the *Gesamtausgabe*, gives a clear insight into Heidegger's comprehensive studies of Nietzsche's thinking. As will become clear, it is not a coincidence that Heidegger in the same period starts to employ and define the

word 'technology' (Technik), and its Greek root 'technē', which surprisingly does not appear one single time in Heidegger's famous account of the human Dasein's ontological relation to the tools (die Zeuge) in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger is far away from being a neutral reader of Nietzsche. According to the acclaimed Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann, "Heidegger read Nietzsche the way theologians and preachers have read their sacred texts, selecting a verse, or even a half sentence, disregarding the context, and using it as a prop" (75). Heidegger willingly acknowledges this style of reading, and bluntly adds that his own contribution to the text "is what the layman, comparing it to what he takes to be the content of the text devoid of all interpretation necessarily deplores as interpolation and sheer caprice" (*Nietzsche vol. I-II*: 191f.) Even though Kauffmann is right in his critique, it is difficult, at least in the present context, not to appreciate how Heidegger unrestrainedly is squeezing, twisting, and selecting Nietzsche's thinking to make it fit his own. If he had not, and instead offered a neutral exegesis, it would not have been likely that an explicit link between technology and the will would have emerged.

The will to will

As already anticipated the fundamental concept in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is *the will to power*. However, according to Heidegger, also power must be conceived as will. In Heidegger's reading, the will to power therefore becomes a *will to will*, that is, a kind of tautological doubling of the will; or, pure and simple, the ultimate will:

> *But now, to anticipate* the decisive issue*, what does Nietzsche himself understand by the phrase "will to power"? What does "will" mean? What does "will to power" mean? For Nietzsche these two questions are but one. For in his view will is nothing else than will to power, and power nothing else than the essence of will. Hence, will to power is will to will, which is to say, willing is self-willing (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV *37, my italics)*

Thus, a typically example of Heidegger's peculiar reading, in which Nietzsche indeed becomes *Heidegger's Nietzsche*. Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's concept of the will (to power) as a will without any external aim; the will wills nothing but to empower itself. With that Heidegger also forestalls a common misunderstanding of power as the object of the will: "In the strict sense of the Nietzchean conception of will, power can never be pre-established as will's goal" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 42). However, Heidegger still defines the will as *self-overcoming* ('Selbst-Überwindung'), since it is characterized by a double effort to preserve the already seized power, which it at the same time seeks to enhance and improve: "Only from such certainty of power can archived power be heightened. Therefore, enhancement of power is at the same time in itself the preservation of power" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 197).

As eccentric as this might sound it is not just philosophical gibberish, but captures a shared experience in hi-tech cultures. Indeed everybody, who uses digital technologies experiences this basic feature of the will: The digital camera, the smartphone, or any other digital device establishes a (feeling of) power and empowerment, and to ensure this power one needs to enhance and improve the device by upgrading it to the latest version; otherwise the power is lost. Since this chain

of upgrading is endless, the object of the will fades out of sight, and becomes a pure will to technology as such, that is, a will to will.

The Heideggerian concept of the will (to will) thus offers a metaphysical-anthropological interpretative framework to understand the rather compulsive relationship to digital technologies; a relationship that does not seem to fit into Aristotle's claim about the *rational animal*. Quoting Nietzsche, Heidegger clearly strips of this rational privilege ascribed to humans: "*Everything* that lives is will to power. 'To have an to want to have more – in one word, growth – that is life itself'" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 196, my italics).

Nihilism as transitional period

To Heidegger, Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power is primarily a forecast of what we might expect of the future: "a historical decision concerning what is to come". (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 202). In accordance with Nietzsche, Heidegger defines this future event as *nihilism*, that is, the an*nihil*ation of all values. To Heidegger, nihilism has been on its way since Plato, but with the metaphysics of the will to power, and Nietzsche's herald of the death of God – let alone the death of any other historically sedimented values and concepts – the completion of Nihilism's slow journey through the history of Western metaphysics has come to an end (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 204).

However, it is not enough to understand nihilism as an annihilation of all values. The values had certainly been emptied of content – they have been *devaluated* – yet they have not disappeared. Rather, they appear as empty containers waiting to be filled with new content, that is, waiting for a *revaluation* ('Umwertung'). Consequently, nihilism is a transitional period, where devaluated values are waiting to be revaluated (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 200ff.). This implies that nihilism is also an opportunity for liberation (from the old stubborn values): "Nihilism thus does not strive for mere nullity. Its proper essence lies in the affirmative nature of liberation" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 204).

