

THE DESIRE  
OF THE  
MEDIUM

ALARC

BOUNTIEST



# THE DESIRE OF THE MEDIUM

MARC BOUMEESTER  
ArtEZ Press

# COLOPHON

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*I dedicate this work to my daughter Juni Boumeester,  
whose affection and joy fuel my existence.*

5

15

35

61

117

167

201

249

254

263

264

GLOSSARY:  
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

INTRODUCTION

1. LIQUID FIELD:  
INTRODUCING THE WORKINGS  
OF THE GREY MOUSE

2. ETHOSCAPE:  
AFFECTIVE AND INTENSIVE THINKING

3. IDEOSCAPE:  
CONCEPTS, ASSEMBLAGE, DESIRES,  
AND PEDAGOGY

4. FORM OF CONTENT:  
AFFORDANCE IN THE TECHNOSCAPE

5. FORM OF EXPRESSION:  
NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC DESIRE  
IN THE MEDIASCAPE

CONCLUSION:  
SUSPENDED BETWEEN  
PENSIERO DEBOLE AND AMOR FATI

BIBLIOGRAPHY

FILMOGRAPHY

LIST OF IMAGES

There is no Life or Death  
Only activity  
And in the absolute  
Is no declivity.  
There is no Love or Lust  
Only propensity  
Who would possess  
Is a nonentity.  
There is no First or Last  
Only equality  
And who would rule  
Joins the majority.  
There is no Space or Time  
Only intensity,  
And tame things  
Have no immensity.

# GLOSSARY: TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The desire of the medium covers a specific field within affect theory and media philosophy, and its dealings require a specific vocabulary. This vocabulary is not something I have invented alone: it stems from Deleuzian scholarship and its propagation under the affective turn. Perhaps the most efficient way of introducing the reader to this specific domain is by summarising the concepts most frequently used in this text. Key concepts highlighted in **bold** indicate that they are defined concepts, either in the text or in the glossary below. The highlighting of terms is strategic, not categorical, since it aims to provide a better understanding of the text without saturating it with colour. Given that some concepts are decisive while others are instrumental or relational, any linear introduction or classification would suggest some type of hierarchy or causality. Due to the linear structure of text as a medium ('text' desires linearity), some sort of serial order is essential, yet all concepts are fully interconnected and have no intrinsic priority over each other. The concepts I refer to most frequently are accompanied by my preferred definition from among those generally available. Key to understanding this exercise is that these concepts need to be activated, which will be done in the main body of the book.

## AGENCY IS NOT BEING, IT IS BECOMING<sup>1</sup>

**Agency** is energy, an underlying, autonomous drive and a source of the new. Agency is a cause of **energetics**, yet is not reduced to this since energetics is the working of agency between bodies. Agency is a vector; energetics is a force. Desire is a particular form of agency; it has no predetermined bodies to work on. **New materialism** opposes abstract and humanist traditions in cultural theory that are grounded on dualist structures; instead it offers an enticing alternative by opening up theoretical formulations in which matter is a very strong actor. Thus the prerogative on agency shifts from the anthropocentric to a shared domain (matter, medium, mind,

body).<sup>2</sup> Feminist philosopher Karen Barad summarises: ‘Agency is not held, it is not a property of persons or things; rather, agency is an enactment, a matter of possibilities for reconfiguring entanglements.’<sup>3</sup>

1. Steven Shaviro draws attention to Simondon’s theory of becoming, which influenced Deleuze: ‘The individual, as (continually) produced in a process of individuation, is never an isolated Self. It is always coupled or coordinated with a milieu; the individual can only be understood together with its milieu, and cannot subsist as a unity without it. The contact between individual and milieu is mediated by affect. Affectivity comes in between inside and outside, just as it comes in between sensation and action. Just as sensation gets oriented along a series of gradients in order to become perception, so (unconscious or preconscious) affect gets oriented along a series of processes of becoming in order to become (conscious) emotion.’ ‘Simondon on Individuation’, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=471> [accessed 25 July 2016].
2. The term ‘new materialism’ was coined by Rosi Braidotti and Manuel DeLanda.
3. Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, *New Materialism*, p. 54.

### ASSEMBLAGE WORKS WITH CAPACITIES, NOT PROPERTIES

**Assemblages** are configurations: nebulas of bodies that have no intrinsic meaning or properties that can be evaluated without considering their relation to other bodies in the assemblage. Ecologies are local (material and immaterial) assemblages. The exteriority of relations is a term for the force fields these bodies produce and by which they claim their respective niche in the ecology they form, depending on their capacities.<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of assemblage rests on the idea that there is no constant ontology for the environment (the metaphysics of presence). Formations need to be seen as assemblages that form part of a variety of assemblages. For philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari, a body can be human, nonhuman, organic or inorganic, a social construction or a virtuality. Moreover, this body has no meaning or veracity before its existence through external networks, connections and affects. In other words, according to Deleuze, ‘The minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the *assemblage*.’<sup>5</sup>

4. The inseparable relationship between agency and assemblage is adequately described by Michel Callon: ‘The term *agencement* is a French word that has no exact English counterpart. In French its meaning is very close to ‘arrangement’ (or ‘assemblage’). It conveys the idea of a combination of heterogeneous elements that have been carefully adjusted to one another: [A]rrangements (as well as assemblages) could imply a sort of divide between human agents (those who arrange or assemble) and things that have been arranged. This is why Deleuze and Guattari proposed the notion of *agencement*. *Agencement* has the same root as *agency*: *agencements* are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting

in different ways depending on their configuration. This means that there is nothing left outside *agencements*: there is no need for further explanation, because the construction of its meaning is part of an *agencement*. A socio-technical *agencement* includes the statement[s] pointing to it, and it is because the former includes the latter that the *agencement* acts in line with the statement, just as the operating instructions are part of the device and participate in making it work.’ Michel Callon quoted in Karl Palmås, ‘Deleuze and DeLanda: A New Ontology: A New Political Economy?’ Paper presented at the Economic Sociology Seminar Series, Department of Sociology, London School of Economics & Political Science, 29 January 2007.

5. Gilles Deleuze, ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’, in *Dialogues* (New York: Columbia UP, [1977] 1987), p. 51. ‘The utterance is the product of an assemblage – which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events.’

It is imperative to take the actively changing relationships of the multiplicities that constitute the assemblage as the only starting point for assemblage thinking.<sup>6</sup> Multiplicity is a concept developed by Husserl and Bergson as an alternative to both the ‘one or many’ problems and its opposition in dialectical philosophy, which distinguishes only two types of approach to a construction of reality.<sup>7</sup> According to Deleuze’s summary: ‘There is neither one nor multiple, which would at all events entail having recourse to a consciousness that would be regulated by the one and developed by the other.’<sup>8</sup>

6. Probably Deleuze and Guattari’s most famous quote begins to unlock what assemblage thinking evokes: ‘We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body.’ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 257. Brian Massumi adds: ‘Bodies that fall prey to transcendence are reduced to what seems to persist across their alterations. Their very corporeality is stripped from them, in favor of a supposed substrate – soul, subjectivity, personality, identity – which in fact is no foundation at all, but an end effect, the infolding of a forcibly regularized outside.’ Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrania: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 112.

7. The differences between continuous and discrete multiplicities can be listed as:

*Continuous multiplicities:*

differences in kind  
divides only by changing in kind  
non-numerical – qualitative  
differences are virtual  
continuous  
qualitative discrimination  
succession  
fusion  
organisation  
subjective – subject  
duration

*Discrete multiplicities:*

differences in degree  
divides without changing in kind  
numerical – quantitative  
differences are actual  
discontinuous  
quantitative differentiation  
simultaneity  
juxtaposition  
order  
objective – object  
space

Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Hammerjam (New York: Zone Books, 1966).

8. He continues: 'Multiplicity remains completely indifferent to the traditional problems of the multiple and the one, and above all to the problem of a subject who would think through this multiplicity, give it conditions, account for its origins, and so on.' Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (London: Continuum, 1986), p. 14.

If we adopt the idea of multiplicities within assemblages, it becomes impossible to give a definition of an assemblage. Therefore I prefer to emphasise the notion of **assemblage thinking** as the guiding principle when working with this concept, rather than the concept itself. Gilles Deleuze emphasises:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.<sup>9</sup>

9. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Hammerjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 55.

The term 'sympathy' as used above should be understood as a functional anthropomorphism.

### ENERGETICS DEALS WITH THE INTENSIVE, NOT WITH THE EXTENSIVE

As all assemblages are also part of other assemblages, the capacities of the properties of their bodies are relative. The most constant aspect of a body to consider is its relative capacity to act and be acted upon, which is called affect. Affects are produced by the interplay between bodies, but since these bodies are part of a number of different assemblages at all times, these affects are not universal.

Philosopher Muriel Combes elaborates on philosopher Gilbert Simondon's individuation (becoming of being) as she places the individual in perspective:

To put it more precisely, affectivity, the relational layer constituting the center of individuality, arises in us as a liaison between the relation of the individual to itself and its relation to the world. As such, it is primarily in the form of a tension that this relation to self is effectuated: *affectivity, in effect, puts the*

*individual in relation with something that it brings with it, but that it feels quite justifiable as exterior to itself as individual.*<sup>10</sup>

10. Muriel Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 31.

Affection is already an extensive state, just as perception is. The intensive state of affect or percept can be individuated, and therefore affect can generate different affections in different people.

### EXTERIORITY OF RELATIONS ELIMINATES ALL EGO IN FAVOUR OF ECOLOGY

In order to shift thinking from the individual to the population, and in order to refrain from reducing any complexity to the mere sum of its parts, we need to focus on the exteriority of relations. Gilles Deleuze calls for the use of an anti-principle when he says: 'Relations are in the middle, and exist as such. This exteriority of relations is not a principle, it is a vital protest against principles.'<sup>11</sup>

11. Deleuze, 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature', p. 55. He continues: 'Empiricists are not theoreticians, they are experimenters: they never interpret, they have no principles.'

We always need to start from the middle, from the position within the ecology, the niche we have found. This ecology includes both the actualised and the virtual. The actual is always discrete and extensive (topographical); contrariwise, the virtual is intensive (topological) and creative. We could consider the intensive as an 'independent' ontological register, one that mediates the virtual and actual. Therefore Brian Massumi emphasises:

In fact, the reason why the properties of a whole cannot be reduced to those of its parts is that they are the result not of an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities. These capacities do depend on a component's properties, but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities. Relations of exteriority guarantee that assemblages may be taken apart while at the same time allowing that the interactions between parts may result in a true synthesis.<sup>12</sup>

12. Brian Massumi, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 11.

This is also the reason why we need to focus on populations and not on individuals.

### ASIGNIFYING IS NONREPRESENTATIONAL, YET NON-TRIVIAL

When affects are not universal, then all bodies are unique. Their properties determine how they form a niche in the assemblage. This means that no body can replace or represent another body. Therefore its affects are **asignifying**, they do not represent anything but themselves. Acknowledging asignifying affects means leaving behind traditional semiology and semantics as basic systems for exploring significance. To overcome the dominance of thinking in terms of representation and instantiation, the order of signification (semantics, semiotics, symbolic and so forth) should be overthrown. As Félix Guattari proposes:

It is not a question, for example, of magically denying signification by rendering language absurd and falling back into the techniques of word play, but of placing different semiotic systems in conjunction with each other, beginning with asignifying semiotics, that is to say those semiotic practices which use signs in order to transform the real and which constitute, precisely, the privileged site for the investment of desire in the social arena.<sup>13</sup>

13. Félix Guattari, 'Everybody Wants to Be a Fascist', in *Chaosology*, ed. Sylvère Lothringer (Los Angeles: Autonomedia/Semiotext(e), 1995), pp. 173-174.

Simondon's notion of transduction can be described as the relation between the actualised and the virtual, in which neither is able to precede or dominate the other since both only exist within the relation itself. Agency is the transition from the actual to the virtual (or vice versa). It is a non-universal event: its appearance is significant, yet it signifies nothing but itself. Philosopher Pascal Chabot argues that 'the psyche emerges in an attempt to resolve [...] tensions in a new way: with thought'.<sup>14</sup> However, this construct does not fully describe the situation; another set of arguments also contributes. Chabot continues: 'Psychic individuation refers to the evolution of the mental universe in an individual. It is a relationship with the world based on perception, emotion and signification.'<sup>15</sup> Emotion is a problematic construct in this discourse since it is the transition

from affect to emotion that creates room for interpretation and signification. Therefore we clearly need to steer away from emotion. Affects are intensive, emotions are extensive. Emotions are signifying; affects are asignifying, yet very significant.

14. Pascal Chabot, *The Philosophy of Simondon: Between Technology and Individuation*, transl. Aliza Krefetz and Graeme Kirkpatrick (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 95-96.  
15. Ibid.

### HEURISTICS: NOT A METHOD BUT AN APPROACH THROUGH TRIAL AND ERROR

Empirical encounters that entail any type of methodological thinking are based on similarities and representations of (future) conditions. Methodology uses representations to reduce processes to a scale that corresponds to specific requirements. This reduction fails by definition to include all the relations in the assemblage it wants to explore and therefore gives a false sense of 'completeness'. The methodology may work, but it excludes many elements. It works because it excludes. Therefore it would seem more useful to change to a system of trial and error to explore, and even design, (future) conditions. This is called a system of **heuristics**; it is not precise, yet it is rigorous. The literal and metaphorical starting point of this research is the premise that everything is contingently obligatory and not logically necessary. The theorem of logical necessity suffers from the critical flaw that comes from oversimplifying the complexity of forces, drives, agencies and antagonisms that concretely form the fabric of life. The focus needs to be on life as dynamic creativity (assemblage) rather than on the environment (territory) itself. According to cultural theorist Claire Colebrook:

The tradition that Deleuze and Guattari invoke is opposed to the organism as subject or substance that would govern differential relations; their concept of 'life' refers not to an ultimate principle of survival, self-maintenance and continuity but to a disrupting and destructive range of forces.<sup>16</sup>

16. Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 137.

There is no such thing as an 'environment as such', let alone the environment. Speculative realist Levy R. Bryant points out that 'environments cannot be treated as something that is simply given or there such that the organism subsequently fills a

niche that already existed in the environment.’ He argues that organisms perform actively in the construction of their environment.<sup>17</sup> The evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin adds that the predominant view of ontology primarily rests on causality, and comments: ‘While this structure is fine for clocks, since main-springs move the hands and not vice versa, it creates indissoluble contradictions when taken as the meta-model of the living world.’<sup>18</sup>

17. Levi R. Bryant, ‘The Democracy of Objects’ (2011), <http://openhumanitiespress.org/democracy-of-objects.html> [accessed 25 July 2016].
18. ‘This view of environment as causally prior to, and ontologically independent of, organisms is the surfacing in evolutionary theory of the underlying Cartesian structure of our world view. The world is divided into causes and effects, the external and internal, environments and the organisms they “contain”. While this structure is fine for clocks, since main-springs move the hands and not vice versa, it creates indissoluble contradictions when taken as the meta-model of the living world.’ Richard Lewontin, ‘Organism and Environment’, in *Learning, Development, and Culture*, ed. H.C. Plotkin (Chichester: Wiley, 1982), p. 159.

## AFFORDANCE DOES NOT DESCRIBE A FUNCTION, YET IT ALLOWS FOR FUNCTIONALITY

I regard the real as being composed of two components: the actualised and the virtual. The virtual is the part of reality that is not actualised, and, in remaining so, can be very effective, especially in producing affects. In my view, aesthetics deal with reality. **Metamedia** is a transitional state between the virtual and the actualised; it is the energetics of actualisation. The capacity to transit from the virtual to the actual and vice versa is called affordance. Although **affordance** is not a functionality, it can be a proto-functionality in the same way that the relation between *affect* and *affection* and the relationship between *percept* and *perception* can be described as capacities for becoming. The exact outcome of this process of becoming cannot be described a priori, yet its required actors can be determined.

Affordance is a creation of psychologist James Jerome Gibson, which he defines as follows:

The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way

that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment [...].<sup>19</sup>

19. James Jerome Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), p. 127.

Drawing on Brian Massumi’s work, architectural theorist Andrej Radman elaborates on this concept and urges for a shift from the metaphysical, universal experience of space (always and for everyone) to the dynamic relational space of experience when he states:

Experience is not an event ‘in’ the mind, separate from the environment. Rather the mind emerges from the interaction with the environment. Consequently, by modulating perception one can already modulate subsequent action. This antecedent level of potentialisation is proto-epistemological and already ontological in that it concerns change in the body’s degree of enablement in and towards its environment.<sup>20</sup>

20. Andrej Radman, *Gibsonism: Ecologies of Architecture* (Doctorate Dissertation, Delft University of Technology, 2012), p. 4.

The difference between affordance and deterministic functionality lies in the reverse approach of their relation: every functionality requires affordance, but not the other way around. The simplest way to illustrate the concept is that of a chair: it is designed to sit on, its function is to be sat upon, and this function can be designed. But the real question is: what is *sit-on-ability*? What provides these types of relational properties can be found in both the virtual and the actual. By searching for affordance rather than functions, demands or programmes, an entirely different spectrum of potential can be unlocked.

An outcome of becoming is therefore never the product of a logical necessity, but contingently obligatory, allowing for the existence of **multiple optima**; in other words, the possibility of the formation of different, yet potentially important outcomes. The outcome can only be established after the fact, never as a result of a predefined procedure. In biology, this is exemplified by the way a variety of phenotypes develop from the same genomes when exposed to different conditions (not, ‘many roads lead to Rome’ but ‘one road leads to many Romes’).

# INTRODUCTION

This book is the elaboration of a dissertation on the affective capacities of media and their collaborative function with the ‘artist’.<sup>1</sup> It originated from a series of ideas and propositions that aspired to counter some orthodox modes of thinking within the field of media theory and design philosophy. The quest was based on an extensive series of educational programmes I had developed that partly dealt with the supposition that the role of and interplay between media can best be measured on the basis of their affective capacities (iso-affectiveness) rather than on their ontological setting. In my view, it is more important to focus on what media do rather than on what they are. To achieve this requires a thorough appreciation of the equality of each medium in the spectrum of media typologies, which is not always the easiest thing to accomplish.

1. The word *artist* has been placed inside quotation marks to indicate that in today’s artistic practices, the division between fine art and design has become majorly opaque; therefore, in most cases, the word *artist* can also be read as *designer*.

Let me elaborate. I have lectured for many years on the relationship between film and architecture. For many architectural students, this relationship is most logically defined from one of two positions: either cinema has architecture as its subject, or architecture serves as a vessel for cinema. Despite concerted attempts to cross boundaries between the respective media disciplines and engage with different modes of operation, this point of view automatically leads to foreseeable outcomes: the end result would be either a film (on architecture), or a type of architecture for housing filmic activities (a theatre or projection space of some kind). Yet I believe the most interesting aspect of this cooperation between media lies in areas where they are not operating on their strengths, or when the ‘rules of engagement’ are changed in order to reach a deeper understanding or to achieve a more profound experience. A classic example of this is the opening scene of the 2003 film *Cidade de Deus* by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, in which the structure of a Brazilian favela is portrayed in such a way that it tells us more about its claustrophobic structure than any traditional map could do, yet it would be literally impossible to physically construct it on the basis of the floor plan created by the cinematography.<sup>2</sup> A second

example concerns the design of a traditional Chinese garden that has been carefully constructed to create a series of unique vistas when viewed from different perspectives. When moving through the garden, a series of scenes unfold, turning every visit into an inimitable cinematographic experience, yet one that could never be captured or portrayed on film. In these and many more cases ‘impossible architecture’ or ‘impossible cinema’ has been created, which I consider to be a highly valuable and irrefutable part of any deeper understanding of the respective media. What is exposed by these creations is the full capacity of the medium, whereas, in most cases, only a part of it tends to be actualised. The portion of the capacity of a medium that is most frequently actualised can be seen as the strength of the medium. For instance, for its creation, architecture requires space; cinema requires time: both media can express a type of narrative and/or functionality within their strength and both engage these strengths. The part of a medium’s capacity that is habitually ignored is its area of weakness, which in this example is where cinema deals with space and architecture deals with time. From these areas, impossible architecture and impossible cinema emerge. The next step is to explore the potential itself, even before actualisation takes place and leads to some form of expression. This potential is synonymous with the virtual; together with what is actualised, it comprises all of reality. This potential does not have to be actualised to have an effect; there are many forces in daily life that draw their strength from potential without ever having to be actualised, among them chance, risk, leverage, anticipation, longing, and so on. These forces can be grounded in moral and religious codes, traditions, laws, or other ‘distant’ yet present actors that create a fear of retaliation or exclusion; but perhaps even more, they emerge from the individual psyche. It is most probably precisely because these forces are not actualised (as in the Lacanian ‘big Otherness’ or ‘das Andere’), that they are able to gain significant strength and impact.<sup>3</sup>

2. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, *City of God* (São Paulo: O2 Films, 2003).

3. Symbolic ‘big Otherness’ refers to anonymous authoritative powers or knowledge, whether these be real or fictitious.

In *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, philosopher Gilles Deleuze paraphrases D.H. Lawrence, who concluded that ‘the first figuration (the photograph) should be criticized, not for being too faithful or

“true-to-life”, but for not being faithful enough’.<sup>4</sup> Here Deleuze is indicating that by engaging with the medium on its strongest merits (in this case taking a photograph), we exclude perhaps the most valuable elements, namely all that was not (or could not be) photographed at the same time as the photo was produced. The question then arises: who or what is actually determining the part of reality to be included in the photograph? This reduction of virtual and actualised reality could be attributed to the photographer, who is trained and well equipped to use photography in its strongest and most characteristic way. Yet this assumption substantially reduces photography’s potential; after all, shouldn’t the medium itself first define its own capacities?