The one, who is able to devaluate – *say no to* – all the old values, and at the same time revaluate – *say yes to* – them is of course *the superhuman* ('das Übermensch'); Nietzsche's famous archetype of the coming human. When the values are not any longer valuated and fixed by the church, philosophers, or other institutions, humans face the fact that the world ultimately still remains, and that this remaining something has to be given new values (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 218f.). That is definitely a job description that matches the superhuman's ability to say yes and no at the same time!

It is, however, important to understand that the superhuman is not an alter ego for Nietzsche, with which "Herr Nietzsche", as Heidegger expresses it, arrogantly distances himself from the mediocrity of the crowd (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 227). Rather, the superhuman is a messenger of a new kind of metaphysics, which prompts humans to will, and to empower themselves enough to decide what the beings surrounding them are to be.

Productionist metaphysics

Only in the first volume (vol. I-II) of the lecture notes on Nietzsche, Heidegger regards Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power, and the accompanying concepts of nihilism and the superhuman, as a passable way to overcome metaphysics. In the second

volume (vol. III-IV) it is instead conceived more disappointingly as the culmination or, as the English translation goes, *the consummation of metaphysics* (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* passim). According to Heidegger the human subject has – in the history of Western metaphysics, at least since Plato – been placed as the necessary medium, through which the truth of Being had to be mediated. Consequently, the truth of Being cannot be anything else than a representation. In Nietzsche's thinking Heidegger now sees the consummation of this simmering subjectivism, because the subject – that is, the superhuman – here is completely left alone without gods and institutions to decide the Being of beings (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 218ff). Before Nietzsche's superhuman, that is, before the death of God, God was conceived as the Being, which, as an absolute subject, was able to create and decide the objective world, including the human (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 226). In this Heideggerian theology, Christianity is seen as permeated by a *productionist metaphysics*, as the Heidegger scholar Michael Zimmerman incisively puts it (157); or with Heidegger's own words: "The supreme being (summum ens) is the Creator himself. Creating is conceived of metaphysically in the sense of productive representation" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 226).

In a note from GA 76 – a volume of the *Gesamtausgabe* consisting of unpublished notes and sketches about technology – Heidegger comes a step closer in showing the relation between technological production and Christianity. Under the headline *Die Frage nach dem Wesen der Technik*, Heidegger thus fragmentarily notes: "Leibniz: Dum deus calculat, fit Mundus" (*Leitgedanken* 344). The note refers to a frequently cited marginal note in a monologue by Leibniz. Here the exact wording goes: "Cum deus calculat et cogitationen exercet, fit mundus" (30). Loosely translated, that is: When God is thinking and calculating, he is creating the world. To Leibniz, God's actualization of exactly this world as *the best of all possible worlds* is thus a result of a strictly logical procedure of selection. Bracketing God, Leibniz's note also acts fine as an epigraph to the dominant metaphysics of the present, where beings hardly are grasped as other than results of complex technological processes. Not *what is it*, or *how is it*, but *how is it made* goes the metaphysical refrain of our times. Just think about the platitude "maker culture", to get a feeling of how apt Leibniz's old note still is.

Productionist metaphysics thus does not disappear with the death of God. Quite the opposite: It is consummated with the superhuman and its affirmation of the the will to power, which allow it to take the place of God as the one, who is able to make and (re) valuate everything. The superhuman wants to make and control everything that is, including itself, with the aim to increase its power. To that purpose the superhuman needs to be able to simplify and to automate beings, and in the description of this *will* to *simplification*, Heidegger eventually connects Nietzsche's metaphysics of power to technology through the neologism *Machinalisierung*, which is inappropriately translated into English as *mechanization*: "'Mechanization' makes possible a mastery of beings that are everywhere surveyable, a mastery the conserves – and that means store – energy" (*Nietzsche vol. III-IV* 230).

The reason why the translation is inappropriate is that Heidegger certainly seems to have a particular purpose with his neologism. First, Heidegger also uses the prefix 'Mach' in the concept 'Machenshaft', which is a difficult translated name for the essence of technology, and which he in particularly develops in *Beiträge zur Philosophie* and *Besinnung* from the same period as the lecture courses on Nietzsche. Secondly, while

the term *Mechanisierung* connotes science and objectivity, *Machinalisierung* clearly emphasizes a human actor or a subjective activity; a *making* (Machen), which at the same time is distinguished from a divine *creating* (Schöpfung) independent of technological means. Thirdly, the close relationship between the words machen and Macht (power), underlines Heidegger's interpretation of the will to power as a will to self-empowerment through technological making.

Cautiously playing on the prefix 'Mach', Heidegger thus makes it very clear that he sees both technology and subjectivism – or *humanization* ('Vermenschlichung') as he synonymously calls it – as equally effects of the consummation of the metaphysics of the will to power. In the course of history we have thus been pushed further and further into the centre of power, that is, into the ready-made world, in which we are left alone with beings we have made by ourselves. We have, in other words, become the Leibnizian God, who makes the world with complex technological calculating.

Obsession, compulsion, and disorder

If we accept Heidegger's interpretation of the will, which is indeed also a diagnosis of our present technological time, we find that the compulsive use of digital technologies is not so strange after all. Since control over technology is the essence of the still more complex ways of making, excessive and exact repetition of routine activities is unavoidable. For instance, 'tweeting' could be seen as a subtle way to affirm the will to power in order to be able to 'make values' by one's own, that is, ultimately to 'make oneself'. However, tweeting and information sharing alike, easily slides into mildly compulsive behaviour, where the superhuman's double effort to preserve and enhance power is replaced by a rather meaningless loop of repetitive control of tweets, hashtags and followers. The technology that ought to control the making (of power), thus becomes the object of compulsive control itself, leaving the making, that is, the power, to others (to Twitter, perhaps?).

However, the symptoms described above are also symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, where short-circuits in the brain's control mechanisms transform the vital control of actions to compulsive repetition of the same actions without any other purpose, but the control itself. At best such compulsive actions preserves the patients power, but they does not enhance it. In metaphysical terms this could be stated as a will to power that slides into a will to will, which, as suggested, is manifest in many digital technologies. Not everybody, indeed maybe nobody, match the qualifications of the de- and revaluating superhuman or the calculating God of Leibniz, which could be why our technological culture is so full of compulsive behaviour and so full of fixed commercial values. Perhaps 'hactivism' or other DIY-activism are close to meet such qualifications, and thus will succeed in making their own values, but such privileges will presumably always be reserved for the few leaving the rest in the compulsive hands of the blind will of technology.

However, Heidegger is not only doing diagnostics, he also comes up with a cure, which is, in fact, quite the opposite of activism, since activism too would be just another kind of affirming the will that does not allow us to transcend the dominant metaphysics of our times.

Cure

Everything functions

In the dialogue "Anchibasie", from *Country Path Conversations*, written between 1944 and 1945, Heidegger introduces the concept *Gelassenheit*, which is commonly translated as *releasement*. The dialogue consists of three characters: a scholar, a scientist and a guide ('der Weise', which is of cause Heidegger himself!). In the first part of the dialogue the main topic is technology. Through his fictive characters Heidegger thus argues that we in fact know very little about technology, because we think to know it only on the basis of technical and functional terms. Moreover, every attempt to think about technology, which is not about its usefulness, is deemed to be pure speculation (*Country Path Conversations* 5f.). Pushing it to an extreme, this means that everything in the era of modern technology only is, as far as it is useful and has a well-defined function. As Heidegger puts it, in the infamous Spiegel-interview from 1966: "Everything functions. That is exactly what is uncanny. Everything functions and the functioning drives us further and further to more functioning" (Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us" 37).

To Heidegger this epochal state of mind calls for radically new way of thinking, which is what he explores with the concept of releasement. Not surprisingly, Heidegger begins his definition to oppose releasement to the will: "Then releasement lies […] outside the distinction between activity and passivity, [b]ecause it does not belong to the domain of the will" (*Country Path Conversations* 70). After perplexed questions from the scholar and the scientist about how to practice this kind of thinking, which the guide only defines 'via negatonis', the guide eventually gives a more positive definition: "We should do nothing at all, but rather wait" (*Country Path Conversations* 71). Thus, releasement is waiting, but not a waiting for something specific: ""Waiting has, properly speaking, no object […] In waiting we leave open that upon which we wait" (*Country Path Conversations* 75). In other words releasement is about *letting be*, or letting the beings be, just as the German perfect participle *lassen* (to let), which *Gelassenheit* is the nominal form of, also suggests.