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London and New York: Continuum, [1981] 2003), p. 71.

I realised that this chain of cause and effect could not be properly addressed until man and media occupy the same ontological plane. It serves no particular purpose to maintain a stratified view of responsibility, will and drive in processes where an artist or designer collaborates with a medium. Practitioners working with media will recognise to some degree that these processes include elements of accident, serendipity, suspected boundaries/unknown abilities, chance, and unseen causes and effects. Clearly these elements are not steered by humans alone, which is why I propose to ‘formalise’ them and shift the anthropocentric perspective that categorises them to the role of incidental. It is relatively easy to address the desires of artists in these processes, since they are often part of their ‘official’ modus operandi. Now, as a counterweight, I will introduce the desires of the medium as a ‘formal’ element in the processes that, in collaboration with the artist, lead to the creation of a work of art. Therefore, I will boldly pose the question: ‘What is the desire of the medium?’

The term ‘desire’ as I use it here is a synonym for *drive*, *force* or even *agency* itself, yet the several connotative layers the word ‘desire’ incorporates are not to be discarded altogether. Desire is itself a product of urgency; it implies an unstopability distinct from any ethical, moral or political system of evaluation or repression. Desire in all its forms of expression is provocative: its display of urgency without boundary is both alarming and exciting. Its connotations address even the most prosaic levels of unconscious urging,

generating an enticing struggle between restraint and indulgent submission that not only directly inspires works of art but also the modes in which these creations operate. By placing the focus on the overarching or underlying tendencies that are expressed by matter in its operative mode as a medium, I can examine these desires.

What the medium desires cannot be discovered through traditional means of investigation, such as constructing classifications or examining individual cases, but neither are these needed. In its interaction with the human sensorium, a visual medium must be seen in order to operate, while an audible medium must be heard in order to prove its existence. These types of generalities are a starting point for exploration. To circumvent the definitional problems of desire as a quality of the developed mind, we need to broaden the level of the discussion to incorporate population thinking. **Population thinking** is neither about single cases, nor is it a system of categorisation: it is the opposite. It deals with tendencies that incorporate all interactions, whether social, environmental or psychological. As philosopher Manuel DeLanda remarks: ‘In short, for population thinkers, only the variation is real, and the ideal type [...] is a mere shadow.’<sup>5</sup>

5. Manuel DeLanda, ‘Virtual Environments and the Emergence of Synthetic Reason’, in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 793-815.

**Desire** is a mode of existence that strives for its own autonomy and emergence without a foundational point of departure or a teleological destination. Based on this definition, it should be possible to measure the tendencies and drives that interact between the human and the **nonhuman**. Psychoanalyst Félix Guattari explains the concept of desire as ‘everything that exists *before* the opposition between subject and object, *before* representation and production’.<sup>6</sup> The concept of desire depends on its incapacity to be fulfilled. In the synthesis of a work, a surplus is generated that is more than can be anticipated or measured on the basis of the sum of the elements. This is a desire of plenitude. Deleuze and Guattari add: ‘There isn’t a desire for power; it is power itself that is desire. Not a desire-lack, but desire as a plenitude, exercise, and functioning, even in the most subaltern of workers.’<sup>7</sup>

6. Félix Guattari, ‘A Liberation of Desire’, in *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985* (Los

Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p. 142. He continues: ‘It’s everything whereby the world and affects constitute us outside of ourselves, in spite of ourselves. It’s everything that overflows from us. That’s why we define it as flow. [...] [W]e speak of machines, of “desiring-machines”, in order to indicate that there is as yet no question here of “structure” – that is, of any subjective position, objective redundancy, or coordinates of reference. Machines arrange and connect flows. They do not recognize distinctions between persons, organs, material flows, and semiotic flows.’

7. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, transl. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 56. ‘Being an assemblage [agencement], desire is precisely one with the gears and the components of the machine, one with the power of the machine. And the desire that someone has for power is only his fascination with these gears, his desire to make certain of [sic] these gears go into operation, to be himself one of these gears—or, for want of anything better, to be the material treated by these gears, a material that is a gear in its own way.’

In my interpretation, a desire of plenitude is produced continuously and therefore has no predetermined dimensions. This perspective opposes the Lacanian notion of a desire of lack, in which desire emerges as the surplus produced by the articulation of need in demand, thus suggesting that either or both terms are quantifiable.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, defining a desire of lack hinges on a type of correlational anthropocentrism that is not helpful to my explorations because it centres on a difference between conscious and unconscious drives. This would not provide a good starting point for the obvious reason that when dealing with matter, any level of consciousness is very hard if not impossible to assess. Furthermore, the desire of lack is based on a highly individual set of definitions, whereas the desire of the medium has to be addressed from the perspective of population thinking. Still, there are grounds for occasionally using Lacan’s interpretation of the Freudian concept of desire, as I will demonstrate. Feminist philosopher Karen Barad’s strategy in formulating a new framework for negotiating the ‘established’ realms of science, nature and, ultimately, life itself (which she named **agential realism**), specifically includes the need to establish a starting point which is both in between the human–nonhuman as well as locally embodied. Barad’s framework rests on four premises, the first two of which interest me most. To cite Barad: ‘**Agential realism** grounds and situates knowledge claims in local experiences: objectivity is literally embodied.’ And secondly, ‘**Agential realism** privileges neither the material nor the cultural: the apparatus of bodily production is material–cultural, and so is agential reality.’<sup>9</sup> It would be a critical error to disregard or to undervalue ‘the human element’ in these negotiations, since that would consti-

tute reverse privileging. The search for immanent desire requires the recognition of a flat ontology, with an occasional need for what political theorist Jane Bennett would call ‘strategic anthropomorphism’.<sup>10</sup> As theorist Ben Woodward remarks: ‘Bennett seeks to highlight the kinds of physical and energetic materiality shared between kinds of being instead of arguing for a fundamental separateness between beings.’<sup>11</sup>

8. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006). In chapter 24, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’, Lacan remarks that ‘desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second’, pp. 575-585.
9. Karen Barad, ‘Meeting the Universe Halfway’, in *Feminism, Science and the Philosophy of Science*, eds L.H. Nelson and J. Nelson (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 179-180.
10. Jane Bennett, Introduction to *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 10.
11. Ben Woodward, ‘Schellingian Thought for Ecological Politics’, in *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* (Vol. 2013.2: *Ontological Anarché: Beyond Materialism and Idealism*), p. 89.

Indeed, much needs to be said about the effects and workings of the area defined by the relationship between the artist or designer, the matter with which they collaborate and the **assemblage** they form, both in terms of direct collaboration with or within media, and at the level of metadesign; in other words, the assembly of environments of autonomous and applied design. It is a **double bond**: the recursive bond between theory and practice, which calls for the urgency of constructing and conceptualising new types of education in this field. Through my experiences as an educator in art and design schools, I am informed by ongoing discussions regarding the role of this type of school within a rapidly changing media and social setting, and the consequences of the latter on curriculum and general organisation. Much of the reasoning in this type of environment is based on outdated pillars of validation such as the dualisms of ‘specialisation versus generalisation’, ‘fine art versus design’, ‘academic versus professional development’ or ‘theory versus practice’.

However, the implications of the question ‘What is the desire of the medium?’ are much wider. By setting both human and non-human actors on the same footing, we are forced to step away from anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. The ‘collaboration’ between humans and matter is predominantly seen through the lenses of anthropocentrism and hylomorphism, causing developments in the discourse to take a narrow, single-track route.<sup>12</sup> Since

both play a major role in understanding the nature and history of art, this position automatically introduces a certain degree of friction. This friction is part of the quest for an answer to the question itself, but perhaps even more important than an answer is the discussion of the existence and justification for the exceptional position humans believe they are entitled to. Little argument is required to support the thesis that human beings are responsible for the most devastating problems on earth. Seen in this light, this book is also a clear cry for a more sensible approach to the uses and abuses of the powers invested in humanity. The best place to develop an alternative outlook is, of course, in education. However, to be clear, this is not a text on pedagogy, although it does draw on experiments performed within education. Neither is it a manual on the practice of education, yet it aspires to educate some of the educators. If this book calls for anything, it is for a **pedagogy of the senses**, a term used by both media theorist Marshal McLuhan and Gilles Deleuze.<sup>13</sup>

The search for the desire of the medium is a conceptual framework formulated in order to open discussion into new modes of considering human–nonhuman interactions in design processes – including the design of these very processes. Its goal is to encourage the introduction of a different paradigm, one that could encourage a better understanding of the role of art and design in society. Rather than replacing one arborescent structure (the aforementioned pillars) with another, it might be wiser to approach these matters from a **rhizomatic** point of view.<sup>14</sup> Alternative ways of thinking about the structure of design education can contribute to the development of new modes of dealing with the immense economic, environmental, geopolitical and anthropological problems the world faces. Anthropocentric thinking has produced most of these problems. As I will argue, art is not about politics, art is politics, just as design is economics and economics is politics. In general, it is my conviction that we need to focus on precision and quality rather than on development and growth; these principles need to be at the core of art and design education. As mentioned above, this research aspires to offer a theoretical framework that can contribute to this discourse rather than to produce a set of practical applications. The ‘voice of the medium’ is key in this process, and therefore it is time to ask again: ‘What is the desire of the medium?’ This question, however,

has no conclusive answer. Instead, the question itself becomes a rhetorical and recursive starting point for addressing an interplay in which both human and nonhuman actors contribute to the creation of something new that is different from the sum of its parts.

12. Hylomorphism is a philosophic argument developed by Aristotle, in which he distinguishes between soul and body in the same way as between form and matter. Aristotle regards a soul as being that which makes a living thing alive, assuming that there is a distinction between body and soul (dichotomy of man).
13. Marshall McLuhan, *Report on Project in Understanding New Media* (Washington, DC: National Association of Educational Broadcasters, 1960), and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1964). See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York: Continuum, [1968] 2012).
14. The rhizome is a model constructed by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze to describe cultural organisation that resists the mode of root-tree system thinking in which chronology and causality prevail in the quest for the genesis of ‘things’. Rhizomatic thinking presents culture and history as a type of cartography with no single origin or evolution; a rhizome ‘ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles’. A rhizome has no end or beginning, it is always the ‘in between-ness’ that characterises its existence. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia 2*, foreword and translation by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1980] 1987) (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 8.

## AFFECT THEORY

Although this research has its origins in Deleuzian scholarship, it departs from what is currently referred to as the ‘affective turn’.

**Affect theory** is a way of understanding domains of experience that fall outside (or refuse to fall within) the paradigm of representation. These experiences are coextensive with our mental and bodily experiences yet are not reducible to them, and, as such, do not depend on any signifying instrument. Experience is never of something, rather it is something in itself and, as such, irreducible to what we call ‘lived experience’. Affects cause auto-responses in the body and thus circumvent consciousness. Philosopher and radical empiricist Brian Massumi argues that ‘thought lags behind itself. It can never catch up with its own beginnings. [...] All awareness emerges from a nonconscious thought-o-genic lapse indistinguishable from movements of matter.’<sup>15</sup> Affect is a threshold experience, a conceivable transition in everyday life, in which it is inevitably embodied. Brian Massumi stresses the often-neglected importance of movement and sensation in cultural constructions and in our interactions with (the) real and virtual worlds. Especially in the context of new media art and technology, the focus needs to shift from the categorisation of

object-related properties to the experience of movement and interrelations between the senses. Massumi urges that any theory of media or culture must take **affect** into account. The significance of the structuralist signifier needs to give way to an ‘**asignifying philosophy of affect**’.<sup>16</sup> Instead of creating a false duality between intensity and signification, we need to regard both as operants that can act directly. This means that in order for something to act, it does not have to signify anything in order to be significant, which is exactly what affect means. Philosopher Baruch Spinoza considered ‘affecting’ and ‘affected’ as being one force, drawing affect closer to proto-action.<sup>17</sup> Proto-action can be seen as the aptitude for creating a capacity for affective interaction, for aligning an affording constellation that allows for singularity. Architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter describes singularity as ‘those critical points or moments within a system when its qualities and not just its quantities undergo a fundamental change’.<sup>18</sup> Proto-action is the state before this threshold experience; singularity is a threshold experience.

15. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 195.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
17. Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, transl. Edwin M. Curley (Princeton and Chichester: Princeton University Press, [1677] 1994), p. 154.
18. Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 13.

**Affect theory** is not a crystallised and stable ‘construction’. Various perspectives derive from a wide spectrum of interests and purposes and span a variety of academic fields.<sup>19</sup> My research has been based on the integration of theory and practice, the configuration I find most important, and which in my view is essential for a true understanding of affect theory (and its philosophical and theoretical background). The discourse on affect is an intrinsic part of research into the ways in which contemporary political, cultural and economic transformations and their ramifications in the social domain operate.<sup>20</sup> Affect theory can be situated alongside the discourse of **new materialism**, which advocates the conceptualisation of interchange and fluctuation in between the realms of nature and culture, and thus dismantles or deterritorialises former distinctions between these realms.<sup>21</sup> This results in the claim that nature and culture are always ‘**naturecultures**’ since the mind is always material, which resonates strongly with the aforementioned **agential realism**.<sup>22</sup> In

this specific construct, the mind is an idea of the body, and matter is unavoidably something of the mind – the mind has the body as its object. This forms one of the premises of my research: the mind has no dominance over matter; the mind is not ‘detachable’ from matter and therefore cannot produce anything that is not part of this connection. This implies that there cannot be any transcendental entity or order outside this connection, yet there is a part of reality that exists only as potential: the virtual. Since the dominance of mind over matter has governed the academic discourse for many centuries, it is paramount to work on the emancipation of matter. Under the lead of new materialist thought, matter is said to be rapidly losing its unwilling characteristic.<sup>23</sup> It seems that matter is slowly being freed from its impotence to express desires and act upon them. Desires emerge unconsciously; they circumvent any conscious intervention and resist obedience to the mind. Matter itself acts in very physical ways; it shows a remarkable autonomous agency, which political theorist Jane Bennett describes as ‘the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own’.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective we might ask ourselves in what way the body expresses its own desires rather than those of the mind. Desires are not obedient to the mind and thus are able to interact with matter directly, unhindered by any conscious intervention. Matter needs to be seen through the lens of **population thinking**, which is not about the individual but about tendencies. For example, dust does not settle in very busy places but lies instead in the tranquillity of a forgotten corner or an out-of-the-way spot. Dust, as a system, is not compatible with action. But dust does not exist as an entity; dust is already a body composed of many types of organic and inorganic elements. There is no ‘individual dust’, and if I address a medium or a human in this text, it is always from this same perspective. As a first step to make way for a slightly higher level of abstraction, art historian W.J.T. Mitchell makes a plea for the ‘recognition’ of the will of images when he writes: ‘Images are like living organisms; living organisms are best described as things that have desires (for example, appetites, needs, demands, drives); therefore, the question of what pictures *want* is inevitable.’<sup>25</sup> Despite my objections to using an anthropomorphic analogy, it is my belief

that this line of thought sets course towards a more refined discourse on the desire of the medium. I would prefer to treat this as a temporary, perhaps intermediate stage for developing new vocabulary.<sup>26</sup> This vocabulary is still in development, which has led me to include some key terms in the Glossary, which will facilitate the comprehension of this text.

19. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg first made an attempt to distinguish the different theoretical angles of this discourse in their book *The Affect Theory Reader*. More recently (October 2015), Seigworth organised the ‘Affect Theory Conference, Worldings-Tensions-Futures’ to take a renewed inventory of the international perspectives currently developing on affect theory. See Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
20. See Michael Hardt, Foreword to Patricia Tincineto Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. ix-xiii. ‘The challenge of the perspective of the affects resides primarily in the synthesis it requires. This is, in the first place, because affects refer equally to the body and the mind; and, in the second, because they involve both reason and the passions. Affects require us, as the term suggests, to enter the realm of causality, but they offer a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers.’
21. Both affect theory and new materialism are platforms for several reinterpretations of the (supposed) culture-nature schism. Therefore they form a strong meeting point for the ongoing development and expansion of queer theory. Although it is not specifically addressed in this text because of its anthropocentric character, this research has been informed by parts of the discourse on queer theory and philosophy.
22. Naturecultures is a term coined by Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).
23. In relation to media theory, there are three points of interest that could be seen as a temporary definition of new materialist thinking within the realm of media theory. Theorist Jussi Parikka has formulated them in the following manner:
  - 1) The seemingly immaterial is embedded in wide material networks; information is pervaded by the existence of material networks, practices and various entanglements that include not only the materiality of the political economy of ownership, access and use, but also the material assemblages that govern the way we act in media milieus.
  - 2) Technical media is also defined by non-object-based materialities, which makes it slightly more difficult to conceptualise. As a regime of electromagnetic fields, of pulsations, electricity, and such fields as software, technical media and digital culture escape the language of solids.
  - 3) The intimate connection between the dynamic human/animal body and media tech, which since the nineteenth century and for example experimental psychology labs has now extended to the various design practices in HCI and such that tap into the physiological thresholds of the human being in novel ways – hence the interest in affect, emotion, non-conscious and somatic levels of the human body, and emergence of various forms of interfacing. Taken from the opening words spoken by Milla Tiainen and Jussi Parikka at the *New Materialisms and Digital Culture Conference*, Anglia Ruskin University, 21-22 June 2010. See ‘What is New Materialism’, <http://machinology.blogspot.nl/2010/06/what-is-new-materialism-opening-words.html> [accessed 25 July 2016], and Rick Dolphijn and Iris Van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University

- Library, Open Humanities Press, 2012).
24. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. viii.
  25. Thomas Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 11.
  26. Political and social theorist Diana Coole remarks: 'It is this chasm – between touching and touched, activity and passivity, phenomenal and objective being – that grants the body its capacity for "double sensation" and which opens it onto a world or, to express it more ontologically, this is Being, flesh, existence, opening itself to contingency, meaning, and self-transformation; a hollowing out whereby interiority, dimensionality, and productive differentiation occur.' See Diana Coole, 'The Inertia of Matter and the Generativity of Flesh', in *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 107.

## ON REPRESENTATION

To complicate things, I use the term 'pedagogy' in a very specific sense. As I mentioned earlier, in order to unlock the potential inherent in my topic, it is imperative to avoid a focus on 'belonging to', which exemplifies representational thinking. Pedagogy, in the traditional sense, includes a methodology of transfer that relies a great deal on representation to be effective, which is why I believe we can only use pedagogy in its most *inessential* way: in other words, learning needs to be enabled by direct experience, allowing for a multitude of outcomes, rather than geared towards a predefined result. Obviously this type of learning encounters many practical obstacles, yet under the right conditions it is possible to actually facilitate this type of learning within a traditional learning framework, such as a university or art school. This type of learning is called a **pedagogy of the senses**, which I referred to earlier. Philosopher Inna Semetsky draws on the work of Brian Massumi when she explains that 'experience is not confined to a personal cogito of a Cartesian subject but represents an experiment with the enviroing world: we can, and should, learn from experience'.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, in the case studies included in this text, I will demonstrate that incorporating the domain of the virtual as a part of the real in the process of designing the actualised is not only helpful but will prove to be essential in the design of better futures. Because my line of argumentation rests heavily on the concept of direct experience, it is inevitable that I come into conflict with systems of representation. Yet one cannot simply be 'against' representation; I can only hope to express my difficulties with representational thinking.

27. Inna Semetsky, 'Deleuze as a Philosopher of Education: Affective Knowledge/Effective Learning', in *The European Legacy* 14, no. 4 (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 443-456. She continues: 'Experience is that quasi-objective milieu which provides us with the capacity to affect and to be affected; it is a-subjective and pre-personal.'

**Systems of representation dominate our worldviews through semantics, semiotics, symbolism and so on. It is my strong conviction that worldviews based on these systems cause many of the cultural, economic and ecological difficulties that we face. In order to change these outlooks, we need to change our ways of 'communicating' with the world, which in my view means abolishing the dominance of systems of representation. In order to do so, we need to examine three problems that are caused by systems of representation: a systemic collision between affect and representation, a layered distancing from the subject matter and an embedded set of beliefs.**

Let's begin with the last of these: the embedded set of beliefs. We encounter many strong convictions when addressing the issue of representation. Sharply defined semantic and semiotic constructs occupy vast stretches of conceptual terrain. Some of these concepts are so embedded in most disciplines that deal with the arts that they survive changing conditions rather well. This means that if the context does not fit the concept, it is easier to reinterpret the context than reject the concept. After all, allowing for temporal or geographical differentiation is no more than post-structuralism. In the arts, temporal shifts and changing localities can have a significant impact, probably more than in any other type of production, given that intentionally or otherwise, the arts reflect the contemporary scene. If we consider a contemporary work that is placed in a certain context, in a museum for instance, this act metaphorically places it in the realm of art history. In this context it acts as the 'aggressive' young newcomer, colliding with many of the other works and perhaps even with the context itself. Twenty years later (or even much sooner), this work will have become part of 'the context' and, in its turn, will be confronted by other, more recent 'aggressive' works. Therefore the boundaries between figure and ground and between subject and context are probably the most opaque and should not be ignored, even if one denounces the grounds for existence of modes of representation. Philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes' system of denotations and connotations provokes us to regard fashions as modes of transformation,

not as modes of transfiguration or deformation.<sup>28</sup> Philosopher Jacques Rancière's speculative hyperbole regarding the 'un-representable' forces us to discuss a painting in terms of its *gestalt value*, or lures us to pursue fundamental interpretations of its composition and constructions.<sup>29</sup> Yet there is much more than this to be gained from the encounter with an artwork. To put it bluntly, for me an oil painting is no more than oil on canvas, and whatever anyone reads into it is not my concern. The only thing I am interested in is to see what this painting *does*, how it provokes a transfer of values or opens up affective relations. I apply this same attitude to all media. My sole interest concerns their affective capacities, not their inherent properties or their respective place in any taxonomy or ontological setting. The most valuable position I can take is that of the embedded outsider, whose target is to steer the discourse as far as possible in the direction of capacities as opposed to properties, and away from the hegemony of semiotic orders.

28. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

29. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of Image* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 130-138.

The second problem, which is closely related to the previous difficulty, is caused by the systemic collision between a system that draws its strength from representational values and one that centres on affect. How can we find a common language to discuss two fundamentally incompatible positions? On the one hand there is the 'belief' in representation as the most portentous order for signification, drawing its meaning from a system of signs (the signifier and the signified) in order to affect. And on the other hand, we have the opposite system, which regards the affect itself as the significant element, without any intervention whatsoever from a representational system. This duality is certainly not a matter of a sliding scale of terms and positions, since we are not dealing with two propositions in a dialectic argument; moreover, the two positions reside in completely different realms. To draw an analogy: it is obvious that if the existence of a god is renounced, this instantly invalidates all discussion about which concept of a god would be most accurate, or what form of devotion most appropriate. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek claims that a state of true atheism can only be reached through stages of true religion, and perhaps the same goes for the belief in representation, or representational thinking in general.<sup>30</sup>

The last of the three aforementioned problems, is the issue of representation as a concept in itself: the dilemma of the reversal of *belonging to*. A representation can be seen as 'something that belongs to something else', which is not to be confused with 'something that constitutes something else'. It is a one-sided synecdoche, the *pars pro toto* without the *totum pro parte*. An aversion to representation is not only informed by the inclination to step away from anthropocentrism and its dominance over desire in the relationship between human and matter, it also refers to a much deeper-rooted belief that we have entered a new phase that describes future modes of existence much more adequately. American philosopher John D. Caputo argues that the 'overgrown faculty of categorization' is what philosophy calls modernity.<sup>31</sup> Modernism thinks in terms of unified systems in which everything has its place and its purpose, whereas postmodernism views the world as a web, an entanglement of forces in which there is no distinction between beginnings and endings, causes and effects or hierarchies of events. Jean-François Lyotard assigned postmodernism an 'incredulity toward meta-narratives'.<sup>32</sup> This belief reflects the hope that we are able to readjust the narrowing effects of modernity and recalibrate the overly expanding effects of postmodernity.<sup>33</sup>

It is essential to my research that I take the bold position of isolating thinking in terms of representation as a closed discourse that I will avoid, along with its divergencies: Identity, Narrative and Culture (INC). These divergencies can be found in both modernism and postmodernism, and it serves no purpose to express myself in terms of either one of these historical constructs. Rather, it seems wise to focus on questions that concern actions and not the properties of entities of any kind. I am not interested in what something *is* but in what it *does*. This does not mean that I ignore or undervalue other points of view. It is my strong belief that the current debate is hindered by modes of thinking that depend on the binary opposition of the universal towards the particular. What needs to be at the centre of this discourse is 'the difference that makes a difference', and this can only be found through action: action in both theory and practice, which is a third perspective that calls for pragmatism and relational thinking.

30. Slavoj Žižek: 'The only way really to be an atheist is through Christianity. Christianity is much more atheist than the usual atheism, which can claim there is no God and so on, but nonetheless it retains a certain trust in the Big Other. This Big Other can be

called natural necessity, evolution, or whatever. We humans are nonetheless reduced to a position within the harmonious whole of evolution, whatever, but the difficult thing to accept is again that there is no Big Other, no point of reference which guarantees meaning.' In *The Perverter's Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes (2013; New York: Zeitgeist Films).

31. Caputo summarises these positions thus: 'Difference is a buzz word for postmodernity just the way "universal" was for *modernity*, a word that I will use throughout to signify the Enlightenment, the age of Reason that first emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which subsequently shaped the contemporary world of science, technology and civil liberties. Universal is a modern motif, difference is a postmodern one.' John D. Caputo, *Truth: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 42.
32. Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 23-25.
33. Caputo, *Truth*, p. 4.

## ESTABLISHING REASONABLE DOUBT

As I said earlier, central to the argument I am setting forth here is the premise that the virtual and the actual are both real, and that there is nothing beyond them. The only way to describe any situation is to become one with that situation; any attempt to represent something will only lead to a new situation, and tell very little about the 'original'. These principles are interwoven throughout this book and, whenever possible, are exemplified, not by means of models (which would be representation) but by actual cases. The 'field work' of this research consists mainly of the programmes and studio work I have developed in educational establishments specialising in design and the arts. Most of this work has had pragmatic as well as theoretical components, the former determined by the requirements imposed by the various institutions in which I have taught. The programmes needed to serve well-defined and controllable goals; the standard was required to reach the expected level of study; the programmes had to be organised in a way that was accessible and feasible; and the results needed to be measurable and verifiable. In the course of this book I will introduce several of these programmes, either to clarify my arguments or to exemplify how the theory I present here could be put into practice. Certain experiments I have undertaken in educational institutions have enabled me to test the validity of a number of the concepts, which, in turn, have led to new stages in my research. Working with students in various fields of design (from architecture to cinema)

and the arts (from interactive installations to performances) has proved to be a solid testing ground.

As I have indicated, this search for the desire of the medium is not a quest with an predictable outcome, since it is obviously impossible for me to prove in any definitive way that the medium has a will or a desire. The perception of will is said to be a function of the developed mind alone, yet I find it unacceptable to make a fundamental distinction between the human species and the complexity of the world. It is an abstract separation that cannot be justified by centring on individual cases. Population thinking, in contrast, deals with tendencies that operate over a long period of time, which makes it erroneous to isolate our species as the focus of all interconnection with its milieu. This is what human exceptionalism and foundationalism presume to do, thus implying that even humanity's failure to create an environment to provide it with the necessary resources in a sustainable and non-disruptive way should be considered a tendency that best typifies the human race. Therefore it is my goal to cast at least a degree of reasonable doubt over the anthropocentric hegemony of desire. As I will argue, hylomorphic dominance over the discourse regarding the bond between the creator (artist/designer) and the created can only be overcome when creators are willing to regard themselves as being on the same ontological plane as the matter and medium they deal with. This bond needs to be created, and in order to make room for a new interpretation of how this can actually be done, the question that needs to be asked over and again is 'What is the desire of the medium?'



# 1. LIQUID FIELD: INTRODUCING THE WORKINGS OF THE GREY MOUSE

## THE BODILESS SHADOW

In order to explore something as intangible as ‘the desire of the medium’, I needed to construct some type of device to register any trace of its existence or movements. As I previously argued, it would be very hard to undisputedly claim to know anything about the desire of the medium, given that we are neither able to communicate directly with the subject nor establish any terms of measurement. In order to detect any of these traces, we need to focus on tendencies rather than on individual cases (**population thinking**). What is needed is some type of radar or sonar capable of detecting traces of the desire of the medium without singling out any specific case. To embody this abstract notion, I’ll draw upon a lecture delivered by Nat Chard at the *Plenitude & Emptiness* international symposium, during which he showed a stereoscopic image in which a shift of camera-angle had caused an object to ‘disappear’ but its shadow to remain.<sup>1</sup> This residual form perfectly exemplifies the concept I describe below: **the bodiless shadow**. This abstract effect introduces the concept of the Grey Mouse: a mouse-grey element that appears light against a dark background and dark against a lighter background. This element acquires its visual properties in relation to its setting without losing any of its capacities. It may seem ironic to introduce a metaphor at such a strategic point, having just made an extensive plea against thinking in terms of representation. However, although the mouse may be a metaphor, its affects certainly are not.<sup>2</sup> What it produces in this relationship can be detected as a shadow of its being, yet without it having a body to produce that shadow. Therefore my Grey Mouse can be seen as a placeholder for the desire of the medium, even if it is never replaced by an actual definition. For regardless of whether or not I find a proper and conclusive definition, the effects of the interplay between the mouse and

its background are very real (exteriority of relations). To this end, I will adapt a model used by social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai to create a specific framework. In so doing I am highlighting a premise that runs through this chapter: what I am looking for in this inquiry will never be directly visible. Instead, what I seek will always need something upon which to cast a shadow – a shadow that infers presence.

1. Nat Chard, 'Drawing Uncertainty', lecture presented at *Plenitude and Emptiness: Symposium on Architectural Research by Design*, Edinburgh, 4-6 October 2013.
2. Moreover, the mouse has been interpreted as one of the three embodiments of Satan, alongside the goat and the dragon! My mouse however, has no representational value whatsoever.

### DESCRIPTION BY PROXY

In his essay 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', Arjun Appadurai portrays a model of a complex, intertwined, yet (strategic) disjunctive global order.<sup>3</sup> He distinguishes five 'global cultural flows' that he claims compose the global cultural economy: *Ethnoscap*es (the migration of people across cultures and borders), *mediascap*es (media expression of our imagined world), *technoscap*es (cultural interactions due to the advance of technology), *finanscap*es (the flux capital across borders), and *ideoscap*es (the global flow of ideologies).<sup>4</sup>

I am aware that any system of categorisation is unavoidably accompanied by critical flaws. Firstly, such a system entices the user to put every component of the investigation into one of the defined categories, thus producing a form of anthropocentric reductionism (without even bringing to bear any of the affective arguments that deal with the abolition of the subject-object paradigm). Secondly, this act of categorisation, of constructing an exterior, suggests that the 'subject who is constructing the scheme' cannot be placed in that scheme, or, in other words, they possess objective exteriority. Hence, to create a scheme is to remove oneself from the equation. Despite these flaws, systems of categorisation are potentially helpful as long as we recognise that we only construct such systems in order to examine the unexaminable, and that we do so as a starting point because our topic of research falls outside existing classifications. In this way, we might begin to look for the shadows cast and the contrasts produced by the elusive object of our attention, our Grey Mouse, without ever being able, or needing, to look it direct-

ly in the eye. Categories therefore serve temporarily as a means of seeing what is currently unseen. In this context, the temporality of a system is always under question. As we can only see the subject through its encounter with its environment, and as the environment changes by definition, the system can never be arrested in time. This a-temporal mechanism is a means of revealing what I refer to as **the bodiless shadow**.

Therefore I propose to convert Appadurai's 'scapes' into four perspectives or 'modes of thought', distinguishing between **ethoscape** (affect), **ideoscape** (concept), **mediascape** (form of expression) and **technoscape** (form of content). The **Grey Mouse** is located in the middle of our chart of revised scapes: between affect, concept, expression and content. These *scapes* are each governed by one of the concepts introduced earlier. **Ethoscape** is connected to affect; **ideoscape** is dominated by assemblage. **Mediascape** and **technoscape** are two sides of the same coin: the first looks at the form of expression and the second examines the form of content, hence they both deal with asignification.

3. Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Theory Culture Society* 1990, 7, no. 295, DOI: 10.1177/026327690007002017.
4. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

**ethoscape** (*affect*)

**mediascape** (*expression*)



**ideoscape** (*concept*)

**technoscape** (*content*)

Figure 1. The Grey Mouse concept: A mouse-grey element appears light against a dark background and dark against a lighter background.

This element acquires its properties from its relation to its setting without losing any of its capacities. What it produces in this relationship can be detected as a 'shadow' of its being, without it ever having a body to produce that shadow.

Crucially, this adjustment to Appadurai's terms is not simply a refinement of the contents of the original categories, nor is it a transgression of any sort. Rather, it is an attempt to conduct research that not only responds directly to Appadurai's meta-construct itself but also allows, or perhaps even provokes, adaptation, indigenisation and appropriation. In the construction of these four 'scapologies', Appadurai departs from the multitude of recognised, seemingly open-ended presuppositions that condition discourse. For instance, he identifies multicore rather than singular power structures, such as authority, technology and ethnicity. This permits power balances to continuously shift within the scapes, making them behave more like fluid entities than fixed categories. Furthermore, he isolates agency as an instrument that also generates, modulates and shapes these scapes. The flexibility of his concept allows for a diversity of experience within and beyond its context. Therefore he sees identity or citizenship as a temporary outcome of intersecting scapes rather than as a presumed given. These differentiations do not arise from the simple subdivision of existing categories into scapes, but rather from the recognition that the disjunction between these categories is the reason for their existence. This is why I have 'shamelessly' left out Appadurai's fifth category, 'financescapes', given that, in the context of my quest, it serves no purpose to specifically address these, especially since my own view on the degree to which economics is integrated throughout the other scapes is far broader than Appadurai's. The flux of financial transactions and the power arising from these alone deserves a far more elaborate exposure than I could provide here; but even more importantly, the notion of finanscapes 'far from being too abstract, is not abstract enough' to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>5</sup> By temporarily placing elements in different settings we can zoom in on an element without losing the capacity to view the entire assemblage. For this we need to actively steer away from any individuation and remain operating on the level of **population thinking**. Therefore I speak of *a scape that is inherently plural*, as opposed to any specific scape or multitude of scapes used by Appadurai.

5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (New York: Continuum, 1980), p. 156.

## ETHNO- TO ETHO-SCAPE

In his scapes, Appadurai regularly displays an array of protagonists in a diverse range of examples, and it is easy to misinterpret his ethnoscape as an accumulation of identity-driven classifications (in other words, any grouping based on race, or national and cultural traditions). The actors in his circumstantial narrative are precisely those who intrinsically escape such classification. Appadurai defines the ethnoscape thus:

The landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons who constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.<sup>6</sup>

This does not mean that there is no inclination towards socio-cultural re-identification with the original homeland (sentiments of the type 'there are no "truer" Filipinos than those who live outside the Philippines'), but this is not the same as ethnicity. I want to unburden Appadurai's ethnoscares from these inherent points of reference, given that a point of origin is an essential criterion in order to classify as a tourist, immigrant or refugee. One has to migrate from one place to another in order to be defined a migrant, unlike the nomad, who has no point of origin but lives in 'the intermezzo' between two points.<sup>7</sup> The emphasis of this scape should be on its interrelations and not on geography, economy, race or language. This allows for the underlying agencies, desires and tendencies to become visible through 'the nomadic subject'. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti comments: 'The posthuman nomadic subject is materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded – it is firmly located somewhere, according to the radical immanence of the "politics of location". [...] It is a subject actualized by the relational vitality and elemental complexity that mark posthuman thought itself.'<sup>8</sup>

6. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 33.

7. Deleuze and Guattari are often referred to on this subject: 'The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a

direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo.' See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 380.

8. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 188.

We must look beyond the evidential existence of the ethnos to interpret the realm of post-anthropocentric interrelations.<sup>9</sup> Appadurai's intention is to delocalise and de-specify his protagonists: '[...] people, machinery, money, images and ideas now follow increasingly non-isomorphic paths', and the inability to escape their psycho-linguistic connotations is as much built in as in any structuralist position.<sup>10</sup> By changing ethnoscape to **ethnoscape**, a crucial modification can be achieved without losing some of ethnoscape's stronger capacities (interrelations, fluidity), while attaching many more. Ethos is self-referential; ethnos is not. This vital transition enables a connection with the post-anthropocentric discourse on cultural becoming, without losing its qualities as part of Appadurai's scapes.

9. Braidotti remarks: 'The roar which lies on the other side of the urbane, civilized veneer that allows for bound identities and efficient social interaction is the Spinozist indicator of the raw cosmic energy that underscores the making of civilizations, societies and their subjects.' *Ibid.*, p. 55.

10. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 37.

The attractiveness of Appadurai's **mediascape** lies in the fact that he theorises the migration of images and people on the same plane; after all, a substantial part of the incentive to migrate is to literally follow one's dreams. Appadurai speaks of a two-part system: the system of production and distribution of media itself, 'and of the images of the world created by these media'.<sup>11</sup> The projected, created, enhanced and/or cognitively externalised and adjusted mental image that embodies the prospect of a better life is obviously blocking the objective evaluation of actual living; the criteria are externalised to an extent that can never be met in actuality. Envisioning better conditions (through the influence of the media) creates an appetite that cannot be satisfied, exactly because it is only an envisioning. Similarly, the American Dream has no actual point of reference; it draws its existence and presentation from what is called the *Urstaat*. Philosopher Joe Hughes explains:

The *Urstaat*, the 'subjective essence', is that which steps outside of the process of production in the form of a 'cerebral ideality', a principle of reflection, and 'gathers together' what came before and what came after. The entire genesis is therefore united in this cerebral ideality as its history.<sup>12</sup>

11. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

12. Joe Hughes, *Deleuze and the Genesis of Representation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 54.

The American dream is an 'ideality' fed by (media) events, transformed by new definitions, adopted by new participants and constantly vitalised by the image of itself, which inhibits the minds of those who aspire to experience it in its many projected shapes and expressions.<sup>13</sup> This twofold division provides us with an excellent pivoting point between more than one scape, with media (and the information carried by them in particular) as the hybridising entity. This entity is not without form or shape, but reluctant to take on any specific identity; in fact, it is unable to be identified by definition. Just as a mouse-grey element appears light against a dark grey background and dark against a lighter background, the **Grey Mouse** acquires its properties from its relation to the setting without losing any of its capacities. Appadurai continues: 'The lines between the "realistic" and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct "imagined" worlds.'<sup>14</sup>

13. Appadurai connects these realms by stating: 'What is more, both these realities as well as these fantasies now function on larger scales, as men and women from villages in India think not just of moving to Poona or Madras, but of moving to Dubai and Houston, and refugees from Sri Lanka find themselves in South India as well as Canada, just as the Hmong are driven to London as well as Philadelphia.' Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 34.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

In fact, Appadurai uses the notion of ethnoscaapes as a construct within **mediascapes**, provoking the remark that this leads to a nesting of scapes (ethno-media-ethno-etc.), which makes it impossible to distinguish them from the start. More or less the same applies to the alignment of the other scapes. It would, for instance, be very hard or even arbitrary to determine how to classify labour in terms of both ethno- and finanscape. Commodification of human resources automatically impacts financial streams as well as physical streams, in terms of goods, people, money, information, and so on. The emergence of the systematics of scapes also entails its own downfall: in order to strengthen the conceptual framework, more and more information has to be put into the system, making it increasingly unreliable.

The definition of **mediascape** I am proposing here tries to overcome these dilemmas by starting (and ending) in difference. I propose

to define **mediascape** as the definitional domicile of form of expression, expressing information that might also appear as a concept in the **ideoscape**, or as content in the **technoscape**, nesting all these scapes into a Klein bottle with dimensions in the virtual and actualised domain.<sup>15</sup> This concept of information should not be seen in the most restricted sense: the absence of information is also information, like the footprint in the sand, and so it can act dichotomously. When it appears here, it cannot be there, when it is there it has to have been here, and so on. By staying close to the notion of the **ethoscape** (aka affect), it becomes instantly clear where this would lead us: we would be evaluating information in its most nonessential but relational way, and therefore we would not reduce information to any of its appearances in one of the scapes. In fact, we would not even attempt to describe it in terms of any single value, but always based on the multitude of avatars it turns into when expressed in a particular scape: information as pure agency. Not the agency *of* something, but agency full stop. In the same way, concepts such as affect, percept and concept are proto-actions of affection, perception, conception, and so forth. The point of fixture lies in the concept of **metamedia**. This is not to be mistaken for cross-, inter-, trans- or multi-media. In all of these four categories, the particular media specifics are combined, connected and transposed to achieve a higher goal, to create a stronger degree of communication.

15. A Klein bottle is a one-sided surface with no boundaries, also known as a non-orientable surface or two-dimensional manifold.

## TWO OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

There are two obstacles to consider. The first is demonstrated by the system itself. Systems have the tendency to become totalising; every element needs to be able to be placed somewhere in the system, and if it does not fit, we create a miscellaneous category and thus make it part of the system. When Appadurai theorises on how media create a manifold and deeply intertwined view of the actual, the virtual and imagined worlds, his attention turns to what he refers to as ‘the master-narrative’, which embodies a great number of othernesses, such as rights, freedom, welfare and sovereignty. As I argued above, these othernesses are only accessible through the very same channels from which they arose (the synergy of the actual, virtual and imaginary), causing an

intrinsic gap between the desired and the achieved, which, in its turn, causes all types of mental and physical motion or activity. By bundling the othernesses under the master-narrative of Enlightenment, Appadurai creates room for alternative points of view without having to reposition one element due to repositioning another. Reinterpretations, divergences and the indigenisation of (elements of) these **ideoscapes** can manifest themselves locally without the obligation to be or to have previously been connected, or the need to be disconnected from the ‘original’ **ideoscape**. Appadurai’s key objective in developing his five dimensions of global cultural economy was to establish that globalisation is not the result of the expansion of a single core-centred capitalistic model. Instead he offers a model of localised adaptations of modernity that generate a variety of types of globalisation: new global modernity as a collection of local anomalies. The interaction between the scapes creates new and unpredictable socio-cultural arenas that follow non-isomorphic paths and temporalities causing a continuous field of destabilisation. Therefore it is remarkable that these fields are often clustered. **Technoscape** and **finanscape** are seen as the core of economic development and challenge; **ideoscape** and **mediascape** are the source of the creation and distribution of concepts, ideas, imaginings and images, and both sets are alternatively joined by **ethnoscape** as the connecting force. Any useful system should be a system that can only be regarded as a totality, as a force field between several elements with a strong gravitational pull. As soon as any element is isolated or goes missing, the whole system is rendered useless.