Practicing releasement is therefore about letting go of the will to immediately define, make, valuate, control, simplify and alter the beings we confront. Perhaps one could compare it to the perpetual response of Herman Melville's famous Mr. Bartleby: "I would prefer not to". At least the *functionary* Bartleby's response is met as being completely meaningless, just as Heidegger described the reaction to thinking not concerned with usefulness. Heidegger (*Country Path Conversations* 92) moreover describes waiting as a resolute *non-willingly* comportment that *release* the beings, including ourselves, to the *open region*, which means that they are not reduced to an idea, a creation of God, a product of a willful mortal 'maker,' a function or any other fixed concept. Rather, beings should just be left they way they are!

Yes and no and both

Ten years later, Heidegger returns to the concept of releasement in an address entitled *Gelassenheit*, in which the contrast between releasement and modern technology is even sharper. For instance he makes it clear that releasement requires that we at any time are willing to discard the technology we are using. Our *yes* to technology must in other word be accompanied by a *no*:

> *But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses "yes" and at the same time "no," by an old word, release-ment toward things [Gelassenheit] (*Discourse on Thinking *94).*

However, the simultaneous yes and no that characterize releasement is also a subtle way to renounce the will, which Heidegger clearly states in a fragment from the before mentioned GA 76: "Wille in sich *nein und ja*" (*Leitgedanken* 10). The quintessence of the will is thus exhausted in the statements "Yes, I will", and "No, I will not". Consequently, Heidegger's insistence on the simultaneous yes and no can be seen as an attempt to transcend the metaphysics of the will, which, broadly speaking, is stretched out between Schopenhauer's no – that is his' rejection of the will, which we have not touched upon here – and Nietzsche's yes, that is, his affirmation of the will (to power). However, this is not only of interest for philosophy, it also adds a new interesting perspective to the binarity of digital technologies.

Binary numbers

Just as a simultaneous yes and no make no sense to, and indeed disturbs, the metaphysics of will, a bit, which at the same time has the values zero (off) and one (on), is self-contradictory to the binary (or Boolean) number system. Although Heidegger does not examine this connection explicitly, he actually comes quite close in the lecture course on Nietzsche, where he described how the superhuman's affirmation of the will to power, that is, to make and revaluate, depended on the possibility to simplify and automate the beings. To represent beings through combinations of zeros and ones must indeed match the demand for simplicity and automation.

Incidentally, it is worth noticing that most, if not all, programming languages are permeated by imperative expressions, such as: "Print", "Execute", Return", "Edit", "Order", etc. A command and control language thus, which fully complies with the cogent simplicity and binarity as required by the metaphysics of will. It is well worth noticing that it was Leibniz – whose calculating God, Heidegger saw as a kind of antecedent for modern technology and its foundation in the metaphysics of the will – who in 1679 invented the binary number system.

The thinking of releasement is thus flowing between a contrasting yes and no to technology: "It would be shortsighted", as Heidegger states, "to condemn it [technology] as the work of the devil", but at the same time he rejects the optimism, which exultantly argues that technology "is a road to a happier human life" (*Discourse on Thinking* 94; 91). Neither the resolute *yes*, nor the resolute *no*, are, according to Heidegger, able to comprehend that technology radically changes our relationship to the nature and the world. On the other hand, the thinking of releasement

is an opening to the concealed meaning of technology; it is "openness to the mystery" as Heidegger idiosyncratic puts it (*Discourse on Thinking* 95).

Accordingly, Heidegger also has a peculiar view of the prospect of nuclear warfare (the address is from 1955), which emphasizes the principle of the simultaneous yes and no: The danger is not, Heidegger says, that another atomic weapon is used in war ('the yes'), the danger is that it is not used! (*Discourse on Thinking* 95) The reason for this offensive statement is that without a massive manifestation of technology, Heidegger fears that technological thinking will unnoticeably diffuse into every corner of the human life-world, which is an even worse disaster, since it would make the dependence on technology too large to be able to reject it ('the no'). However, since technology actually spreads in this way the 'mystery' remains closed, if not the thinking of releasement is resolute and persistent.