## ANTHROPOCENTRICITY

Another obstacle within Appadurai’s scapology is its anthropocentricity, or at least its anthropocentric tendency. It is not by chance that Braidotti’s interpretation of posthumanism has already been introduced in this context. To return firmly to media, let us examine Appadurai’s term **mediascape**. The central aim of Appadurai’s theory is to dislodge the Renaissance humanistic thinking that is central to the emergence of diasporic, nomadic and migrant socio-cultural fields, especially in relation to the projected and the imaginary. Recognising the limits of this mode of thought, Appadurai formulates

an agile terminology that is able to change perspective and to both re-contextualise and be re-contextualised. Of particular interest in this regard is the role of information seen as the gateway between the virtual and the actual, whereby the virtual is understood as the non-actualised part of reality, which is a fundamentally different understanding of the dichotomy between virtual reality and ‘the desert of the real’ expressed by philosopher Slavoj Žižek.<sup>16</sup> Appadurai expresses this concept through the term **mediascapes**, suggesting that the collective imagination leads or contributes to the emergence of a non-anthropocentric yet social force: ‘The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.’<sup>17</sup>

16. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 155.

17. Appadurai continues: ‘No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors.’ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 33.

Here the notion of imagination is raised, in the same manner as matter, to the level of the meta-individual (rather than the level of the intra-subjective).<sup>18</sup> The redefinition of **mediascape** that I propose here attempts to overcome these dilemmas by starting (and ending) in difference. **Mediascape** is understood here as the definitive domicile of forms of expression. It is in **mediascape** that information (which might also appear as a concept in the **ideoscape** or as content in the **technoscape**) resides, pulling all four scapes into the virtual and the actualised domain. Keeping in mind the notion of the **ethoscape** (or affect), this definition leads to an evaluation of information that ensures it is no longer reduced to an appearance in one of the scapes alone. In this way, information becomes pure agency, not the **agency of something, but agency full stop.**<sup>19</sup>

18. As literary critic N. Katherine Hayles notes: ‘Against [the] dream or nightmare of the body as information, what alternatives exist? We can see beyond this dream, I have argued, by attending to the material interfaces and technologies that make disembodiment such a powerful illusion. By adopting a double vision that looks simultaneously at the power of simulation and at the materialities that produce it, we can better understand the implications of articulating posthuman constructions together with embodied actualities.’ See: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*.

*Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 47.

19. Just as affect, percept, and concept are, to use Spinoza’s term, proto-actions of affection, perception, conception etc. Spinoza considered ‘affecting’ and ‘affected’ as one force, drawing affect closer to proto-action. Proto-action can be seen as the capacity to create space for affective interaction, for affording a constellation that allows for singularity.

Information, therefore, lies in the concept of **metamedia**. It is **metamedial** and, as I established earlier, should not be mistaken for cross-medial, inter-medial, trans-medial or multi-medial. The specific denotation of **metamedia** I use here draws on media theorist Lev Manovich’s description of **metamedia** as a field of new interactions between form and content in the field of emerging media, and the convergence of technology and medium.<sup>20</sup> Within this definition I would like to discuss a particular part of the **metamedia** system, namely the state that occurs when a certain concept, belief or idea is intensely present, to the extent that it dominates all other potential notions. This state of the ‘real virtual’, as opposed to virtual reality, saturates the mental-medium (the concept is often referred to in terms of highly volatile media, such as ‘it’s in the air’ or ‘out there in the ether’). This saturation is so heavy that it can only be expressed through a particular medium, or, to be more precise, the virtual begins to demand some form of expression. Its desire to be expressed has become immanent. At this point of saturation, the virtual, overflowing with concept, is left with no other option than to crystallise in some type of medium: medium as the extension of man (effect), medium as substrate (capacities), medium as concretised sensation (expression), medium as entity (form), medium as force (agency) or medium as relation (becoming). Here, the elusive **Grey Mouse** reappears; the expression of a concept through materialisation, but a materialisation conditioned by its surroundings and imminently affective.

20. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). This is a reversal of Marshall McLuhan’s conception of **metamedia** as the totalising effect of media. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 1964).

To provide an example in this light, we might now ask: what is the affective capacity of a medium like urban architecture? And what is the relationship between architecture as a materialisation of a saturated concept and that concept? Here I will reaffirm a statement I made earlier: the virtual and the actual are both real-

ity.<sup>21</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the relationship between the physical, the architecture of the tangible and the architecture of affect have often been seen from a flawed perspective.<sup>22</sup> Any research undertaken in which the initial premise was shaped by a perceived, fundamental difference between the architecture of the tangible and the architecture of affect has therefore been overlooking one potentially provocative condition. The appearance of both types of architecture in the same conceptual field generally demands that one be subservient to the other; it is presumed that since they are not of the same fabric they cannot be equally strong. The question for this research should be whether this definition, or even this way of defining media or types, actually belongs to a bygone intellectual era. The classical definitions of media typologies are based on properties attributed as a result of their intrinsic qualities; for example, photography is defined by the fact that it produces photographs; what cinematography produces is defined by the fact that it produces moving images. In the contemporary ecology of media there is, in contrast, a constant interaction between media: media negotiate, share values, mediate protocols. It would therefore be immediately more provocative to simply state that both types of architecture (i.e., architecture as tangible media and architecture as affective media) are equal. It is provocative to explore the idea that these two values are not mutually exclusive. In this context the architectural ‘product’, if you will, is therefore no longer a product at all, it is an event, a transaction caught somewhere between the tangible and the affective.

21. Brian Massumi notes: ‘My starting point is the basic Spinozian definition of affect, which is an “ability to affect or be affected”. Right off the bat, this cuts transversally across a persistent division, probably the most persistent division. Because the ability to affect and the ability to be affected are two facets of the same event... You start in the middle, as Deleuze always taught, with the dynamic unity of an event.’ Expanding on these two ‘facets’ Massumi notes: ‘One face is turned towards what you might be tempted to isolate as an object, the other towards what you might isolate as a subject. Here, they are two sides of the same coin. There is an affectation, and it is happening in-between. You start with the in-betweenness [sic]. No need to detour through well-rehearsed questions of philosophical foundations in order to cobble together a unity.’ Massumi interviewed by Joel McKim in ‘Micropolitics: Exploring Ethico-Aesthetics’, in *Inflexions: A Journal for Research-Creation*, no. 3 (October 2009).
22. Marc Boumeester, ‘Reconsidering Cinematic Mapping: Halfway Between Collected Subjectivity and Projective Mapping’, in *Urban Cinematics: Understanding Urban Phenomena through the Moving Image*, ed. by François Penz and Andong Lu (Chicago: Intellect Press, 2011).

## LIVING IN MEDIA

Amidst the current techno-social avalanche in which media transform into an amorphous, ubiquitous entity, it is perhaps not surprising to hear a cry for reconnection with the non-mediated, a desire for the lived incident. However, as noted above, the classical distinction between the lived and the mediated has become extremely opaque. If the act of relaying information has gained the same status as the production of information (tweet-retweet, post-repost), all incidents will be measured by one particular bandwidth, removing the fundamental gap between the lived and the mediated. Lev Manovich even claims that ‘in the 1990s-2000s “new media” was software driven content. Today software itself is “new media”, making it increasingly hard to connect or reconnect the distinction between content, the digital diaspora and the tangible’.<sup>23</sup>

23. Lev Manovich, message on Twitter (tweet), @manovich, 25 July 2016, 08:39.

Coupled with the collapse of models based on the separation of the tangible and the affective, or the agency of the individual, this transfer of essential values forces us to re-evaluate the position of the mediated in our society, and particularly the relationship between lived experience and media. As sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman notes in his description of what he terms ‘liquid modernity’:

Because today we don’t believe any more that the state of perfection may ever be reached – the change is here to stay. For the first time in our history, we are confronted with change as a permanent condition of human life. So we need to develop the ways of behavior, the ways of contact which are fit for living in this state of constant change.<sup>24</sup>

24. Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Value Dilemmas as a Challenge in the Practice and Concepts of Supervision and Coaching’, lecture at the ANSE-conference, 7 May 2004, Leiden, the Netherlands. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

In response we could (for the time being) adopt media theorist Mark Deuze’s concept of a life lived not ‘through’ but ‘in’ media. Here, the alterity of all that is physical is subjugated to our individual perception and assumed neutrality; the closest we might come to a ‘moment of objectivity’ is through an accumulation of all mediated notions. Mark Deuze explains: ‘The whole of the world and our lived experience in it can indeed be

seen as framed by, mitigated through, and made immediate by pervasive and ubiquitous media.<sup>25</sup>

25. Mark Deuze, *Media Works* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 12-13.

Within this condition we could (re)structure the interdependencies that traditionally appear to have existed between the production and representation in and of moving imagery and urban conditions. We might also address the relationship between the individual seen from the perspective of **population thinking** and our means of engagement with a particular condition. This differentiation appears subtle and perhaps insignificant, but this depends entirely on what we want to address. Just as the *dérive* was not about finding reality, *Kino-Pravda* was not about finding truth: both were a means of collecting or selecting.<sup>26</sup> In both *Kino-Pravda* and the *dérive*, the (individual) player created a private ‘game’ with the city as its game board, and in doing so abandoned all notions of objectivity.<sup>27</sup> A new approach, a dismantling of the ‘artistic tower of Babel’ to quote Vertov, seems necessary here to accommodate the collapse of distances between investigator and the investigated, whether it be the heroic cameraman or the meandering intellectual and the old city, and to address the re-attuned relationship between the virtual and the actual.<sup>28</sup> As a tactical device, the *dérive* or drift was constructed to engage the discourse on social and cultural modernist conditions by re-proposing a condition of ‘representational space’ (as opposed to – using Lefebvre’s terms here – a condition of the ‘representation of space’).<sup>29</sup> By aligning such techniques with methodologies developed and used by filmmakers in the decennia after Guy Debord and the Situationists, we might start to discover a means to map socio-spatial-cultural-economic conditions in contemporary urban settings using moving imagery.

26. *Dérive*: the exploration of urban landscapes fuelled by aesthetic instinct. *Kino Pravda* (film truth): a concept promoted by filmmaker Dziga Vertov to capture fragments of actuality with the film camera, which – after editing – would reveal deeper layers of truth than could be seen without the intervention of the camera and the system of montage.

27. Sociologist Scott Lash comments: “The response to domination through interactivity is the “interpassivity” of drifting. In the hegemonic order, we challenge power through contesting domination through discursive argument. Or through symbolic struggles. To *dérive* is to do none of the above. It is to slip out. It is strategy through movement. See Scott Lash, ‘Power after Hegemony: Cultural Studies in Mutation?’, in *Theory, Culture & Society* (London: Sage Journals, no. 24, May 2007), pp. 55-78.

Ahmet Polat





**Ahmet Polat seems to say with his photography: 'Forget about me, let's talk about you.' The intimacy he creates is as genuine as it is deceitful, just as 'impossible' as smoking in water. After all, in order to get that close to the subject matter and be able to capture such delicate and tender openness, the photographer must have some way of becoming 'invisible'. Here, the camera functions as the great magician, it takes over the responsibility of the here and now for all the actors in this interplay. This disguises the photographer beautifully and enables him to get close enough to see into his subjects' inner worlds. Lisa Henderson describes this as a strategy that is not necessarily premeditated, but a strategic mix of conscious and unconscious tactics for entering circles that are not meant to be entered.<sup>1</sup> Still, this is a mutual understanding, a triangular love affair between photographer, medium and subject. The medium is both the cause and effect of the creation of a world that hovers between documentary and the 'photographic gaze'. Without the camera, these scenes would never have existed, since we would never have been able to see them in retrospect. But perhaps this is all too simply put. Susan Sontag remarked that**

**'photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention', and with all due respect to the 'strategic magic' that is produced in Polat's work, perhaps Sontag's observation is an even more crucial starting point." Regardless of the deceptive contradiction in this display of public intimacy, both the photographer and the medium use their aesthetic forces to pave the way for an open form of communication between the subject and the viewer. This is not a dialogue: the imagery undoubtedly accentuates the boundary between observer and observed; the information is flowing on one side only. Yet this does not entail a rupture in any way; on the contrary, the subject is portrayed in crystal clear fashion with no apparent intervention from either photographer or medium. Both have suppressed to the maximum their desire to manipulate, and instead have used their capacities to fabricate a (metaphorical) lens of the highest possible quality to capture the moments of accessibility allowed by the subjects in the photographs. Indeed, this is all about the subjects, even though the invitation, 'Let's talk about you', is extended by both the photographer and his medium through a strategic 'magic trick', used just to ease the process, but not to enable it.**

**Ahmet Polat**

**Ahmet Polat**

I. Lisa Henderson, 'Access and content in public photography', in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 275-287.

II. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 11.

When placed in the hands of Hiryczuk and Van Oevelen, photography becomes an instrument that produces new perspectives and architecture at the same time. The particular constructions with which they portray their subjects seem highly artificial: the axonometric perspective disables any visible vanishing points by representing three-dimensional objects in two dimensions. The work is embedded in a long history of traditional techniques used in cartography and architecture to display all three axes in the same scale, which is obviously impossible with a linear perspective. This isometric projection is a type of cartography in itself: rather than describing a scene as it is perceived, it tries to depict it in the most inclusive way, which, paradoxically, may steer away from objectivity.<sup>1</sup> Both the Bauhaus and De Stijl worked with axonometric drawings to create new visions of architecture and three-dimensional objects in general, and this type of projection is still a major instrument in architectural practice. The technique provides a great amount of information about a design: elements are made visible which otherwise would not be perceptible in the actual built construction. The downside is that this also creates problems when translating models into

real architecture.<sup>2</sup> Hiryczuk and Van Oevelen circumvent this cleverly by creating non-architecture, meaning the creation of an architectural expression in a medium other than architecture. Although not strictly axonometric (the curvatures found in natural forms such as humans and trees are highly resistant to axonometric deformation), their work produces architecture more than photography. The photographic medium is pushed to its limits by being forced to depict an unnatural type of perspective, while it is simultaneously used to provide the much-needed limitations of the frame to depict the scenes precisely. Since everything we see in the image physically exists (no tricks or digital manipulations were used), in order to create their architecture, the artists needed the desire of the photographic medium to limit the range of visibility. What we see is true architecture (the people who appear in the images were actually in that space), yet this space could not exist without the aid of the photographic medium. Within this estranging environment, the protagonists are occupied with ordinary activities – gardening and reading a book – as if nothing unusual was going on. We can almost sense the smile of the artists and the medium when we look closely.

Hiryczuk Van Oevelen

Hiryczuk Van Oevelen



I. See Andrej Radman and Marc Boumeester, '13th Venice Biennale of Architecture: Sensibility is Ground Zero', in *Legacy: The Delft School of Design [2002-2013]*, eds G. Bruyns and J. Schaap (Delft: Delft University Press, 2015), pp. 166-177.

II. See Chapter 3, 'IDEOSCAPE: Concepts, Assemblage, Desires and Pedagogy', paragraph 'Scale and the problem of conditional representation'.



Hiryczuk Van Oevelen

28. Sociologist Scott Lash comments: 'The response to domination through interactivity is the "interpassivity" of drifting. In the hegemonic order, we challenge power through contesting domination through discursive argument. Or through symbolic struggles. To *dérive* is to do none of the above. It is to slip out. It is strategy through movement. See Scott Lash, 'Power after Hegemony: Cultural Studies in Mutation?', in *Theory, Culture & Society* (London: Sage Journals, no. 24, May 2007), pp. 55-78.
29. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

### TAKE IT TO THE STREET

To give an example of such an approach, I will describe part of my research undertaken between 2004 and 2009 with small groups of postgraduate students at the Faculty of Architecture, Delft University of Technology.<sup>30</sup> This research took place in two stages. During the first stage, a group of students was asked to analyse sections of films to the point that the films began to 'disintegrate', in the sense that every single layer of sound, pure image, framing, montage, and so forth, was processed, counted, and translated into tables and graphics.<sup>31</sup> In effect, they had extracted the shadow and discarded the body. On the basis of this data they were asked to remake the clip using different subjects, in this case urban architecture (architecture into film). Secondly, the students were asked to remake the clip again by transforming it into an architectural form (film into architecture). This form was then cast in concrete and subsequently used as a central element in a short film dealing with architectural form itself. What these projects revealed was that not only were the results (the designs themselves) accomplished pieces of work, but also the students discovered that it was useful to be able to dive in and out of this bundle of data because it helped them keep control of the design process and its underlying and overarching philosophy. They were able to design a new body that had no direct reference to the original, yet had the same ontological intensity.

30. Parts of this research have been described in Deborah Hauptman ed., *The Body in Architecture* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2006), pp. 222-253; in François Penz and Andong Lu eds, *Urban Cinematics* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2011), pp. 239-256, and in Marc Boumeester, "'Camera Eye": Cinematic Studio Research into Architectural Practice', in *Architecture and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Publishers, 2015), pp. 87-104.
31. These (three minute) film clips were chosen from feature films made by Tarkovsky, Kubrick, Gandini, Sorrentino and others.

During the second stage, a second group of students were taught to intelligently produce moving images before being sent out to a site for which they had to conceive a design intervention. These

sites were specifically chosen on the basis of their social vulnerability and were often situated in hostile places around the world. On arrival they had two missions. The first was to systematically analyse the site by using a camera and by following a set of pre-determined instructions. The second mission was to make a short film about the affective quality and the affective capacity of the area and its inhabitants. This was neither to be a documentary nor an analysis but a sketch of the conditions they encountered. Upon their return, the students were asked to develop this short film alongside the design for the intervention. At the conclusion to the project they revealed the two results simultaneously during one presentation (sometimes there were more results on display, such as written reports about the survey, video-stills and photographs). By not distinguishing between the two pre-set media, the design of the film and the design of the architecture became one with the research, the affectivity, the social and political conditions, and so forth. In other words, they had started to create one bundle of information out of which several concrete media-products emerged; the various pieces were one and the same, different in shape yet iso-affective (of the same affectivity) alterities. We had created the **Grey Mouse** itself, making form and simultaneously casting shadows and forming contrasts in **mediascape**, **ideoscape** and **technoscape**; creating at once an architecture of affect and an architecture of tangibility.

## MISSION

The reconstruction of the aforementioned set of scapes is a first attempt to rethink Cartesian strategies and models for perception, conception and affection. The notion of the model itself is already vulnerable since there is neither input nor output, only throughput.<sup>32</sup> In its place, the process of research, concept, design and product should be conceived as one – a **metamedial** framework – a self-creating field of conceptual saturation in the realm of the virtual, ready to discharge and be concretised in the actual. Research by design by research. While these notions are not yet models, they will become so as they inform and are reflected in the organisation of the design process, and as the development and extrapolation of and through design projects feed back into this theoretical context. Hence this feedback loop alters not only the **mediascape** it may have evoked, but

also every other scape. To follow Félix Guattari:

The decisive factor, it seems to me, is the general inflexibility of social and psychological praxes - their failure to adapt - as well as a widespread incapacity to perceive the erroneousness of partitioning off the real into a number of separate fields. It is quite simply wrong to regard action on the psyche, the socius, and the environment as separate [...] we need to apprehend the world through the interchangeable lenses of the three ecologies.<sup>33</sup>

32. Massumi: 'The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential.' See Massumi, *Parables*, p. 30.

33. Félix Guattari, 'The Three Ecologies', in *New Formations*, no. 8 (Summer 1989), p. 28.

The practice of research (just as the theory of design) is not to be arrested and forced into any pre-given form or methodology. Rather, research through design, given its ability to equally address both the affective and the tangible, is the quintessential strategy for transforming methodological limit into essential heuristic ingenuity. The practice of design-led research means one can no longer think in terms of the specificity of a medium when looking at the affective capacity of that medium. Instead, as demonstrated above, one ought to explore the manner in which this affective capacity (agency) might be revealed. This capacity might not be stable, but it is certainly concrete. The highest achievable goal here is to craft an intertwined dynamic field that creates an impression in the **ethoscape**, **mediascape**, **ideoscape** and/or **technoscape**, aggregating **metamedial** thought directly into the actualised object. Like the object of the research just described, the research-by-design process itself is capable of casting a solid, if bodiless, shadow. In the search for this bodiless embodiment it is imperative to ask ourselves: 'What is the desire of the medium?'

## 2. ETHOSCAPE: AFFECTIVE AND INTENSIVE THINKING

On the basis of the ‘vectors’ and ‘coordinates’ presented in the introduction and chapter 1, this chapter aims to clarify the fundamental lines of thought that support the arguments in this text; its ‘logic’, if you will. The peculiarity of this logic is that it also serves as part of the argumentation, and thus it is impossible to establish a clear division between theory and empirical evidence. This work is not exposing a new world, but a different perspective, which shows the *existing* world in a truly new way.

I will now address the importance of the transition from extensive thinking to intensive thinking, a concept that is both an abstract framework and a practical mode of operation. The emphasis on direct experience that I express throughout this work might suppose a logical connection to the phenomenological discourse or ‘school’, yet there are several reasons why phenomenology does not address the same issues as the ones I deal with. I need to briefly clarify the differences, including alternative views on the concept of affect and a ‘declaration of solidarity’ with the posthuman discourse. Lastly, I will expose how affective and intensive thinking can replace Cartesianism and linear thinking, and support this by providing an example.

The central line of investigation in this chapter will be to examine the role of information as both the pivot in human–nonhuman interaction and between the virtual and the actualised. By placing the role of information against a specific background (the ethospace), I hope to clarify the notion that the way we perceive our world calls for a different approach to perceiving how we perceive our world. In my view, there are not two systems operating as is generally understood; that is, one system that describes how the other system works, but in fact only one operational system. The perception of *how* we perceive is the same as the perception of *what* we perceive. In other words, there is no way we can separate ourselves from ourselves: no absolute knowledge exists outside ourselves.

Since this widespread misconception may be due to an incomplete understanding of the virtual and the actual, this chapter will endeavour to illuminate the particular relation between them. As mentioned before, I define the ethospace as the landscape of human and nonhuman elements that constitute the world of post-anthropocentric interrelations, which is what we *are*. In the ethospace, the smallest measurable component of reality is that of the relation and its capacity to affect and be affected. The ethospace is thus substantial but not limited to the world that can be measured by physical instruments. It is the ‘totality’ of assemblages which contains everything, both the incorporeal virtual and the corporeal actualised.

## INTENSIVE THINKING

Most crucial to the understanding of intensive thinking is that it entails a constant readiness to engage in every situation (actualised or virtual) from within the milieu. That is to say, to regard *every* situation on the basis of its relation to others (its exteriority), rather than to emphasise its finite properties. This leads to a constant awareness of the assemblage one is part of, explicitly including the ‘observer’. Intensive thinking involves the fullest possible spectrum of sensory information, thus making way for total somaesthetic awareness, given that any experience reaches us through a multitude of sensory channels, including the non-actualised. Although I had been working with this concept for many years in practice, it was not until I became familiar with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze that I was able to connect my own voice to a wider discourse. This wholehearted engagement with other bodies (object, elements, life forms) in our surrounding environment means that we no longer speak of the experience *of* something (there is no external experience), but rather of experience *as being* something.

Intensive thinking can act as a method for initiating new approaches in artistic and design processes (including architecture), but it can also be a purely ‘sterile’ exercise, where a tangible outcome is neither sought nor necessary. All bodies behave differently in different assemblages, and all assemblages are in constant flux. Therefore, if the capacities of a body to interact with other bodies were to remain the same, the effect of these capacities

would vary depending on the assemblage. I claim that to truly understand even the simplest of bodies one would have to understand the whole universe. Intensive feeling can be taught through exercises, whereas intensive thinking needs a theoretical and philosophical context to be effective. The reason intensive thinking cannot rightly be called a ‘method’ is because of its own logic: every process is a complete, new assemblage. Thus any linearity and causality that has been detected in previous assemblages might or might not occur again. For this reason I would rather speak of a heuristic instrument than a method. The interlocking networks of capacities, actualisations and flows connect bodies at different strata and locations (non-local causality), and their precise workings and effects are never truly foreseeable (heuristics).

This process has a highly intertwined theoretical, analytical and pragmatic part. We can only detect what is needed if we know that we need to detect it, yet we cannot know what is needed until we detect it. This involves the entire spectrum of our bodily senses in the appreciation of our ‘milieu’. Philosopher Richard Shusterman proposed somaesthetics as ‘the critical, meliorative study of the experience and the use of one’s body as a locus sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning [...], devoted [also] to the knowledge, discourses and disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it’.<sup>1</sup>

1. Richard Shusterman, ‘Somaesthetics and Care of the Self, The Case of Foucault’, *The Monist*, no. 83 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 532-533.

These mechanisms are, for instance, very adequately described in the writings of Brian Massumi, specifically in his text, ‘The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation’.<sup>2</sup> It is paramount to understand these deliberations as part of a policy to become aware (and in control) of detecting flows (both actualised and virtual) as the most ‘real’ structure underlying our world. Despite our natural inclination to reduce reality to what is concrete, visible, tangible, and so forth, we need to adapt to another realm of sensibility. We can only become aware of the forces that act upon all processes if we try to distinguish strata that supersede and underlie the becoming of actualisation. I will return to intensive thinking as a pragmatic instrument later on in this chapter.

2. See ‘The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation’, in Massumi, *Parables*, pp. 68-88.

## OBJECTIONS TO PHENOMENOLOGY

It would be understandable to associate the proposed enhancement of the senses and the extrapolation of knowledge gained by sensory learning with phenomenological thinking, yet phenomenology rests in part on a set of assumptions that are not in line with intensive thinking (and affect theory in general). I will dedicate some words to this philosophy because of its resonance, but its false premises preclude it from my further explorations.

It is generally thought that the realm of the actualised is governed by the phenomena it produces, which address us at the level of sensory perception and result in a consciousness of experience that we could call a phenomenological approach. The fundamental proposition that experience is, or leads to a conscious perception brings me into conflict with phenomenological ontology and epistemology. Phenomenology deals with the edifice of experience that not only includes the realms of individual perception and thoughts, recollection and imagination, emotions and desires, but also the domains of corporeal awareness, embodiment and social motion. One of the founding fathers of phenomenology, philosopher Edmund Husserl, used the term ‘intentionality’ to indicate that our experience is exclusively directed by specific notions, ideas, thoughts, images and so on. This representational or ‘intentional’ relation with our surroundings through these modes of ‘legibility’ gives significance and content to our experience. These ‘intents’ are therefore different from the things they represent. There is a distinction made between the actualised, our somaesthetic perception of those elements, and our awareness of that perception itself. Intentionality connects the conscious with perception through a concept. According to Husserl, the appeal of phenomenological reasoning is obviously its return to the matter itself: ‘*Zurück zu den Sachen selbst*’, which steers away from the abstractions of science and the concept of impartial objectivity. Phenomenology allows for – is even based on – the concept of subjectivity, making ‘*die Sache*’ (the thing) and its unique exchanges with its place the germane focus (and not ‘*die Sache*’ itself). Unlike classical empiricism, which supposes that all knowledge comes from experience, phenomenology leaves room for a non-causal epistemology. Phenomenology is distinctly different from the Cartesian systems of analysis, in which the world is divided in objects, sets of objects and objects interacting with one another.

er. The notion *Dasein* was central for Heidegger, and as such could be helpful in the context of my investigation. Philosophy scholar David Woodruff Smith explains: ‘We must distinguish beings from their being, and we begin our investigation of the meaning of being in our own case, examining our own existence in the activity of “Dasein” (that being whose being is in each case my own).’<sup>3</sup> Smith reports that Heidegger saw phenomenology resolve into a ‘fundamental ontology’.<sup>4</sup>

3. He continues: ‘For Heidegger, we and our activities are always “in the world”, our being is being-in-the-world, so we do not study our activities by bracketing the world, rather we interpret our activities and the meaning things have for us by looking to our contextual relations to things in the world.’ See David Woodruff Smith, ‘Phenomenology’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2011 edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/phenomenology/> [accessed 25 July 2016].
4. Ibid.

What makes it impossible for me to work from a phenomenological perspective is a threefold set of obstructions. First and foremost, there is the issue of consciousness as the unique mode of gaining awareness of experience, knowledge of experience and the epistemology of experience. As I stated earlier, I believe that experience is not *of* something, but rather it *is* something: there is no need or even reason to regard consciousness as the instrument for qualifying experience. The psychologist J.J. Gibson argues that perception is direct, unmediated by instruments of cognition or rational thought, and therefore the antagonistic mind/body dualism is rendered obsolete. Rather, he claims, it is the constantly situated immanence that provides a recursive continuum of interactions between the perceiver and the environment. The mind is not the sole instrument for registering and making sense of experiences; in fact, there is no such thing as a mind in isolation. Experience is a continual feedback loop system that learns, gains, grows and adds to the understanding of the experience, and to the understanding of itself and its environment. This means that the environment also ‘learns’ from that experience. This process can be regarded as an ecological system in which both the perceiver and the perceived supply this reciprocal ‘perceive-ability’. This ‘opportunity for action’ is also known as affordance. Central to this position is the fundamental shift from the anthropocentric supremacy of experience through some type of consciousness to a nonhuman, multi-channelled ‘non-understanding’ of experience. This shift counters

the concept that sensory involvement is merely an instrument of information transferal and re-establishes somaesthetic experience as a self-standing and self-referential entity. A change of this kind from the ego-logic domain to an open ecological system is a movement that phenomenology does not provide – and hence my second reason for rejecting its logic.

My third and final argument for seeking models other than phenomenology is the latter's reliance on the division between human (and other sentient creatures') mental and physical properties. The Cartesian duality, wherein the separation between mind and matter is either fundamental (complete division) or derivative (permeable division) is inaccurate. Under the reign of affect theory, properties are secondary to capacities; therefore any division on the basis of properties is inadequate. Yet to adopt a monistic view would not serve either: I have already indicated that the central premise of my argument is that the realm of the virtual and the realm of the actual have the same origins. The mind is the invention of the body and vice versa. To underscore this, let me refer to a much-quoted paragraph from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body.<sup>5</sup>

5. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 257.

Knowledge is based on relations: we simply cannot tell what something is until we know what it can do with something else, including ourselves. And this has nothing to do with the concept of consciousness, which is an essential criterion for the discipline of phenomenology. Philosopher Henri Bergson argues in his book *Matter and Memory* that the two major monistic schools, that of idealism and that of realism, overstate their propositions, and he shows that 'realism and idealism both go too far, that it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but in itself of another nature than they'.<sup>6</sup> Matter, according to Bergson, is 'an aggregate of "images"'. And by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*,

but less than that which the realist calls a *thing* – an existence placed halfway between the "thing" and the "representation".<sup>7</sup>

6. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, [1896] 2004), pp. vii-viii.

7. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

The relationship between mind and matter has been extended under the reign of the affective turn. According to psychodynamic psychotherapist Anna Gibbs, affect is often described as 'intricately involved in the human autonomic system and engaging an energetic dimension that impels or inhibits the body's capacities for action'.<sup>8</sup> Affect is a crucial part of the process of an organism's interaction with (natural or coded) stimuli. In the notes on his translation of Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*, political philosopher Brian Massumi summarises how we can define affect according to the authors' intent:

**AFFECT/AFFECTION** Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies).<sup>9</sup>

8. Anna Gibbs, 'After Affect', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 188.

9. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. xvii.

Within the discourse on affective theory, we can distinguish two major streams of thought. The first deals with affect in the way Deleuze proposed: affect is a-subjective and operates across many boundaries, whether organic or non-organic. Another approach was developed by personality psychologist Silvan Tomkins, which, in my view, is at best only partially useful.

Tomkins classified affect into nine categories. He believed that optimal mental health would be gained if positive affects were maximised and negative ones minimised. He distinguished the positive affects as: i) Enjoyment/Joy; ii) Interest/Excitement. Consequently, he isolated neutral affects: iii) Surprise/Startle; and finally negative affects: iv) Anger/Rage; v) Disgust; vi) Dismissal (reaction to bad

smell); vii) Distress/Anguish; viii) Fear/Terror; and ix) Shame/Humiliation. Although this theory has had a limited effect on the field of psychology as a whole, a number of scholars have been working with these notions to develop a personal interpretation of affect theory. The most striking difficulty with this classification is its anthropocentricity. As I have argued, we simply cannot start from the human subject in order to make sense of the world. Apart from this fundamental inadequacy, however, Tomkins does provide some interesting notions to take into consideration. Tomkins' affect involves states of emotions that are directly connected to the unconscious, leaving room to manoeuvre away from the dominance of the mind (idealist monism), while still remaining within the realm of the human. More importantly, Tomkins gives us the notion of 'affective resonance', indicating that affective tendencies people display can be contagious (someone laughs, making you laugh too). These tendencies can be in alignment with deeper primal drives, either giving priority to less forceful motivations, or in counter position, dampening stronger impulses. Affective resonance can be seen as a two-step accelerator: affects make good things better and bad things worse. These relational extensions of affect are very useful if regarded separately from Tomkins' nine-class division, and in my view they do not contradict Deleuze's position, making it worthwhile to include them in my set of definitions on affect. However, any a priori taxonomy of affects would disregard the workings of the creode, and it is this that makes Tomkins' classification unserviceable as a starting point in the context of my argument, yet nonetheless useful to bear in mind.

## EPIGENETICS

One of the premises in this book is the assumption that an outcome of becoming is never the product of a logical necessity, but contingently obligatory. This allows for the existence of 'multiple optima', meaning the possibility of different, yet equally important, outcomes being formed. Moreover, any outcome can only be established after its formation, never as a result of a predefined procedure. Evolutionary biologist and philosopher Conrad Waddington developed a metaphorical landscape to visualise the ways in which evolution progresses and 'takes turns'. He called it the 'epigenetic

landscape', and it provides an excellent metaphor for this presupposition.<sup>10</sup> His analogy consists of a number of marbles rolling down a hill. Each marble will 'compete' for the grooves on the slope, and eventually all will come to rest at the lowest point. The marble denotes a mutation in time and the grooves signify the number of options confronting the marbles in the 'progress' of evolution. The 'competition' between the marbles and the attraction of the different grooves would not only affect the outcome of the distribution, but also the landscape itself. Waddington used the term creode (also spelled chreod) to describe the pathway of the marbles, and it serves as an embodiment of the 'contingently obligatory' argument.

10. Conrad Waddington, *The Strategy of the Genes* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957).

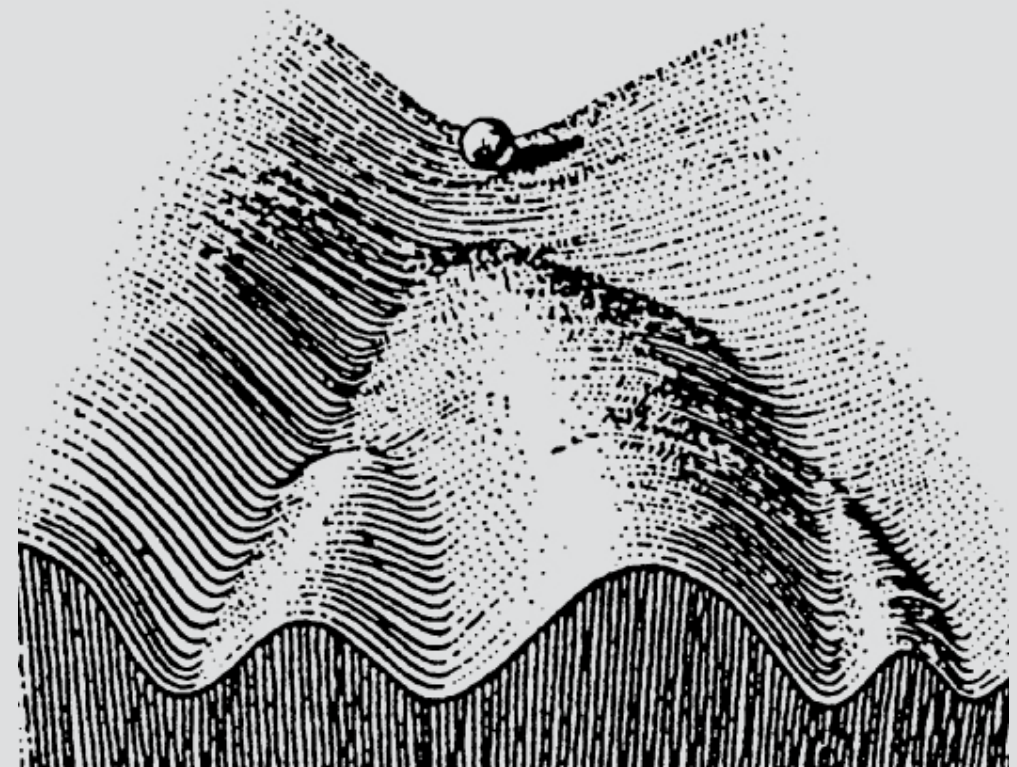


Figure 2. Conrad H. Waddington, *Epigenetic Landscape* (1957)

Within the anthropocentric domain, we could perhaps regard 'autonomous' drives (the need for food, sex, shelter, warmth and so on) as being the deep attractors in Waddington's epigenetic landscape and name them 'desires'.<sup>11</sup> We could take 'connected' drives

(such as interactions, stimuli, preferences) as specified forms of drives and call them ‘affects’. In that case (in relation to Waddington) affects can be seen as accelerators, as differences that make a difference, and desires can be seen as the strength of the attractions. The depth of the attractor is desire; the angle of elevation or decline is affect. This implies that although the outcomes of the ‘path of the marble’ are not predefined, they are nonetheless subject to a limited degree of freedom. In other words, there is no preset destination, but not everything is possible. To be able to experience these strata, to witness and engage with these flows in everyday life, is true intensive thinking.

11. These drives are closely related but not limited to the ‘4 Fs’ (fighting, fleeing, feeding and fornicating), considered in evolutionary biology as the elementary drives.

## POSTHUMANISM

This exploration is intrinsically informed by a critical view on humanism, which has afforded me a useful conceptual and critical framework. Most useful to me is posthumanism’s categorical break with the Renaissance humanist tradition, which sustains that the ‘human state’ is universal, rational and exercises free will.<sup>12</sup> According to Renaissance humanist theory, the human being exists in this state and is crafted as an autonomous pinnacle of presence in contrast to all other beings and entities. This view is changing, however, and posthumanism is an attempt to classify what could be the next phase. As Ihab Hassan remarks: ‘We need first to understand that the human form – including human desire and all its external representations – may be changing radically, and thus must be revised.’<sup>13</sup>

12. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

13. He continues: ‘We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call post-humanism.’ See Ihab Hassan, ‘Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes’, in *Georgia Review* 31, no. 4 (winter 1977), pp. 830-850.

The concept of human exceptionalism has conceived and enhanced many misconceptions; most crucial among them in this context is the concept of hylomorphism. Hylomorphism (also hylemorphism) is the notion that during the transformation of matter into form, a type of ‘soul giving’ is involved. This ensoulment has been regarded as the prerogative of the artist. Hylomorphism is

one of the methodologies that Gilbert Simondon opposed most strongly in his work. He accused hylomorphism of accentuating the presupposed prerequisites for interaction, in this case form and matter, rather than the real requirements for this process, such as metastability, information and energy. Philosopher Miguel de Beistegui elaborates:

Contrary to the claims of the Aristotelian, ‘hylemorphic’ model – a model born of a simple reductive interpretation of simple technological operations, such as the molding of a brick – the individual is not the result of a molding which, in a single blow as it were, provides a homogeneous and formless matter with its determinate form. Rather, it is a (temporal process) through which the crystalline form acts like a ‘recurrent germ of information’ in a medium already rife with singularities and energetic differences.<sup>14</sup>

14. Miguel de Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology* [Studies in Continental Thought] (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004).

The posthuman is a trope for a philosophical perspective that seeks to reconsider the human condition. The concept recognises imperfections, discord and systemic flaws in the unanimity of the human individual. As a result of this perspective, posthumanism crucially includes the potential to seamlessly shift perspectives and assume different identities in order to explore and understand how the world functions. The posthuman individual is not stable or singular but rather a conceptual embodiment of a multitude of beings. It is a being in ‘becoming’, unified in him/herself. This perspective provides a different and emerging ontology which leads to a multiple and heterogeneous worldview. It is for this reason that posthumanism rejects the notion of universal objectivity in favour of situated objectivity. Unsurprisingly, yet rather ironically, the discourse on the concept of posthumanism itself is also subject to an emerging ontology. Its main contributors, among them Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Manuel DeLanda and Steve Nichols, assume different positions on posthumanism vis-à-vis the human, and many interpretations of the ‘posthuman’ have produced contradictory ideas. Manuel DeLanda, an author who can be seen as a true advocate of posthumanism, even described the term itself as ‘very silly’.<sup>15</sup> Steve Nichols claimed in his 1988 *Posthuman Manifesto* that his generation was already posthuman, since they were radically different

from the previous one. This position seems not to have lost any of its impact, despite the change in generations. Probably best known is the interpretation of the posthuman discourse expressed in Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg', which she introduced in *A Cyborg Manifesto* in 1985.<sup>16</sup> In this work she critiques the traditional view of the cyborg. Haraway removes the sharp distinction between the human and the machine, which is clearly fading in light of the involvement of technological developments in our lives. Her concept of the cyborg has largely contributed to the development of the posthuman discourse.

15. Manuel DeLanda in conversation with Don Ihde, Casper Bruun Jensen, Jari Friis Jørgensen, Srikanth Mallavarapu, Eduardo Mendieta, John Mix, John Protevi, and Evan Selinger, '1000 Years of War', <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=383> [accessed 26 July 2016].
16. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991).