Heidegger does not come closer to define how to practice releasement, and neither has this 'cure', as it is here audaciously called, been the subject of clinical trials. However, it still gives rise to some questions, and questioning can – at least to Heidegger – be curing. Thus, what if this resolute thinking between affirmation and renouncing of the will to technology really were able to release both the compulsive 'user' and the obsessive 'maker' from the repetitive stuttering staccato-like choreography, in which they are staged? What if the global circuit of zeros and ones, which the familiar world is made up, suddenly collapsed, and began to speak in non-Boolean tongues? How would that leave Being?

Concluding remarks: Releasement versus ecstasy

Heidegger's concept of releasement and Bataille's central thought about consuming the excess energy to reach a state of ecstasy pursue the same overall goal: to transgress the given metaphysical order as well as the societal boundaries. As mentioned in a quote in the introduction, also Bataille defines ecstasy as a realm beyond the will. Moreover, he emphasizes that "in ecstasy one can *let oneself go*" ("Inner Experience" 82, original italics). However, while rapture, violent sacrifice and erotic excess are essential to Bataille's concept of ecstasy, they are unfamiliar to Heidegger's resigning and passive comportment of releasement, which is more akin to a the positive notion of *fatigue*, recently developed by Byung-Chul Han (2010). Releasement and ecstasy can thus be seen as two different approaches, or perhaps even cures, to cope with the symptoms of compulsive-obsessive behaviour in digital culture.

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Cornelia Sollfrank in conversation with Wolfgang Sützl

SHARING: THE RISE OF A CONCEPT

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Cornelia Sollfrank: Your recent research has revolved around the notion of "sharing," and I would like to get a better understanding where this interest comes from and how it is embedded in the larger context of your work.

Wolfgang Sützl: This interest in sharing has resulted from my research on media activism. In the course of a research project at University of Innsbruck, we realised that "sharing" plays an important role in many activist communities – while its actual meaning seems to be rather vague. It obviously relates to the then very topical phenomenon of file sharing, but there seemed to be other implications as well.

Media activism was not just brushing media against the grain, but also intervening in the socio-economic structure of the media and tech industries. This involved questioning the notion of scarcity. If you can make digital content available to many people for free, why not do it? In an interview I did with Eben Moglen, a co-founder of the Free Software Foundation, he asked: if you could provide everyone with enough food to eat by pressing a button, what would be the moral argument for denying people that food? Activists realized that digital media had this potential of functioning outside an economy of scarcity. To examine such questions, we organized a conference, *Cultures and Ethics of Sharing*, in Innsbruck, and later I co-organized an ICA preconference on *digital sharing* with Nicholas John (Hebrew University). Since then my research has been mainly concerned with the conceptual dimension of sharing.

CS: Before we talk about the phenomenon of sharing in the context of digital networks – which obviously is the field in which it has been rediscovered and has proliferated most in the twenty years – I would be interested in learning more about the intellectual roots of this concept. You have looked at a number of philosophers who might be useful in order to conceptualise the notion of sharing – one of them being Georges Bataille and his idea of the excess…

WS: Bataille is of particular interest in this regard, because he developed outlines of an anti-economy that starts from surplus rather than scarcity. He focused on what we do to expend resources, rather than make them. He felt that Marxism was not radical enough, buying into the notion of scarcity which is at the heart of the capitalist economic model. He defined a boundary to economic exchange, with expenditure being that which can no longer be exchanged, that which no longer yields anything and cannot be recycled into additional growth. He calls this "The Accursed Share," which is also the title of the book he wrote in 1949. And just like Bataille's expenditure, sharing is not something that can be used towards growth. The concept of a "sharing economy" does not make any sense.

CS: What also comes to mind when thinking about sharing is its embeddedness in Christian culture. How much is the positive connotation of sharing due to this religious origin?

WS: The New Testament contains many references to sharing, the most widely known is perhaps the *Feeding of the 5000*, where Jesus and his followers share what seems to be a ridiculously small amount of food. This happens after Jesus tells his disciples not to send people to the surrounding villages to buy food, that is, he stops them from engaging in economic exchange. What seems key to me here is not so much that by sharing a large crowd is fed from a few loafs of bread and some fish, with everyone getting enough. The point is that there are several baskets

full of food that remain uneaten. There is a surplus that comes from sharing, and it is, just like Bataille's "accursed share," a surplus that cannot be recycled into further growth. This is a model of an anti-economy that also underlies the demand to offer the second cheek. The positive connotation of sharing, its "niceness," comes perhaps from the idea of equality and togetherness in sharing. This is very different from the formal equality enjoyed by participants in a market, and the hierarchies that are created or strengthened through almsgiving…

CS: Together with Bataille and his notion of expenditure, the multiplication of loaves and fishes suggests a parallel to what we have been experiencing with digital networked media: abundance instead of scarcity. I would be interested in how you think these two schemes together.

WS: Bataille applies the word excess to practices that waste energy without return, including sacrifices, luxury, war, and non-reproductive sex. To him, wealth is a matter of expending what cannot be recycled into growth, and it is up to us what form this expenditure has. In principle, digital networked media can be seen as excessive in this way because digital objects are infinitely reproducible, so that in a sense there is always too much, there is always more than we can productively use. However, the commercialization of the internet has led to the paradoxical situation where this excessive availability fuels the growth of Facebook, Google, etc. A few years ago, media activists started virtual suicide platforms that allowed users to delete their profiles, a kind of sacrifice, if you will, that is reminiscent of Bataille's thinking.

CS: If we continue this thought, and bring in the notion of sharing, it becomes necessary to distinguish more precisely between sharing and exchange as an economic transaction. Could you please generally explain the difference of these two concepts?

WS: Unlike exchange, sharing is not reciprocal. It does not consist of the mutual give-and-take that forms the structure of exchange, both of economic exchange, as in a market, and of symbolic exchange, as in the giving and returning of gifts, words, or other symbols. Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) showed the importance of symbolic exchange in capitalism, and takes the Marxist critique beyond the merely economic. Bourdieu has also developed a critique of symbolic exchange around his notion of cultural capital. But they both stop at the point where a formal representation of reciprocity is no longer possible, the point Baudrillard later theorized as "impossible exchange," in his book of the same title.

CS: It appears to me as if symbolic exchange was somewhere between economic exchange and sharing…

WS: Almsgiving, like gift-giving in general, is a form of symbolic exchange, which in Bourdieu's thinking affirms and stabilizes social hierarchies. Symbolic exchange determines who is on top and who is at the bottom. By tipping a waiter you, and the waiter who accepts the tip, agree on this. This verticality of symbolic exchange explains why giving and receiving of gifts in relationships between people who want to be equal, such as the modern couple, is often such an awkward affair, sometimes resolved by giving up the idea of a gift altogether.

Baudrillard argues that symbolic exchange has many forms that support the functioning of economic exchange—for example, the law and the state, which intervene when economic exchange fails, as in bankruptcy, unemployment, or by setting base rates. This

too shows how symbolic exchange is bound up with political power. Organized crime, black markets, or state-controlled economies function predominantly in this way.

CS: That means we actually remain in a sort of economy with the gift-giving, while, as you have already indicated, sharing is something that leaves the realm of economic relationships behind altogether. I think this is where we should continue talking about the philosophical concepts which you are exploring in order to develop the concept of sharing. And I'm thinking of phenomenology, for example.

WS: Once you realize you cannot theorize sharing in terms of exchange at all, you face certain problems that are similar to theorizing everyday experience. Sharing is indeed an everyday routine, as such it does not have its own truth, or at least it does not stand out as an object available to scientific investigation or to the aesthetic privileging that happens in art. Duchamp's ready-mades were a response to this difficulty of the everyday. What would an artwork look like that is not set apart from the profanity of everyday experience? His answer was, perhaps like a urinal, perhaps like a bottle rack. Phrased in ontological terms, Heidegger undertook a similar enquiry in his *Being and Time* (1927), where he sought to understand being through everyday Dasein, the simple fact of our being-there that is always already assumed, whatever question we may ask.

He uses the term Mit-sein or being-with, to understand being as always already shared being. According to him, there is no way to understand the meaning of being other than as shared. As I find myself in the world, I have already shared this world with others. Being cannot be separated from sharing, and the others come into appearance as others because of this sharing. This is why sharing in the commons, as described by Ostrom, defines a political subjectivity. To me, it also offers a point of departure for understanding why an economy of exchange on the way to totalizing itself, as in the current advance of neoliberalism, has such difficulty with the notions of otherness or difference. Exchange must, in order to function, render otherness or difference meaningless – turn it into a "farce" as Žižek says. The only meaning that it leaves for otherness is the unrestrained negativity of random violence, which is just another caricature of a quest for meaning.