The taxonomy of posthumanism becomes more problematic if, for instance, we attempt to classify N. Katherine Hayles' publication *How We Became Posthuman*<sup>17</sup> and Robert Pepperell's *The Posthuman Condition*<sup>18</sup> under the same concept of posthumanism. The most important aspect of Hayles' work is her aversion to liberal humanism, which divorces the mind from the body – a division that leads to the conception of the body as a 'casing' for the mind. Liberal humanism has rapidly lost ground as the entire concept of the human body has come under increasing scrutiny due to the blurred demarcation between technology and humans, which in turn has prompted the need for a focus on embodiment in a broader perspective. However, Hayles sustains that information is 'disembodied', meaning that it is something that can never take the place of the human body as such; information must be embodied to have any effect.

17. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
18. Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition* (Bristol: Intellect Press, [1995] 2003).

It does not serve my purpose here to further examine the taxonomy and (potential) variations of the definition of posthuman. For me, the posthuman condition is an *Urstaat*, a condition that, to a large extent, I had to temporally put aside in order to understand modernity and human exceptionalism. There has never been a concept more alien to me than the assumption that humans have

some form of prerogative over other mammals, or indeed any creature at all.<sup>19</sup> At no point have I seen any proof of the superiority of humans on the basis of their acts or achievements. The feeble advantage that the analytical, so-called intelligent human mind theoretically offers has failed to develop into a true advantage. Ever since the dodo was rendered extinct in 1681 by human intervention (by Dutch colonists, in fact), it was obvious that it would only be a matter of time before the self-destructive forces which, sadly, best typify human nature would evolve into full-scale, conscious and systematic violence. This violence needs to be seen as the continuous human urge for achievement, and the subsequent subjugation of all other forces in order to fulfil this goal. I do not intend this only in a literal and/or direct way, I am also referring to the systematic way of thinking that describes, legitimises and informs the expression of these human urges and their effects. To clarify this, we can think of the literal effects as expressed in actions, and the systemic effects as expressed in concepts. For example, the game of football is a practical expression of the urge to win. The rules of football are a system focused on winning. Being a football supporter is a practical activity and being a football commentator is a systemic action that supports the bigger scheme of football as a system of winning or conquering opponents. Hence, any individual football match is part of a meta-football system. At some point these systems begin to 'bleed' into larger systems, such as the economy and politics, which in a certain way are all systems for conquering. This chain of asserting dominance has always been far more apparent to me than any notion of humanism, and this is why I find posthumanism completely logical and natural as an initial mode of understanding. I have always found this *Urstaat* more plausible than any other model for comprehending the human niche in the world. One could say that my perception of the posthuman condition is largely informed by a pessimistic view of the human contribution to the world. In this light it serves no purpose to engage in a discussion about the extension of the human body by means of technology, nor to question or enforce the blurring borders of human and technological enhancement or intervention (which could be called the 'true' cyborg argument). I propose taking the concept of posthumanism as a trope that is becoming less a trope and more a literal entity. From this perspective, the

posthuman is becoming less humanist and therefore more human, regardless of whether the human body is enhanced or extended in any technological sense. In the words of Hayles:

Whether or not interventions have been made on the body, new models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive science and artificial life imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components.<sup>20</sup>

19. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

20. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 4.

This notion of subjectification relates directly to the form of content. It is constructed yet emergent and thus not a matter of extending a determined body.<sup>21</sup> This viewpoint places the indeterminacy of interrelations, not interaction, as the starting point, since the latter presupposes the existence of already completed entities.

21. The term 'subjectification' refers to a philosophical notion coined by Michel Foucault. It entails the construction of the individual subject. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborated on the concept.

My reasoning implies that the special status attributed to the human subject needs to be dismantled, a symbolic 'Death of Man', as Michel Foucault proposed.<sup>22</sup> This classifies my thinking as anti-humanist, which radically opposes all the assumptions made by humanism. However, the hierarchical humanistic presuppositions cannot simply be discharged or deleted; human influence is too omnipresent and has saturated all other natural processes to such an extent that even thinking of the world without considering humans is simply not possible: the construction of the Anthropocene is irreversible. Humanist thinking brings me to a rather pragmatic position. Although fully embracing an anti-humanist stance as a starting point, it is more useful to include the humanist inheritance in my investigations. Francesca Ferrando adds: 'In tune with antihumanism, posthumanism stresses the urgency for humans to become aware of pertaining to an ecosystem which, when damaged, negatively affects the human condition as well.'<sup>23</sup>

22. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

23. She continues: 'In such a framework, the human is not approached as an autonomous agent but is located within an extensive system of relations. Humans are perceived

as material nodes of becoming; such becomings operate as technologies of existence.' See Francesca Ferrando, 'Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism', and 'New Materialisms: Differences and Relations', in *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics and the Arts* 8, no. 2 (Boston: Karl Jaspers Society of North America, 2013): pp. 26-32.

Humans are a form of content, and all their actions, needs, desires and striving for achievement have had serious implications for all other elements on earth, both organic and inorganic. These relations and networks are not disembodied. The agency of such networks surpasses the cultural, political and social domains, and its materiality is certainly not confined to human biology or psychology, a point that is clearly made by new materialist thinking. The human prerogative on desire is under question, and this is a useful step towards an emerging anthropological ontology to replace existing, predominant anthropocentric exceptionalism. But in my view this step is still not radical enough: the ultimate consequence of human behaviour, namely the extinction of *Homo sapiens*, is not my greatest concern. Most of humanity's potential has been applied to serve completely useless and devastating goals (which to my mind constitute ninety-nine per cent of all human 'achievement'). This fact is simply too frustrating to allow me to give up the battle for a transformation in human relations with respect to all the other life forms that inhabit Earth. In order to come to a true flat ontology we not only need to take the human presence into account but also the human inclination to see itself as something special. The only way to destabilise that perspective is to include human exceptionalism and transcend its arguments, which rest on the dualism of mind and body. It is for this reason (but not only) that I am drawn to a branch of posthumanism called metahumanism. Francesca Ferrando elaborates on this concept: 'Metahumanism is a recent approach closely related to a Deleuzian legacy; it emphasizes the body as a locus for amorphic re-significations, extended in kinetic relations as a body-network.'<sup>24</sup>

24. Ferrando, 'Posthumanism', p. 32.

This specific frame of reference is crucial to me. As I indicated earlier, part of the pathway to intensive thinking is the involvement of the entire body in the process of somaesthetics. Yet before investigating the reconnection of body and mind, we need to address as a theoretical exercise and in a pragmatic way the pathway that connects the human experience to that of the medium. In a diagram-

matic way we can see the human and the nonhuman on one axis, and the virtual and the actualised on another. In the middle of this junction lies a special instance that is both human and nonhuman, both virtual and actual, generally known as ‘information’.

## INFORMATION AS THE CONTRAIL OF THE MEDIUM

As I mentioned earlier, we can espouse several definitions of medium: medium as the extension of man (effect), medium as substrate (capacity), medium as concretised sensation (form), medium as entity (substance), medium as force (agency), or medium as relation (becoming). In any of these delineations, information has a crucial role and a specific place in the enactment of the medium’s capacity. For this reason I consider it essential to expand on the nature of information, which is, after all, a significant ‘point of entry’ in our negotiations with a medium, and therefore a major consideration in the quest to expose ‘the desire of the medium’. In the following paragraphs I will address the role, function and nature of information more extensively.

Information can be seen as the fulcrum between the virtual and the actual, and as both states are part of the real, information itself must also be real. The interesting aspect for us to examine is the extent to which media manipulate that information. I am not referring to the (human) manipulation of information through media, but the nature of the medium itself that influences the information it conveys. Information can work in both directions: it virtualises and it actualises. The relation between the actualised and the virtual is non-linear. The virtual is not a pre-existing condition of the actualised, and the actualised does not necessarily arise from the virtual, yet the virtual generates the contingently obligatory hinterland of the actualised. Architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter illuminates:

Indeed the actual does not resemble the virtual, as something preformed or pre-existing itself. The relation of the virtual to the actual is therefore not one of resemblance but rather of difference, innovation, or creation (every complex, or moment-event, is unique and new). Thus the following should be clear: realization (of a possible) and creation

(through actualization-differentiation) are two intrinsically distinct and irreducible processes.<sup>25</sup>

25. Kwinter, *Architectures of Time*, p. 8. Kwinter continues on page 10: ‘The first programmatically reproduces what was already there, formed and given in advance, while the other invents through a continuous, positive, and dynamic process of transmission, differentiation, and evolution. The crux lies here: Actualization occurs in time and with time, whereas realization, by limiting itself to the mere unfolding of what preexists, actually destroys novelty and annihilates time. In the first instance time is real; in the second it remains artificially derived and abstract in relation to events. In the one case time is a dynamic and perpetually activated flow, in the other, the result of an externally built-up succession of static images.’

Information in itself is neutral; it contains no direct actions. Yet obviously, information can become charged with significance depending on the context and the resonance it has with its users. Information is thus also affective. A piece of paper with some lines of text can contain information that has no effect on any chronology for a long time if it is not disclosed to anyone. Yet it may instantly assume great importance once it is read, and may then initiate an unpredictable chain of effects. The animation of this previously ‘dormant’ state of actualisation is linear; once the genie is out of the bottle, there is no way back. To continue the analogy: if we regard the actualised as the road to Rome, information determines which Rome it will lead to; it actualises in a specific way. Initially, I will consider fairly simple information systems before gradually diversifying to consider ones on a more complex and elusive scale.

I present this in the form of a system of (human/human and human/matter) interaction and signal the role information plays in this. To do so, I have created a simple classification, a two-step mechanism of interaction: moment A precedes moment B and the (non-)action at moment A has a (potential) causal effect on the (non-)action at moment B. Both moments allow for the choice to (dis)engage actively or passively. We can thus distinguish a semiotic square:

active-active, meaning:

I act in order to (be able to) act.

passive-passive, meaning:

I non-act in order to (be able to) non-act.

active-passive, meaning:

I act to (be able to) non-act.

passive-active, meaning:

I non-act to (be able to) act.

The first two ‘classes’ in this square are simple to comprehend. For example, active-active might be: ‘I need to speak to you (B), therefore I come and see you (A)’. Action B is desired, action A enables B to be enacted, both actions are taken: the goal is achieved. An example of the passive-passive state might be: ‘I don’t want to do that task (B), so I don’t raise my hand to offer (A).’ The desired consequences are achieved without an action. Here again, the system remains simple. It becomes more interesting if we look at the two intermixed stages.

### ACTIVE-PASSIVE

A clear case of the active-passive model would be one in which the impression is given that someone or something is taking control in or over a certain situation, but in fact does not act as anticipated. This may be done deliberately, for instance by creating a false sense of security by assembling a weak instrument of protection, such as a hastily constructed and unsafe balustrade around an open podium, merely to satisfy (formal) requirements. Or by offering a type of insurance policy that has so many clauses and iterations of conditions that it actually covers only a (small) part of what is meant to be insured.

Another form of disruption can result from the scheme: position A enables action B with result C, whereby any attempt to act in a truly positive and productive way is blocked by taking the conditional position, thus preventing anyone or anything else (more capable or well-meaning) to act or react. If the intention is to obstruct result C from taking a specific path, then one could take position A to prevent action B from occurring. Even if a conflict ensues over non-action B, this is considered less important than the prevention of result C. A simple illustration of this could be the following: I don’t like opera but my friend does. I propose to get the tickets, thus taking control over this process and blocking any possibility for him to act (position A). I deliberately don’t buy the tickets (action B), so we don’t go to the opera (result C). I could even lie and say the tickets were sold out (lie of the first order), but choose to say that I simply forgot (lie of the second order), without even attempting to evade confrontation (the lie of the first order assumes responsibility for the outcome, the lie of the second order does not). I would

prefer the stigma of being forgetful or inattentive than having to go through the agony of the opera experience.

A more alarming effect of this type of information-sabotage is the tendency of large corporations to acknowledge certain negative effects of their production or trade (such as the link between obesity and certain food products, or an excessive consumption of finite energy sources) by taking initiatives to prevent these effects. Most often these issues are brought to the table by objectors (such as environmental activist groups) who influence public opinion to the point where action becomes inevitable. By taking control of the situation, the corporation diverts the unwanted attention; and by removing these issues from the public agenda, the actions it undertakes are not really questioned. In many cases the cause would have been better helped if the situation had remained controversial. A similar effect may occur when a city is promoted to become cultural capital of the year. This is often used as an instrument to revitalise a city experiencing socio-economic difficulties. An initial surge of funding streams into the city, enabling the creation of a number of specific improvements, but after the events have passed, most of the problems remain, or may even be exacerbated, yet the political agenda that called for intervention has been disarmed.

The active-passive scheme is not limited to practices of mal-intent. There are many potential situations in which someone or something chooses, or is invited or compelled to take position A, despite their (obvious) unlikelihood of successfully performing action B and thus achieving result C. Take the situation where someone is needed to congratulate a co-worker on her twenty-fifth anniversary with the firm. The task is assigned to the manager, regardless of his or her poor public speaking skills, simply because s/he is the official representative of the firm. Evidently this system is different from the *modus ponendo ponens* or the *modus tollendo tollens*, but it has clear kinship with the counterfactual conditional.<sup>26</sup> For this to apply, the counterfactual argument has to be rooted in the relation between B and A under condition C: if you were a competent manager (which you are not), you would have been rightfully appointed to deliver a good speech (which you haven’t). In this case, as a result of false assumptions or pretences, the result is contingent on the attributes of the actor before s/he entered the equation. This situation can be juxtaposed to the indicative

conditional, which indicates what is, in fact, the causality when the assumptions *are* true (if you are a competent manager, you can deliver a good speech).

26. *Modus ponendo ponens*: A implies B: A is asserted to be true therefore B must be true. *Modus tollendo tollens*: The way that denies by denying. The counterfactual conditional is also known as the subjunctive conditional or the remote conditional.

## PASSIVE-ACTIVE

The passive-active construct hinges on a much more elaborate set of psycho-strata. In one of its contexts (a state which is not expressed, yet very much desired), it creates a constant flux of *Zugzwang* for its environment.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the passive-active creates conditions in or on which others have to act, without A having acted itself. This is not a reaction, since no action has been taken, and is connected to the quandary found in the story *The Lady, or the Tiger?*<sup>28</sup>

27. *Zugzwang* is a German term for 'the compulsion to move', which is an undesired state in chess when a player is forced to move, but strategically it would be more advantageous to pass or to do something else.
28. Frank R. Stockton's *The Lady, or the Tiger?* was first published in the American magazine *The Century* in 1882, <http://www.english-literature.uni-bayreuth.de/en/teaching/documents/courses/Stockton1.pdf> [accessed 25 July 2016].

Written by Frank R. Stockton in 1882, the story deals with a situation of 'impossible choice'. A prisoner must open one of two doors. Behind one is a beautiful woman, ready to marry him; behind the other is a voracious tiger, ready to eat him. But which is which? The beauty (and the fascination) of this tale is that the author does not provide an ending. Stockton's last words follow: 'And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door – the lady, or the tiger?' In order to close the narrative circle we need to come to our own conclusion based on the information the tale gives us. We become actively engaged by reading the story; if we do not make a decision about the ending, then all our energies invested in reading the story are wasted. Precisely this meta-construct, this literary *Zugzwang*, is the most interesting aspect of the story (much more than a decision on how it ends). It ties the concept of the passive-active construct to the model of artificially locked information in a dialectical opposition to non-artificially locked information.<sup>29</sup> If the tale of the lady and the tiger illustrates the passive-active mechanism within a setting of artificially locked information, then 'the parable

of the red chamber' exemplifies the working of this system when dealing with non-artificially locked information.

29. Slavoj Žižek adds: 'When Alain Badiou emphasizes that a double negation is not the same as an affirmation, he thereby merely conforms to the Hegelian motto *les non-dupes errent*. Let us take the affirmation "I believe". Its negation is: "I do not really believe, I just pretend to believe." Its properly Hegelian negation of negation, however, is not the return to direct belief, but the self-relating pretence "I pretend to pretend to believe", which means: "I really believe without being aware of it."' See Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 354.

The parable of the red chamber takes place a long time ago and concerns a young married man and woman who have to make a multitude of decisions about their lives together. The young woman is completely obsessed by the colour red and would like nothing more than to live in a house completely furnished and furnished in red. The young man does not have a specific preference, but he is keen in having an equal say in the decisions made regarding the decoration of the house, and he is also very aware of their budget. The woman knows that if she were to announce her desire to decorate the whole house red, her husband would object. When choosing the first piece of furniture (the couch) they consider all options fairly, one of which is a red couch. During the negotiation process she argues against all the other options on the basis of economics, aesthetics (not only visual aesthetics but also drawing on the entire somaesthetic sphere), pragmatic, social and environmental reasons and many more besides. The end is predictable: the red couch is chosen. A year later, when an old friend of the husband comes to visit the house, he notices that it is completely decorated in red. He asks the husband about this, and he truthfully replies that he has no idea how this has happened. His wife's wish has been achieved not by means of direct action, but by creating a vacuum through the elimination of all alternatives to red: a passive-active pull towards a desired state.

## CATCH-22

A special case of a two-step information system is the famous *Catch-22*, invented by Joseph Heller in his book of the same name. It describes a circular system of reasoning in which the outcome of each of two logics enables the opposite to be true.<sup>30</sup> As I argued above, information is the hinge between the virtual and actual, and as both terms are part of the real, the information itself must also be real. Philosopher Laurence Goldstein reasons that the *Catch-22*

is a ‘vacuous biconditional’: it is logically not a state that is true under any circumstances. Imagine a paper with the words ‘to find the truth turn to the other side’ written on both sides. Any state (looking at one side of the paper) forces us to move from that state (flipping the paper). It serves little purpose to go into the details of any linguistic arguments in this context, but it is interesting to consider the semantics of language itself by regarding the emergence and development of language as an indication of the working of the mind. The desire for access to information leads to the discovery of knowledge that one would then prefer not to have known. For example: on the basis of a concrete indication, a husband persists in asking his wife if she slept with another man while she was in Vienna. Finally she admits she did, at which point he wishes he had never received this information since it completely and irreversibly annihilates the tranquillity of their relation.

30. In his book *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller describes many of these types of locked reasoning, as the following quote exemplifies: ‘There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one’s own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn’t, but if he was sane, he had to fly them. If he flew them, he was crazy and didn’t have to; but if he didn’t want to, he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.’ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Simon & Schuster, [1955] 1997).

The above situation is different from one in which the social conventions built around the maintenance of secret information are more important than the actual disclosure of the information itself. If by chance I come home early and discover from a distance that a surprise party is being organised in my honour, it would be best if I left the scene and returned home at the usual time, pretending to be completely surprised. The receiver of the locked information (the one to whom the secret is unintentionally disclosed) needs to reconstruct the ex-secret into a new secret. The ‘new’ secret is that the original secret is no longer a secret. It has become phantom information. However, when confidential information is formally available to only one or a few receivers yet obvious to everyone else (such as the pregnancy of a teenage girl), we speak of an ‘elephant in the room’, which is an issue tacitly ignored because it is too problematic to speak of. But what if the elephant is bigger than the room?

## KNOWN-UNKNOWN

Žižek (somewhat dismayingly) compliments former US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld on his contribution to contemporary philosophy when, shortly before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, he presented his version of the theoretic threats to be found there, which were then used as a major reason for the invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime. Rumsfeld stated:

Reports that say that something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don’t know we don’t know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend [sic] to be the difficult ones.<sup>31</sup>

31. Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers, ‘DoD News Briefing, 12 February 2002’, <http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2636> [accessed 25 July 2016].

In its original context, and against the backdrop of the ‘war on terror’ that began after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, the premise and a vital element in Rumsfeld’s justification for the military invasion of Iraq was presented as the ‘certainty’ of the presence of weapons of mass destruction. The invasion of Iraq was – in contrast to many other proactive acts of war in history – solely based and justified on the (assumed) possession of information. As we discovered from hindsight, no weapons of mass destruction were ever found or proved to have existed. But by that time the invasion and the hunt for Saddam Hussein had been achieved, and it was due to the type of reasoning Rumsfeld used that public opinion swung just enough to support the invasion. It makes perfect sense to assume Rumsfeld constructed this classification with the sole intention of manipulating public opinion to support the invasion. The instrument of classification is very powerful in overcoming the relativity of probability, because the mere existence of a category creates the psychological effect that it should be filled, regardless of the sense or relevance of this: it is a purely formalistic exercise with great impact on collective perception.

If we were to assess every situation on the basis of all possi-

ble outcomes (including those of a category so far removed that we don't even know of its existence: the 'unknown unknowns') we would be instantly paralysed by anxiety. The absence of any means to qualify the information (how relevant is this information?) or even to quantify it (how great is the chance of this information being relevant?), makes this a rhetorical case of the 'mean world syndrome' under the auspices of a version of the 'cultivation theory' in communication studies.<sup>32</sup> Rumsfeld openly talked about the unknown unknowns with a certainty about the effect this would have (justifying the war through the cultivation of public fear), but without the risk of creating a direct outburst of panic (*War of the Worlds* was also a tale about the unknown unknowns, but with the intention to create panic). This suggests that the military intelligence gathered on the possible existence of any unknown unknowns was negative and indicated the opposite of Rumsfeld's insinuations. The absence of any indication of weapons of mass destruction already dramatically reduced the probability of actually finding any unknown unknowns, yet the 'commodification' of this information in the propaganda favouring the invasion was significant.

32. 'Mean world syndrome' describes a state of mind whereby consumers of mass media perceive the world as being (far) more dangerous than it actually is. Mean world syndrome falls under the larger study of mass media influence (in particular television), regarding the way in which consumers perceive the(ir) world. See George Gerbner and Nancy Signorielli, *Violence and Terror in the Mass Media* (Westport: Greenwood Publishers, 1988).

In other words, Rumsfeld exaggerated a risk so that the US public would sanction his action against this risk, which he well knew was not as real as the public was made to believe. Using this device, he created a win/win situation. Firstly, 'permission' in terms of public opinion was granted, thus invasion assured; and secondly, there was no indication to suggest the presence of any unknown unknowns that could not be handled by the military forces, so their defeat was unlikely. In the case of victory, the military forces would have overcome an enemy force associated with the almost mysterious power of the big 'unknown unknown'. The brilliance of this construction lies in the fact that even if the initial premise is found to be false, it does not undermine what is gained by the invasion itself.

## THE CATEGORY LEFT OUT

Rumsfeld's communication was very precisely crafted within a set of strategic parameters, a clear case of the rhetoric of governmental entrepreneurship (oxymoron intended). The real shrewdness lies in Rumsfeld's omission of the last of the four categories: the unknown knowns, which, as Žižek rightfully points out, refers to the things we don't know that we know, 'which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the "knowledge that doesn't know itself", as Lacan used to say, the core of which is fantasy'.<sup>33</sup> Rumsfeld had very good reasons to exclude the unknown knowns from his list. During the war in Vietnam, the USA fought itself on various levels. Its army had to fight against the psychological effects of the one-year 'tour of duty', which undermined the soldiers' incentive to invest in fighting the war as opposed to focusing on their return home. The average age of nineteen was considerably younger than had been the case with American soldiers in the Second World War, and the young troops brought a completely different mindset to the battlefield. Unlike participants in the Second World War, the average soldier in Vietnam was not wholly convinced of the cause he was fighting for. There was also a cultural imbalance that resulted from drafting policies: most of the soldiers came from minority and working-class backgrounds. This added several pre-existing problems to the military situation in Vietnam. The discussion on whose war was actually being fought (that of the minorities or that of the white imperialists) was openly taking place. Moreover, the US soldiers' training had left them completely unprepared for the Vietcong war strategy, causing a loss of morale among the troops and commanding officers. Meanwhile, on the home front, other problems exacerbated the war situation. The public debate over the involvement of the US in Vietnam led to increasing tension in American society, which resulted in a prominently hostile attitude towards the entire operation, and often prompted a lukewarm or even inimical reception of the veterans on their return home. Many of the veterans were (and some are still) struggling with their encounter with the monstrosities of war. Depending on the source and the time at which the assessments were done, the surveys show that as many as thirty per cent of Vietnam veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and even the most conservative estimate is nineteen per

cent.<sup>34</sup> The war in Vietnam was a morass of loneliness, psychosis, alcohol, despair, drugs, violence and abuse, together with a fundamental shattering of the American dream in all its representations. Not surprisingly, this set of conditions led to a reverse 'battle' of disillusioned veterans against society, and created the myth of the chronically compromised Vietnam trouper, unable to reintegrate into society and, even more importantly, unable to reintegrate into him- or herself. No wonder Rumsfeld was very careful not to draw any attention to the unknown knowns since these belong to the domain of the realest fears, extreme despair, the vilest desires, most lethal drives, and all the other subliminal agencies that humans experience.

33. Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), p. 53.

34. William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1998) and Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Of specific interest is the role of the media (in particular television) in the context of war. Unlike any earlier medium, television provided two fundamental elements of trust. Firstly, there is the obvious visual aspect. Unlike radio, the audience can directly watch events evolve. In this regard, television reached a new dimension during the Iran-Kuwait Gulf War (1990-1991), when millions of viewers worldwide were able watch live combat on TV in their homes. The adage 'seeing is believing' was weighted in favour of the coalition forces, a mechanism that had failed during the war in Vietnam, when the media had acted as a semi-independent body that often encouraged a critical stance towards the war. By shifting the focus between several elements in specific and changing orders, the media was able to influence public opinion significantly. There were the elements of the war itself, (its evolution, intensity, boundaries), its organisational aspects (requirements, logistics, supplies, infrastructures, communications), the inter- and intrahuman affects (its casualties, terror, deprivation, morale) and its political effects (who gained control, its costs, its imperialist agenda). These elements were exposed and, depending on the political colour of the TV news agency (the sender) concerned, it either favoured military actions or opposed them.

As for US citizens who watched the TV war coverage (the receiver), there were several effects of exposure that also determined the impact on the spectator. These include the elements

working directly on the audience (its needs, demands, wishes, opinions, inhibitions and saturation points), the economics of the media (the networks' interests, saleability, exposure, development of culture), and the effects on society (the development of opinion and a 'moral fatigue' caused by the continuous stream of negative news). Both realms (sender and receiver) were at least partly and in fluctuating intensities affected by a system of control and influence implemented by elements of national security, international politics, economic interests, concealment and political self-interest. The trust that audiences placed in what was presented to them on television, believing and judging what they saw, gave the medium significant dominance over other types of media in that era.

The second factor that promotes trust in television is that it has always been designed to be like furniture in the home, making it part of family life. In contrast, the newspaper has always been a foreign element: it arrives one morning and is gone the next; its information is only valid for one day, whereas television is a permanent and controllable feature. We can choose when to access information and, to a certain degree, we can select what we want to see. Media theorist Lev Manovich distinguishes two types of modern media technology: representational technologies such as film, music and videotape, and real-time communication technologies, most of which begin with 'tele' (telegraph, telex, telephone etc.). He argues that television (and radio before it) operates at the junction of these two systems.<sup>35</sup> This makes television an unreliable source for forming an accurate opinion on events. Its preselection of information bifurcates into the fictitious world of representation and the factual world of real events. With the rise of the Internet, this problem seemed to have been overcome: unrestricted access to a wide variety of sources suggests that a well-informed use of this medium could provide broader and more accurate information. Yet Internet and computer-based interfaces have already lost much of their strength in terms of independence and objectivity. Many forces steer our search for objective information, whether these be opportunistic (commercially driven results) or regulatory (restricted areas on the Internet). Still, the awareness of the ubiquity of media and the 'nature' of their ungraspable organisation has increased.

35. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, p. 162.

## INTERPASSIVITY

The intricate role of media in the complexity of intertwined information systems and warfare is perhaps the ultimate embodiment of the unknown-knowns, since ultimately, exposure of its information does not disclose any truly new information. The disturbing fact is that no matter what new and actualised information is provided, its content offers nothing new or unexpected. We already know what is going to happen, we already know what it will look like, yet we do not, or cannot, admit this to ourselves. The unknown-knowns are an automated human psycho-protective mechanism that prevents continual confrontation with our most powerful, unconscious primal drives, which act and steer, most probably far more than we care to accept. As I said before, the mind is an invention of the body and the body is an invention of the mind. Neither of them has any transcendental connection to an absolute entity or knowledge. The most terrifying prospect is that there is actually no external reason or cause other than our own actions to lure us into harming ourselves on the most fundamental levels. Such a realisation alone is 'reason' enough to trigger a devastating array of anxieties – enough for us to invent an 'external internal', an unconscious we cannot access directly, and thus are unable to take responsibility for what emerges. Therefore it is unsurprising that many humans put their trust in some form of invented external entities or 'Othernesses': other forces to which we ascribe the revelation of moral codes of conduct and behaviour, and the power to steer and control us, such as religion. Perhaps this is also why we increasingly 'externalise' our interactions with our surroundings by investing powers and responsibility for interaction to machines, rather than to ourselves.

Building on Lacan's work, Robert Pfaller has elaborated on the concept of interaction as a double-edged sword, with its more sinister counterpart being interpassivity.<sup>36</sup> The rise of the *prosumer*<sup>37</sup> as a substitute for the traditional spectator has supposedly adjoined the input and output in the network society and the intensified discourse on notions of interaction, as well as the increasing opacity of the border between the public and the private domain. Within the Lacanian tripartite classification (which regards the realm of the virtual as being divided into the imaginary, the symbolic and the real), interpassivity occurs in relation

Arjan Benning

**Arjan Benning's photography offers us a seemingly objective point of view that has the pretence of neutrality and transparency. The clear frame perspective and the static posture of the protagonists bring to mind a carefully arranged shop window, or the act of window-shopping. This is blatantly fake, yet not in a negative sense. In these images, the photographer draws heavily on the capacities of the medium to restrict our view without losing precision, together with the ability to frame without excluding the potential that lies beyond the framing. This is all there is to see, but we want more than we can see. The concept of desire depends on its incapacity to be fulfilled, and this mechanism is exactly what Benning stimulates in his specific deconstructionist manner. In this 'game' there is no doubt that the viewer is being manipulated, since Benning's photography sketches 'a world that is obtainable' by buying specific products. What makes this photography distinctive is that how this is accomplished is openly demonstrated. The installations Benning creates contain elements that are surrealistic enough to continually rupture the fourth wall, yet they directly refer to a world that could exist but never actually will. Obviously, that is the whole point of the exercise – this is commercial photography**

– but it is too easy to reduce the imagery to this alone. It is as if Benning is explaining to us the trick of how to pull a coin out of your ear, and yet we still fall for the trick. Benning produces 'visual rhetoric' rather than visual narrative.<sup>1</sup> From the tripartite division of rhetorical devices (logos, ethos and pathos) Benning conflates the latter two; his images are narratively self-referential and connect only primary connotations. The connotative pathos of the subject matter is creating its own ethos: we (the good and beautiful) generate this world that creates us (the good and beautiful) in perpetuity. The ethos is fed by the delicacy of the image without exposing more than is necessary, while the pathos is nourished by framing a particular subject, albeit with strong connections to the connotative hinterland. Both mechanisms are provided by the medium's capacities and drives, so perhaps it is the medium of photography itself that pulls the ultimate 'coin out of the ear' – and Benning loves it when it does.

1. See Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004).





**Arjan Benning**

**Leo Erken**





In George Baker's 'expanded field' of photography, Leo Erken's photography could be placed somewhere between narrative and stasis.<sup>1</sup> Baker distinguishes an axis formed between *stasis* and *non-stasis*, and a second axis between narrative and non-narrative, then establishes all the possible cross connections between them. This entails that the suggested storylines be incomplete; we see only a fragment of each, which makes them connected to, but not part of, a particular narrative. Though obviously immobile, the images are not 'still images'; there is movement. Just as when we pass through a city by train and see split second slices of mundane 'living', it is clear that what we see is not part of our lives, and we are not part of those we see. Observing Erken's images is a form of tourism without the element of leisure. We are not able to become part of the world we see because we are (with Erken) 'on the move', yet still we have specifically come there with him to observe. This creates a distance that is not caused by physical elements alone. Erken uses his camera as a tool for dissection, yet his camera has the same thing in mind for him. The subject matter is apparently untouched by the presence of the photographer, which indicates that he has been careful and respect-

ful in approaching it. Despite the knotty observer-observed relationship, the medium itself seeks pleasure in disrupting this connection. The disarming unpretentiousness of the two scenarios and the people in them makes the observer feel almost embarrassed to be found looking. But the narrative portrayed is not the narrative being told: the story of the viewer's 'self-analysis' is the true narrative in these images. More than the formal subject, the photographer himself is the true subject, and with him the viewers, and to expose oneself in this way takes a lot of courage. The photos make clear they are not ours to take; we can at best appropriate them and use the experience of looking (rather than the images themselves) for the benefit of our own self-analysis. Only the woman staring right into the lens knows this; she does not see through the game played by the medium, but she does see through the viewers' game.

1. George Baker, 'Photography's Expanded Field', in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, eds. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 175-188.

to what Lacan calls 'the big Other'.<sup>38</sup> In the symbolic-virtual realm, this notion would constitute a withdrawal into passivity caused by the introduction of the big Otherness. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy and the canned laughter in television shows, the audience is part of the triadic system (creator, product, public) yet it does not have to engage in any emotional or otherwise mental or physical relationship with the product or its effect. We may witness horrors but we do not have to cry for them ourselves; it is done for us. Slavoj Žižek adds that this type of (virtual) reality offers elements deprived of their essential, yet potentially dangerous substance – like coffee without caffeine or beer without alcohol. Žižek expands: 'Against such an interpassive mode, in which we are all active all the time to make sure that nothing will really change, the first truly critical step is to withdraw into passivity and refuse to participate. This first step clears the ground for a true activity, for an act that will effectively change the coordinates of the scene.'<sup>39</sup>

36. Robert Pfaller, *Illusionen der Anderen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003).

37. The term 'prosumer' was coined by Alvin Toffler to describe a person who produces content for (online) publishing whilst also actively consuming similar content from the same platform, such as YouTube, Facebook etc. It is also used to describe electronic devices (cameras etc.) that fill the niche that exists between professional and consumer quality standards.

38. The symbolic Big Other refers to (fictitious) anonymous authoritative powers or knowledge. Examples are God, Science, Nature, History, Society, etc.

39. Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 27.

When we extrapolate this thinking to the discourse on the prosumer, it could be claimed that a new big Otherness<sup>40</sup> has been created: the network society.<sup>41</sup> In the wake of many traditional ideological forces, such as religion, political-economic systems and various types of social morality, we are now faced with a fabricated, technocratic Otherness. The demands for participation in interpassivity have a low threshold; nonetheless, the potential for interpassivity to act and to provoke action is enormous. Two issues may arise from this. Firstly, the prosumer's ability to contribute to a higher level of interpersonal interaction by means of mediated activity is joined by the associated ability of being actively 'interpassive'. In other words, when we are informed of some terrible event and want to express our sorrow, we can easily join a group through the Internet or other network that will express these feelings for us, such as 'liking' instead of weeping:

‘*Uw medeleven is verzonden*’ (‘Your compassion has been sent’).<sup>42</sup> As Žižek puts it:

This is also one of the ways to specify the meaning of Lacan’s claim that the subject is always ‘decentred’. His point is not that my subjective experience is regulated by objective unconscious mechanisms that are decentred with my control (a point asserted by every materialist), but, rather, something much more unsettling: I am deprived of even my most intimate subjective experience, the way things ‘really seem to me’, deprived of the fundamental fantasy that constitutes and guarantees the core of my being, since I can never consciously experience it and assume it.<sup>43</sup>

40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

41. The term ‘network society’ (coined in 1981) was further developed by Jan van Dijk in his book *De netwerkmaatschappij: Sociale aspecten van nieuwe media* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Samson uitgeverij, 1991). The concept is probably more widely known through the work of Manuel Castells.

42. Screen text taken from the app ‘*ik condoleer*’ (‘I condole’), offered by the Dutch insurance company PC Hooft.

43. Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 53.

With this lengthy exposé on the workings of information in the ethospace, I have tried to destabilise the objective character of information. From the examples given, it becomes clear that the medium (in whatever capacity it may be interpreted) has a distinct and active role in the manipulation of information. This occurs not only in the traditional sense, whereby media are seen as instruments for the distribution and storage of information, but also in a much more subtle play of transducing, locking and un-locking, hiding and revealing information and prioritising its disclosure, which is not fully controlled by human intervention. The special capacity of information is that it can act simultaneously as a concrete and abstract element. Information is also a flow that is influenced by many factors, including the drives and propensities of nonhuman actors, such as the nature of a medium. These flows work on our mind-body system in a way beyond volition. Affect theory rests on the premises that many of these flows are being generated and perceived at both the conscious and unconscious level; somaesthetics offers the ‘gateway’ to do so. In my opinion, the consciousness of experience should not be seen as dominant; rather, experience is something in itself and ‘registered’ uncon-

sciously and consciously. I have argued that it is important not only to focus on the content of the information, but also on the information about the information, which (in certain cases) can be more valuable than the ‘concrete’ information itself. Information is both a capacity and a property. This simultaneous existence stretches into both the virtual and the actualised, making information the literal and symbolic axis to which we can relate both the demands of the tangible and the aspirations of the virtual. As argued before, the essential apparatus to connect with this realm is called intensive thinking, both as a theoretical framework and as a practical instrument.

### INTENSIVE THINKING IN ACTION: BODY WITHOUT ORGANS, FLOW

To what extent can we put the concept of intensive thinking into action? Almost by default, intensive thinking is at its strongest when the focal point of attention is limited; it is a search for the lowest gear in the gearbox, making as many rotations as possible in order to amplify the strength of every metre covered. Extensive thinking by contrast is mostly interested in covering as much ground as possible, sacrificing not only details but also entire processes and concepts in its endeavour. Extensive thinking wants to register objective terms; intensive thinking aims at registering intensities. Extensive thinking lays much importance on the properties of its elements and assumes that the whole of a body can be deducted from the sum of its parts (or organs). In contrast, Gilles Deleuze has given us the additional ‘body without organs’, which has become an often used concept to describe the ‘nebula’ of flows, potentialities, relations, affects, engagements and so forth, that is also part of our body-mind, but which transcends the actualised. As Deleuze and Guattari express clearly: ‘You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit.’<sup>44</sup> However, this extended part of the body is by no means ‘unreal’, it is a place where experience is actualised, yet it does not influence all actualisations directly. This means that many experiences do not have to be actualised in the physical world in order to be of great value to the person experiencing them. Deleuze and Guattari describe this thus:

People ask, So what is this BwO? – But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic; desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight – fight and are fought – seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love.<sup>45</sup>

44. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 166.

45. Ibid.

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three types of BwO's: the empty, the full and the cancerous, of which only the full can be considered healthy. On one side of the scale is the empty BwO, which is completely 'de-organ-ised', its state is 'catatonic', there is nothing obstructing the stream of flows, there is no attachment to the actualised and therefore it is not productive. I associate the empty BwO with an addiction to sex, shopping or gambling, or any other expression of a desire of lack as opposed to a productive desire. The cancerous BwO lies on the opposite side of the scale. It is stratified into a narrow path and repeated over and over again; for instance, an addiction to drugs or alcohol. The cancerous BwO is very dangerous and potentially lethal, and Deleuze and Guattari do not recommend entering this particular state in order to explore the BwO. Located between the empty BwO and the cancerous BwO is the full BwO, which is there to be discovered and enjoyed. Deleuze and Guattari even provide a 'manual' to reach the BwO:

This is how it should be done. Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continua of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO.<sup>46</sup>

46. Ibid., p. 161.

The Body without Organs is an abstract machine and an instrument for activating intensive thinking. In order to comprehend the strength of intensive thinking as a mode of analysis and a major

nexus in creating a synthesis, it is imperative to understand the concept of flow. The term 'flow' as I intend to use it here is not only the type of surplus energy that arises from the organisation of matter (as in aquadynamic systems when two waves enhance or block each other), or the patterns formed by the collisions among different types of energy (as in thermodynamics), nor is it only the statistical chains that produce different phenotypes on the basis of identical genotypes, nor the stream of people that make their way through the rainy streets to do their Christmas shopping, nor the organisation of goods and labour that provides the wherewithal for such shopping to be possible. Flow is all this and much more. It consists of both the virtual and the actualised; it manifests itself through becoming, which is indiscrete and contingent as opposed to non-continuous and essential. It does not operate on the level where action is taken, but on the level where the ability for taking action is created. For a true understanding of this section, it is advisable to examine the referred text.<sup>47</sup>

47. Andrej Radman and Marc Boumeester, 'The Asignifying Affordance of Assemblage: Enactive Embodied, Embedded and Extended Urban Cartography', in *Architectural Journal*, no. 8 (Beijing: The Architectural Society of China, PR China, 2012), pp. 13-23.

The following, final part of this chapter is dedicated to demonstrating the implementation of intensive thinking in design processes. To accomplish this I will present an elaborate example that draws on previous fieldwork and which has also been used in some courses of the master's programme at Delft University of Technology.<sup>48</sup> In this section I will also deal with mapping the urban fabric and its social and economic structures, with a particular interest in exploring the underlying and overarching virtual and actualised flows.<sup>49</sup>

48. These programmes ran from 2004 to 2013 as part of the Delft School of Design (DSD) graduate programme in Architectural Theory at Delft University of Technology.

49. For an introduction to the concept of mapping in architecture see Stan Allen, *Practice: Architecture, Technique and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2009).

The quintessential point of departure for this exploration concerns certain modes of interaction that form a special type of constellation. These interactions contribute to the conversion of properties into capacities. I am not even certain if their interaction could be called an assemblage, given that the non-entangled mode of their existence suggests that they could also be regarded as the opposite of an assemblage. Yet the assemblage has no preconditions, its

totality is always one hundred per cent. This means that there is no preset number of elements: all elements in the assemblage define the assemblage by being part of it. This may seem to be a circular form of logic, but as all elements are strictly connected to others, the entire universe can be seen as an assemblage. The purpose of the assemblage is to emphasise the interrelations of its elements in order to destabilise their property-led ‘characteristics’.