CS: What is not nice about sharing?

WS: For one, once we understand sharing as a limit to economic expansion, an anti-dote to the economic principle itself, it questions a deeply held belief of Western culture. It represents an outside that can be scary because it cannot be regulated by law – because the law is also an exchange operation. Pirates, who did not recognize the law of the sea, had a strong sharing culture, which came back to life in digital piracy. Also, at the moment of sharing, we cease to be as self-contained individuals, and enter the sphere of intimacy. There is a vulnerability that comes with sharing that is expressed in the problem of "oversharing" on social media, where users offer intimate information to others they do not really know. Because of this, sharing as a practice was traditionally limited to smaller communities. And finally, we also share things like the exhaust fumes and noise of our cars or the crudeness of our advertising billboards. It's not always nice.

CS: Now, both of these concepts, exchange and sharing, exist in parallel – offline as well as online. I would like to ask you to describe and unravel this coexistence with regards to digital networked media and also talk about the – maybe intentional – confusions that are emerging from this.

WS: Today sharing is often confused with exchange because of the way we use the word in online communication and the hype around the sharing economy. This confusion is an easy one to make because of the very nature of sharing, but there is also an obfuscation that is part of the business plan of the digital media industry that considers sharing as a profitable form of "customer engagement." The confusion is easy because sharing is a communal phenomenon: it is because our being is always already a being-with-one-another that we can share and experience meaning. This is also why Jean-Luc Nancy can say "meaning is the sharing of being." But in corporate social media and the sharing economy, subjectivities are formed through structured forms of communication that providers prefer to call "sharing," benefitting from the anti-economic potential of the digital (its excess) and the connotations of niceness that come with sharing. These subjectivities are shaped to match business plans, they form around the users' status as customers, as subjects of exchange. But meaning cannot be exchanged, only shared. This is why so much of social media communication is either commercial, or trivial, as in the classic cases of cat videos. There is an erosion of meaning through the dominance of exchange, and a lot of sharing of meaningless content, because what matters to the provider is the profit that comes from customer engagement, from making users do things that affirm their status as customers. But this is due only to the commercialization of digital networks. It is not inherent to digital technology, as for instance the case of Wikipedia shows.

CS: To conclude our little conversation, one could say that "sharing" as an essential form of being with others has gained a new dimension through digital technology. At the same time this new form of sharing in the realm of digital files and knowledge is dependent on a technology which is totally embedded in the cycles of capitalist production, i.e. exchange. I think here is one crack in the concept. Another friction I see in the fact that neoliberalism expands its logic of economisation into all possible domains of life and, through the sharing economy for example, has started to blur a clear distinction between sharing as a way of being or becoming subject and economic exchange. What is at risk here? What is it that drives your research?

WS: What drives me is the belief that with a better understanding of sharing we can gain more clarity about the limits of exchange. This is necessary, because the current neoliberal rationality sees a frontier instead of limits. This frontier is a temporary boundary to be pushed forward, a site of emerging markets and venture capital. Helped by the rise of corporate digital media and the disappearance of a serious alternative to capitalism, this frontier has advanced into the political sphere, into subjectivity, and into rationality itself. Wendy Brown offers a compelling analysis of this process in her latest book, *Undoing the Demos* (2015). What is at risk here is the possibility of forming meaningful political communities in the most basic sense of the word, and along with it the possibility to communicate anything political. Therefore, an improved understanding of sharing may help formulate a political argument against neoliberalism, which is the only type of argument that can be expected to be effective. And I agree, for an argument to be communicated, communication channels are needed that will not instantly turn the sharing of ideas into an economic transaction. We can still learn from the tactical media movement in this regard, and perhaps with the dominance of corporate social media and their business strategies, tactics is even more important than before. Digital media do still offer a real,

non-utopian possibility of sharing, and simply remembering that is a first step. The fact that criticism of the sharing economy is becoming more widespread is also a positive sign. It opens some space for a real discussion of sharing.

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