There is no sense of duration attached to the concept of assemblage, meaning that the interplay of any set of actors and conditions has no predetermined temporal requirement or number of actors, nor any fixed parameter at all, which is to acknowledge the pertinence (or necessity) of contingency. Even the notion of interaction is very fluid: if two or more elements are at play, then non-communicative, non-active, inert qualities displayed by any of these elements do not influence that interaction. Or do they? Let us take the example of standing on a beam measuring fifteen centimetres wide and four metres long. This would not be a hard task if the beam were lying on the floor, but it would become very difficult if the beam were situated thirty metres high between two buildings. Although the void may not even be considered as an entity, its effects are nevertheless very substantial. Another example to consider is the ‘interaction’ between a motorist with car problems standing at the side of a motorway, and the traffic on the motorway. Cars continuously pass at high velocity, and, for a split second, the eyes of a person in the passenger seat of a passing vehicle meet those of our stranded traveller. Although both individuals could be classified in the same category (human, motorists, same modes of transport, same destination etc.), they are still miles apart.

At this point the stranded motorist is caught in an in-between stage of being neither a motorist (because of the defective machine) nor a pedestrian (because of the unsuitable environment). The actor is unable to escape or change the environment; he is suspended between ‘agreeable’ ecologies.<sup>50</sup> This state of *non-motorist-ism* is the specific mode of the type of assemblage I am referring to. Perhaps we could call this a ‘suspended assemblage’ that is appositionally related to a ‘transitional assemblage’, which would indicate the moment of transitional becomings: for instance, a person getting into the car and thus making a transition from pedestrian to motorist. As long as the car is not moving, the person is technically not

driving (though legally considered a driver), but rather in a ‘suspended assemblage’ of motoring. The ecology has changed from the pedestrian realm to that of motorist, yet as long as the car is not being driven, the person behind the wheel can be classified as a ‘non-motorist’ rather than an ‘ex-pedestrian’ since becoming part of the ecology of motorist is clearly the intention. This also indicates that even when elements are not operating within the same realm, in other words, some are operating in the actual and others in the virtual, or even when they are not part of the same ecology they may still affect one another and interact.

50. J.G. Ballard’s book *Concrete Island* (London: Panther Books, 1974) is largely based on the concept of (non-)agreeable ecologies. An agreeable ecology is the part of an environment that permanently suits the biology of the species at hand; e.g., a human can live on earth but not underwater or on the side of the motorway. This concept resonates with Jakob von Uexküll’s construct of *Umwelt*. See Dorion Sagan, ‘Introduction: Umwelt after Uexküll’, in Jakob von Uexküll, Marina von Uexküll, Joseph D. O’Neil, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 3.

Therefore this transitional state of ‘non-motorist’ needs to be acknowledged as being part of a certain assemblage yet able to operate in another. Since every assemblage is always connected to others through the participation of their elements in a multitude of assemblages, the effect of the affect in one assemblage might well be the opposite in another. For example, our non-motorist considered from a different perspective could also be called a non-pedestrian. In the first formulation of the stranded motorist, the environment requires motoring and the subject fails to fulfil that capacity; in the second formulation, the subject possesses the capacity to walk but the environment does not permit it. I would be tempted to call for an overarching assemblage for these assemblages, but as there is no hierarchy in assemblages, such a ‘meta-assemblage’ would be rendered useless. It is precisely the difference between figure and ground that is causing an element to be ‘non-pedestrian’ or ‘non-motorist’. Depending on the *ground* (the pedestrian or motoring ecology), the *figure* stands out as either an ex-pedestrian or a non-motorist. For now I will call this difference ‘the niche’, to indicate that it has a specific space that is neither predefined, nor is there a preconception about its mode of existence.<sup>51</sup> Yet it is always there.

51. The definition of *niche* as it is used here is a (metaphorical) place or position suitable or appropriate for a body. This place has to be established *a posteriori*; there is no predetermined classification for its position or function.

The model of the niche serves as a conceptual *modus operandi*, a concrete state and a relational vector. It is, so to speak, the ‘chemical clock’ of affect theory. In a chemical clock, two or more liquid components react on each other forming new composites (each with a distinguishable colour), none of which is stable. Because of this effect, the composites are formed over and over again, constantly passing the threshold that marks their instability, causing the liquid to change colour indefinitely (provided that there is a source of energy). This model serves as the mode of transformation between content and expression under transient conditions and rests on the inability to separate either element. The importance of isolating the effect is to demonstrate the independence of the system’s effectiveness without the necessity of understanding the system itself. It is obvious that one cannot be both a pedestrian and a motorist simultaneously, and that neither state is predetermined; they are interchangeable in terms of their affective responsiveness. It is not coincidental that the analogies I have used to exemplify some of these concepts have a relation to, or stem from, actual traffic situations.

Situated flows are perfect sources for investigating mechanics of this kind. Brian Massumi exemplifies this strikingly when pursuing Bruno Latour’s notion of the ‘quasi object’, which features the football as a way of rethinking the relation between the object and the subject. Massumi explains:

The formal rules of the game capture and contain the variation. They frame the game, retrospectively describing its form as a set of constant relations between standardized terms. A codification is a framing derivative that arrogates to itself the role of foundation. It might be argued that all foundations are of this nature – *ex post facto* regulatory framings rather than effective foundations.<sup>52</sup>

52. Massumi, ‘The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation’, in *Parables*, p. 71.

A very interesting mode of investigation which I have used with students is to create an alternative cartography based on a taxonomy of these niches, those places where the (urban) fabric allows for changing types of ‘roles’: from motorist into pedestrian and vice versa, motorist into theatre-audience member, and so on. Note that these roles are not pre-established, they are merely indicators that

serve as a contingent label, not as a necessary determinant. Becoming is an event, not a process.

The last section of this chapter is divided into three parts: firstly, the taxonomy of flows; secondly, the transition in ecologies; and finally – the most interesting part – the niche that is left behind or created by the transition. I do see the irony of involving an instrument like taxonomy in a chapter that deals primarily with flows. However, this is a taxonomy of *effect*, not a taxonomy of *nature*. It is established *a posteriori*; therefore I will refer to it as a ‘posterior taxonomy’.

## POSTERIOR TAXONOMY (= CARTOGRAPHY)

When I first introduced the concept of urban cartography on the basis of flow to a group of architecture students, their initial reaction was provoked by the logic behind this thinking. To them it made perfect sense to chart a given urban complexity in terms of its capacities rather than its properties. In this type of mapping, shopping centres become conductors of human activity: the shoppers arrive by car (medium-speed intensive task) and transform into window-gazers (very slow speed, passive, rewarding activity). They would typically stay in such a place for an hour and a half, and then leave to become medium-speed motorists again. When they make purchases they transform into money outlets, while the store becomes a conductor of cash that accumulates into a bigger stream, which is later taken away by a security van. The van arrives empty (low-priority) and leaves filled with the day’s turnover (high-priority).

An airport is a transducer of even greater capacity: it transforms medium-speed elements (motorists parking their cars in the parking lot) into high-speed elements (passengers). The biggest transformation is that it reduces the number of elements (many people and goods in one plane) and transversely increases another type of element (one plane carrying many different types of goods and people). It is an exchange portal of intercontinental magnitude. Analyses such as these are potentially infinite and work through all the four domains that I have called ‘scapes’. When traversing a certain area, all the familiar constructions, infrastruc-

tures and places (especially what Marc Augé calls non-places) can be cartographically charted in a more abstract form.<sup>53</sup> The taxonomy of the urban fabric on the basis of intensive thinking proves to be a very useful tool for transforming a practical task into an abstract mental exercise, and vice versa. All urban elements, big or small, known or unknown, assume a completely different significance when judged on their capacities rather than their properties. This type of analysis provides a solid basis for the further development of concepts and interventions, as has been demonstrated in many student projects I have guided over the years.

53. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York and London: Verso, 1995).

The second stage of the students' analysis was more problematic. After the initial taxonomy, the process came to a standstill. Classification at a more refined level proved to be more demanding. How, for instance, should one deal with different types of hybrid allowances (eating/driving, flying/reading and so forth)? On closer inspection, many 'targets' in the mapping process became more and more difficult to categorise because of the discrepancy between their functionality and their actual usage. If these 'targets' were to be described precisely, it became clear that each element would require its own specific category, which for taxonomic purposes does not work, and is, in fact, a contradiction in terms: taxonomy needs a certain level of abstraction to be effective. Automatically, the students turned to familiar and proved methods to fill the gaps created by the classification. Programme, function, demographics and narrative are familiar (representational) tools for architects, so it is understandable that students automatically revert to them when they are baffled. In order to overcome this, I shared examples from my own urban explorations in order to shift the thinking to another plane. My main purpose in doing so was to make a case for selecting on the basis of flow rather than representation. I will describe one of these examples in detail.

## FIELDWORK SOCIUS

When working for Professor Arie Graafland in the theory section of Delft University of Technology Faculty of Architecture,

I was asked to make three short films to accompany his book *The Socius of Architecture*.<sup>54</sup> This publication deals with analyses of three specific sites (in Tokyo, Amsterdam and New York) through a series of socio-architectural interventions – or intervention proposals to be more accurate, since they were never realised. The short films were not meant to illustrate the chapters in the book (there was nothing to show of the projects in an actualised state), but were meant to clarify what the book was not able to do: they needed to show the affective capacities of the specific sites. Since these sites were especially chosen for their status in the urban fabric, it was not easy to convey these capacities through 'traditional' aesthetic means. The first site was the Tsukiji fish-market in Tokyo, which is the largest trading place of its kind in the world. The trading, shipping and processing activities operate twenty-four hours a day, providing work for over sixty thousand people. The organisation of all these activities is not easy to overview; much of the actual trading and processing is done by small (family) businesses and involves much manual labour. The impression one receives from this place is the reverse of a highly efficient industrial processing plant, yet the effectiveness is certainly comparable. The biggest problem I faced in capturing the atmosphere and forces that propel the economy in this seemingly chaotic environment was the lack of any centralised mode of thinking. Its entire agency is distributed in the assemblage that exists during market hours. Rather than having one core building which hosts all activities and enables processing in a serial, linear way, all the activities are accommodated in smaller structures that make up portions of the chain. The organisation is parallel-serial in a decentralised way.<sup>55</sup> This rhizomatic type of organisation makes it especially hard to demonstrate the enormity of the scale.

54. Arie Graafland, *The Socius of Architecture* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000).

55. In this context, parallel-serial indicates the simultaneous acting of similar processes; e.g., multiple lines of the same type of processing without a central core. Rather than one line processing all tasks (serial), or several lines doing different tasks (parallel), parallel-serial does both.

The second location was the meatpacking district in Manhattan, New York. This site is known for its several connotative layers. Until the end of the 1970s, the railway connection with the hinterland ended on an elevated track running straight into the heart of the district, ensuring an almost uninterrupted

supply of meat. The area was known for its rough character: it has been whispered that a major reason for its removal as a significant hub in the food-supply chain was driven by the wish to eradicate mafia practices. During the decline of its meatpacking functions it became a centre for sex clubs and other venues specialising in sadomasochism and other hard-core, gay male practices, at the same time attracting a string of illegal and dangerous activities (drugs, prostitution, violence) to the area. Building on this reputation, many top fashion designers found the district to be the ultimate spot for contrasting their high-end designs, which fuelled the most recent wave of gentrification and led to the establishment of flagship fashion stores. This in turn attracted another type of nightlife: the hippest bars and clubs are now centred in the meatpacking district. When the area became known for its role as the backdrop for the *Sex and the City* series and movies, its reputation as the ‘hippest place in Manhattan’ was definitively affirmed. My problem was clear: Graafland’s book had been written in the period just before the latest transition and reflected the problems of that era. His design intervention was situated on a part of the remains of the elevated railway track that was a token of a past era and served as a shelter for homeless people who, at that time, were of major concern to the municipality.

By the time I began making my film, this situation had already changed, and in order to capture some of the meatpacking activities, I really had to look hard for a place that was still working in the meat industry, and had to wait several days until a shipment arrived (the only one in a whole week). In the very early hours of the morning the area contained a strange blend of hard-core fetishists and bondage aficionados, who looked with disdain upon the young hipsters leaving the newer clubs and getting into the pimped-up limousines. The supply trucks for both the meat and fashion industry were queuing up in the adjacent streets, where the cleaning activities that are part of the *mise en place* for daytime shopping in the area were taking place in full swing. The question was obvious: which aspects of these activities show the ‘true’ meatpacking district? I will return to this later.

The last of the three sites for my investigation was the *Westerdokseiland*, an area just west of the central station in Amsterdam.

This compound was founded in 1832 and served mostly as railway sidings. Due to its proximity to both the harbour and a part of the historical city, it became a valuable piece of property. Since it was owned and managed by the railway company, it only unlocked its potential at a very late point in the timeline of the gentrification of Amsterdam’s ‘rough’ neighbourhoods. Here I was faced with a different obstacle. The original area featured in the interventions in Graafland’s book had already been transformed and was at the completion stage of a later plan. It was therefore impossible to show the original condition and inappropriate to show the current one, since it obviously would not have pleased my client to have his film filled with someone else’s design. The only elements that I could use were the construction works in progress and the layout of the main and surrounding areas. Thus in order to make a film about this subject I needed to show anything but the subject; I had to ‘depict an absence’ (like using a footprint in sand to show a foot).

As I mentioned earlier, the construction of the three films served as a blueprint (or at least as a source of inspiration) for students to develop their own understanding of this type of cinematically aided cartography. In order to achieve a level of abstraction that could serve as a conceptual framework, I needed to go through the process myself and invent a new cinematic logic.

## CINEMATICALLY AIDED CARTOGRAPHY

### *Tsukiji*

The first film completed was the one on the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo. As I said, the biggest issue was depicting the site’s size and processes. As an effect of its decentralised labour, economic and infrastructural philosophy, there was no central or quasi-objective perspective imaginable. At this point it should be said that the marketplace is an exponent of a much larger system of cultural and social values. In a nutshell, the quasi-religious expression of respect that typifies the Japanese ethos towards food preparation and food consumption necessitates this particular type of supply chain. It is not solely the daily availability of fresh fish and seafood that enables the consumption of these raw or delicately processed foods: it is the fundamental socio-cultural structure that

requires this type of organisation in order to consume this type of food in the specified way.

Graafland's architectural intervention here was a shelter specifically designed for the group of day labourers. A significant number of the 60,000 workers who inhabit the area are mostly single, uneducated men who submit to a system of daily selection in order to secure some income.

Since most the workers are migrants, predominantly from the poorer regions of Japan, the system proves very inefficient: much of their hard-earned wages are spent on food and shelter. The net revenue that they manage to send home is extremely small or non-existent. Indeed some workers even accrue debts in order to stay in the vicinity of the market. The shelter was designed to provide affordable, clean and safe lodgings right on the edge of the huge market complex, next to Namiyoke shrine, which was frequented by the target group. Taking all these factors into consideration, it seemed best not to focus on the men directly: any depiction of an individual as representative would have proved limiting and rather difficult to achieve. Besides, it was not the right way to start the narrative; day labour was an effect, not a cause.

This problem needs to be addressed from two sides: the individual in relation to the collective on one side and the systemic tendencies on the other. Within this division there needs to be room for careful consideration of what is a cause and what is an effect. For example, if an economic system drives people to search for labour outside their habitat, this need could be addressed on an individual level: (temporary) employment can be found elsewhere. However, if not one, but thousands of people make the same transition, than the migration itself becomes an economic system. All these movements have effects at an individual level, yet it is also this individual level that ultimately forms the economic system. The relation between individual and collective, and the relation between collective and systemic, are highly subjective and fluid concepts. If we focus on systemic problems at an individual level, then it becomes clear that the majority of problems are the same for all individuals. This in itself does not make the situation a collective problem, yet it could be addressed by a collective solution.

I decided to create an axis that included both sides (which is ironic given the contra-Cartesian sentiments in this book). On the horizontal axis I placed the size of the system, with its economic, social, cultural and political values and forces; and on the vertical axis, the day-labourer workforce, with its huge collective problems at an individual level. Both axes include interrelated values: individual/collective/systemic, yet they both show a different perspective. The one shows the relation 'from big to small' and the other 'from small to big'.

This could be called a nesting of scales. Axis thinking can evoke the creation of two opposites that do not actually exist, or two elements that are presented as being unchangeable, forcing logic to fill all the blanks in between, even though these might not exist or be relevant. My approach to the axis took the relation between the two scales as the centre line in my investigation. This meant that neither end of the relation was defined in a concrete or precise way. The only way to describe a point in this diagram is to express it in terms of 'bigger or smaller than' another point in the diagram. Regardless of exact figures, we can always place any two elements on a scale that relates the two: one is always greater than the other, unless they are the same size. This could be called the 'differential axis'. Subsequently, I began the mental exercise of collecting all the elements that were visually eloquent and organising them along the axis in preparation for the actual editing, which I began once I was back in Europe. Suddenly all the elements proved to be relevant: after all, the ends of the axes were not defined, only their mutual relation, meaning that the system is always presenting hundred per cent of its assemblage.

A second type of axis focused on the system of parallel handling. As I explained, all the processing is done in a small-scale, decentralised manner, which ultimately leads to an overall throughput of 700,000 metric tons of fish and seafood every year. The only way to develop an understanding of such a magnitude is to repeat the same types of images to the point that the repetition itself becomes visible. By this I mean disrupting the cinematic process of homogenisation and the harmonious assembling of a montage in favour of the creation of a more fundamental insight into the virtual of the subject matter. This

was a difficult procedure, not so much conceptually or technically, but because I had to undermine my own standards as a filmmaker: I had to challenge my own aesthetic instinct.

### *New York*

The second lesson that can be learned is based on the New York experience. The historical layering of the connotative values of the area of the meatpacking district meant that regardless of whichever layers I picked, I would always leave some out. The intervention was based on a set of premises that, in part, no longer existed. Some had shifted and some were 'universal' in the sense that homelessness is not an effect that can be solved simply by modifying a set of parameters. The causes and effects are much too complex to be addressed on a single level. In addition, none of the layers had actually vanished, the area was still claimed by meatpacking activities, S&M practices, clubbing hipsters, garbage men, fashionados, business people and sightseers, all at the same time. Immediately after my return I made a short edit of some of the meatpacking activities and while showing this to my professor and his visiting colleague from Columbia University, the guest reacted immediately, saying, 'That must have been filmed a long time ago', whereas, in fact, the footage was not even a week old.

This is indicative of the constant interchange between denotation and connotation that is provoked by that area: it is what people think-feel it is. The process of gentrification is an apparently unavoidable element in the development of every city, and in that sense this situation was comparable to that of Amsterdam. Yet, given that the proposed intervention was also part of the system of gentrification, it was most likely that the film sequence could serve its original purpose very well, even if the conditions themselves had changed. This made me decide to focus on the conditions it had reflected in the first place, without any attempt to historicise events.

I told one story without pretending that others did not exist. Obviously, this was a meta-story, not a specific story, and the choices of what to depict were amply provided by the subject matter itself. Apart from waiting for the photogenic meat delivery, I did not force anything to be in or out of the shots. Just as in Tsukiji, I spent several nights and days in the area, firstly to familiarise myself with it and to become 'known' there, and lat-

er to film. In Tokyo especially, it was imperative to demonstrate respect for the system and the flows within it. The seemingly unregulated swarming of labourers followed very exact paths and structures: standing one metre closer or further away from a certain point literally made a crucial difference; the moment I unwittingly blocked an invisible pathway, I immediately got into trouble. The method for New York, however, was that any particular story is true as long as all stories are included.

### *Amsterdam*

The third and final lesson to be drawn from the making of this trilogy arose from the experience with the *Westerdokseiland* project. In contrast to the meatpacking district, all layers of denotation and connotation had already been stripped away, not only physically, because of the demolishing of all old structures, but also mentally, because the area had never been inhabited or used by ordinary citizens, so there was simply no form of social history there. I could have employed this freedom to focus on the architecture itself and utilise the architect's arguments for the intervention as a thread in the film. Unfortunately, his plan was never actualised, and so any arguments concerning that specific site were unsuitable for inclusion in the production. The only option that remained was to raise the level of abstraction: to make a film about a plan in any city. The more generic the arguments (generic in the sense of arguments based on a plan, not on the site or an actual intervention), the more detailed the visualisation needed to be. Luckily, that proved to be easy: construction was still in progress, so shots of the work were effortlessly obtained, and shots of the site's surroundings were equally easy to produce. It became a film about interventions in general; the narrative was provided by the design, not by the actualisation of the plan.

## CONCLUSION ETHOSCAPE

Through the examples and arguments I have presented in this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated that any (inter)action that involves humans is at the very most only partially directed by human forces. The potential results of any collaboration

between matter and information are attributable to all the bodies involved in that particular flow. In order to tap into that realm we need to transfer our modes of perception to a different level by means of a transition from extensive to intensive thinking. I have addressed the issues that prevent us from employing phenomenology as a starting point for this transition; instead, we need to steer away from anthropocentrism altogether in order to investigate how affect and intensity can replace Cartesian and linear thinking. As an alternative, I have offered intensive thinking, based on the recognition of flow, agency and relation, as the starting point for negotiating our relation with the exterior. In the course of actualisation, many types of bodies act and operate, but no single one can be identified as ultimately decisive. The only identifiable moments during transitions occur when certain thresholds are reached, yet these thresholds are not caused by the sum of the elements involved. This means that there is no linearity in (reaching) the threshold. The threshold is also a body, a Body without Organs: an abstract machine and a tool for engaging intensive thinking. Once we accept these premises, it becomes impossible to claim that the only force of desire expressed in these thresholds is that of the human participant. This casts a certain degree of reasonable doubt on the hegemony of anthropocentric desire and forces us to ask ourselves: 'What is the desire of the medium?'